

# Morton Feldman : A Celebration of His 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday



Curated by John Bewley

June 1 – September 15, 2006

## Case 1

**M**orton Feldman was born January 12, 1926 in New York City to Irving and Frances Feldman. He grew up in Woodside, Queens where his father established a company that manufactured children's coats. His early musical education consisted of piano lessons at the Third Street Settlement School in Manhattan and beginning at age twelve, with [Vera Maurina Press](#), an acquaintance of the Russian composer, Alexander Scriabin, and a student of Ferruccio Busoni, Emil von Sauer, and Ignaz Friedman. Feldman began composing at age nine but did not begin formal studies until age fifteen when he began compositional studies with [Wallingford Riegger](#).



Morton Feldman, age 13, at the Perisphere, New York World's Fair, 1939?  
*Unidentified photographer*

**R**ather than pursuing a college education, Feldman chose to study music privately while he continued working for his father until about 1967. After

completing his studies in January 1944 at the Music and Arts High School in Manhattan, Feldman studied composition with [Stefan Wolpe](#). It was through Wolpe that Feldman met [Edgard Varèse](#) whose music and professional life were major influences on Feldman's career.

[Excerpt](#) from "I met Heine on the Rue Furstenburg", Morton Feldman in conversation with John Dwyer, *Buffalo Evening News*, Saturday April 21, 1973

Let me tell you about the factory and Lukas Foss (composer and former Buffalo Philharmonic conductor). The plant was near La Guardia airport. Lukas missed his plane one day and he knew I was around there, so he called me up and invited me to lunch. He didn't know what I did. I was doing pretty well as the boss' son.

I told him to come over to the plant. I took off my coat, shirt, mussed up my hair and took my place at one of the giant pressers, a terrible, menacing-looking machine.

When Lukas walked in I had the top steam on, the bottom steam on, sweating, slaving away, the artist in chains. Lukas stood there, horror-struck. He said, Oh Morty. This will not do. We must get you out of here."

[Lukas Foss](#) was instrumental in having Morton Feldman appointed Snee Visiting Lecturer at the [University at Buffalo](#) for the 1972-3 academic year. The University created the position of Edgard Varèse Professor of Composition for Feldman in 1975 and he held the position until his death in 1987. Feldman served as director of the [Center of the Creative and Performing Arts](#) 1976-1980 and created the June in Buffalo festival in 1975. The festival ran 1975-1978, and 1980 under Feldman's leadership and was revived by [David Felder](#) in 1986. Feldman celebrated the music of his colleagues from the so-called New York School at the first June in Buffalo festival, with programs devoted to the music of [John Cage](#), [Earle Brown](#), and [Christian Wolff](#).



Photograph of Morton Feldman at piano, with Creative Associates Julius Eastman, Jan Williams, William Appleby, and David Del Tredici taken during Feldman's first year at the University at Buffalo as Slee Professor.

*Unidentified photographer.*



Photograph of Morton Feldman with Renée Levine Packer, Managing Director  
of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts, 1974-1978

*Irene Haupt, photographer*

June in Buffalo 1975 program, featuring music by Feldman associates, John Cage, Earle Brown, and Christian Wolff



One of the turning points in Feldman's life occurred when he met composer [John Cage](#) at a concert of the New York Philharmonic performing under conductor Dimitri Mitropoulos either January 26 or 27, 1950. Both Feldman and Cage left the concert after the performance of [Anton Webern's](#) *Symphony, op. 21* and happened to meet in the lobby where they expressed their mutual admiration

for Webern's music. Cage and Feldman, along with Earle Brown, Christian Wolff, and pianist, [David Tudor](#), became the nucleus of the musical component of the "New York School", an informal group of visual artists, dancers, and poets who shared interests in various means of experimenting in their respective art forms.

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CHERUBINI	Overture to <i>Ascanio</i>
BEETHOVEN	Concerto No. 5, E flat major, Opus 73, ("Emperor"), for piano and orchestra"
	Allegro Adagio un poco meno — Rondo: Allegro
	ROBERT CASADESUS
	INTERMISSION
WEBER	Symphony, Opus 21, for chamber orchestra
	Ruhig schreitend Variationen: Theme — Lebhafter — Sehr lebhaft — Wieder mässiger — Amüsant ruhig — Sehr lebhaft — Marschmäßig — Etwas treister (First performances by the Society)
RACHMANINOFF	Symphonic Dances, Opus 45
	Non allegro Andante con moto — Tempo di valze Lento assai — Allegro vivace

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January 26-27, 1950 program for New York Philharmonic concert at which Morton Feldman and John Cage met.

Feldman told the story of meeting Cage in various forms through the years. The following excerpt from his conversation with John Dwyer for the *Buffalo Evening News* is perhaps the most complete.

**Excerpt** from “I met Heine on the Rue Furstenburg” *Buffalo Evening News*, Saturday April 21, 1973.

In the winter of 1950 I went to Carnegie Hall to hear Mitropoulos conduct the New York Philharmonic in the Webern Op. 21, the Symphony for Small Orchestra. I was 24, there with my 17 ½-year-old wife. I'd already composed my graph pieces, the first of their kind, but I was vastly unknown.

No piece before or since had the impact of that Webern work on me. The audience was cackling, laughing, hooting, people walking out.

At intermission I went out to the inner lobby by the staircase, and there was John Cage. Well, I'd recognized him when he came in, with Virgil Thomson, Lou Harrison and Ben Weber. I mean, I'd seen his picture in a spread by PM (now-defunct New York tabloid-size paper of a progressive sort).

Cage asked me what I thought of the Webern. I said I'd never heard anything so thrilling. He practically jumped up and down in agreement and asked my name. When he found I was a composer he brought me in, introduced me to his friends, invited me to a gathering later in the week.

Cage introduced me, in fact, to the whole world of Bohemia at the time, largely centered in the Village. He threw a party and I played some of my piano pieces. I began to meet the artists, the New York painters, who were such a strong influence on my creative life, much more so than composers in general.





Morton Feldman and John Cage at unidentified function  
*Unidentified Photographer*

**T**he visual artists of the New York School were as influential, if not more influential, as the New York School composers to the development of Feldman's style and aesthetic. He wrote about these influences in detail in several of his articles, but the following excerpt from "I met Heine on the Rue Furstenburg" (*Buffalo Evening News*, Saturday April 21, 1973) captures the essence of the interactions and Feldman's respect for his fellow artists of the period.

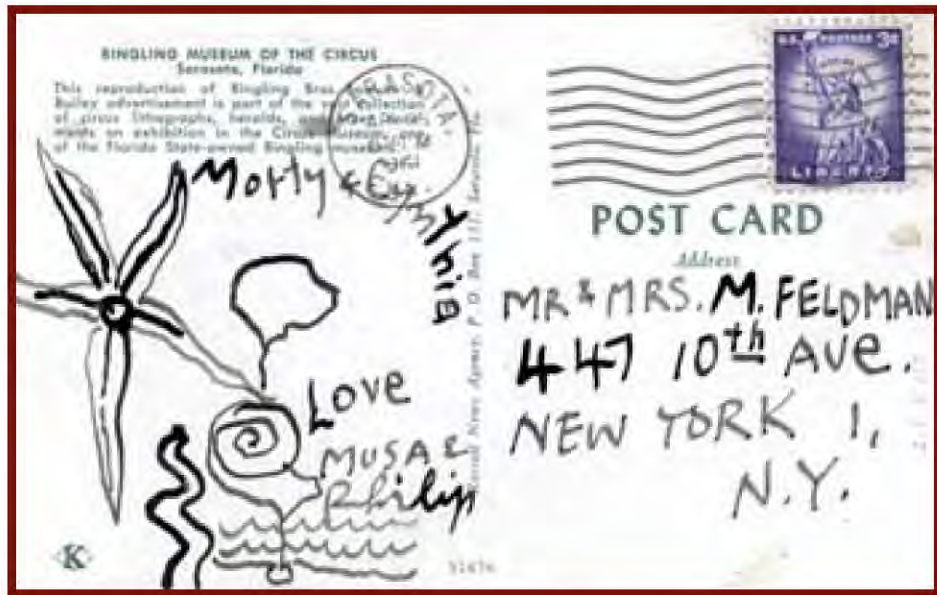
I was living in the Village by now, and began to get involved, myself, with the painters in New York, as friends and fellow artists. Barney Newman, Rothko, Larry Rivers, Jasper Johns, William de Kooning, Motherwell, Rauschenberg, Kline, Pollock, Philip Guston. They were my graduate school.

...  
The painters I knew, mostly older than me, were inspiring in other ways besides their art. They could starve but they wouldn't quit, wouldn't adapt to the market. Barney Newman drew that line down the canvas for 25 years, and then people began to look. Painters, you see, are not concerned with how a thing is made. They make. And then their stamina, their gift of survival. Musicians want to be fed from above.

I remember a party once at de Kooning's studio with the three-day eviction notice on the door. He didn't have the \$22, whatever it was, to stay in business.

Such men wouldn't change a line for the galleries, not when they were being evicted, or later when most of them were hugely successful.

We had the feeling, then in the Village, of sharing something in art that was unknown to the world at large. It was kind of a cul de sac, and I still enjoy the feeling. I grew up in an era when there was very little ability to hear contemporary music. And when you met someone who could there was that kinship.



**P**ostcard from painter, Philip Guston, to Morton Feldman.

## Case 2

**M**orton Feldman composed more than two hundred works. Only 132 of the compositions have been published to date, leaving **45 compositions** (for which complete manuscripts are extant) that have not been published and more than two dozen works that exist only in the form of sketches. Almost all of Morton Feldman's music manuscripts are held by the **Paul Sacher Stiftung** in Basel, Switzerland. However, there the Music Library does possess some unique musical items.

(A list of Feldman's unpublished works is included following the summary of the exhibit.)

**A** facsimile of the unpublished **Flute Trio** (1972) was printed in the program notes for its premiere at a Berlin concert in 1989. This program was fortunately among those saved by Feldman. He gave the original manuscript to **Sophie Kotanyi**, a Hungarian filmmaker and director. A copy of the facsimile has been submitted to Feldman's publisher for publication.

Morton Feldman, Trio for Flute

4' 30"

© 1964 by  
Morton Feldman  
New York, N.Y.

The pencil manuscript of Feldman's unpublished setting of Thomas Campion's *Followe Thy Faire Sunne* (1962) for voice and chimes is unique to the Music Library. The fair copy of the score, with some minor changes to the ending, is in the Paul Sacher Stiftung.

The image shows a handwritten musical score on a piece of paper labeled 'STUDENT PAD' at the bottom. The score is written in pencil and includes the following parts:

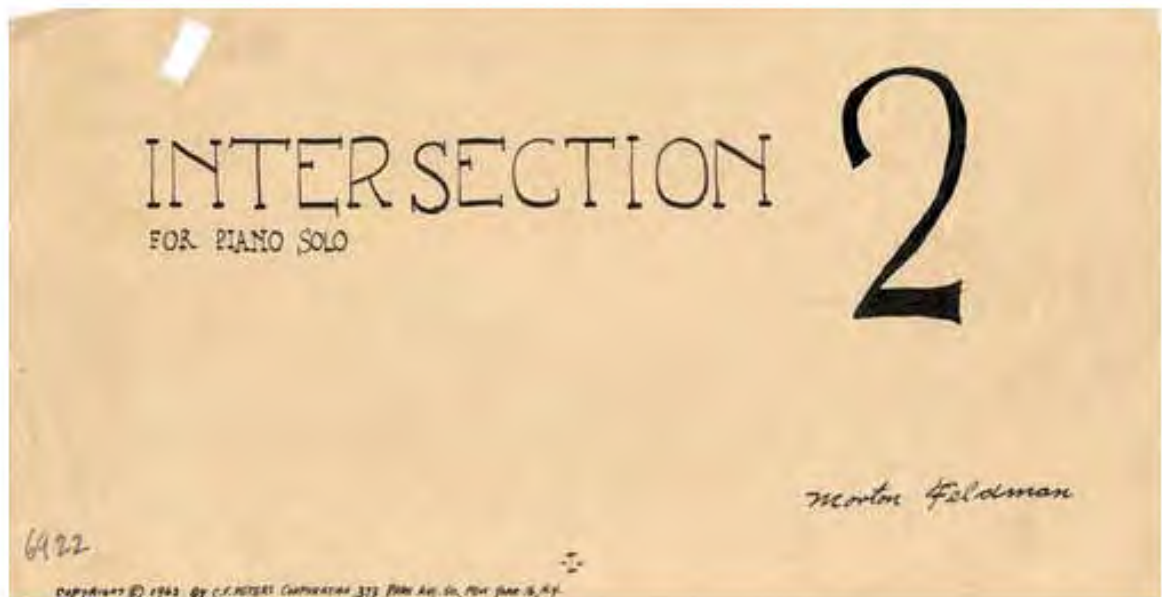
- Chimes:** Two staves at the top, with the second staff containing rhythmic notation.
- Voice:** Two staves in the middle, with lyrics written below the notes. The lyrics include: "LORD) SUNNE", "FROM THE EAST, BRING US", "NIGHT", "AND THE PRIDE OF US OF", "MAYE THE WINDS", "NIGHT", "MAYE THE WINDS", "LORD", "YES THE SUNNE", "THY FACE", "SUNNE", "GO HAPPY".
- Chimes (Lower):** Two staves at the bottom, with rhythmic notation.

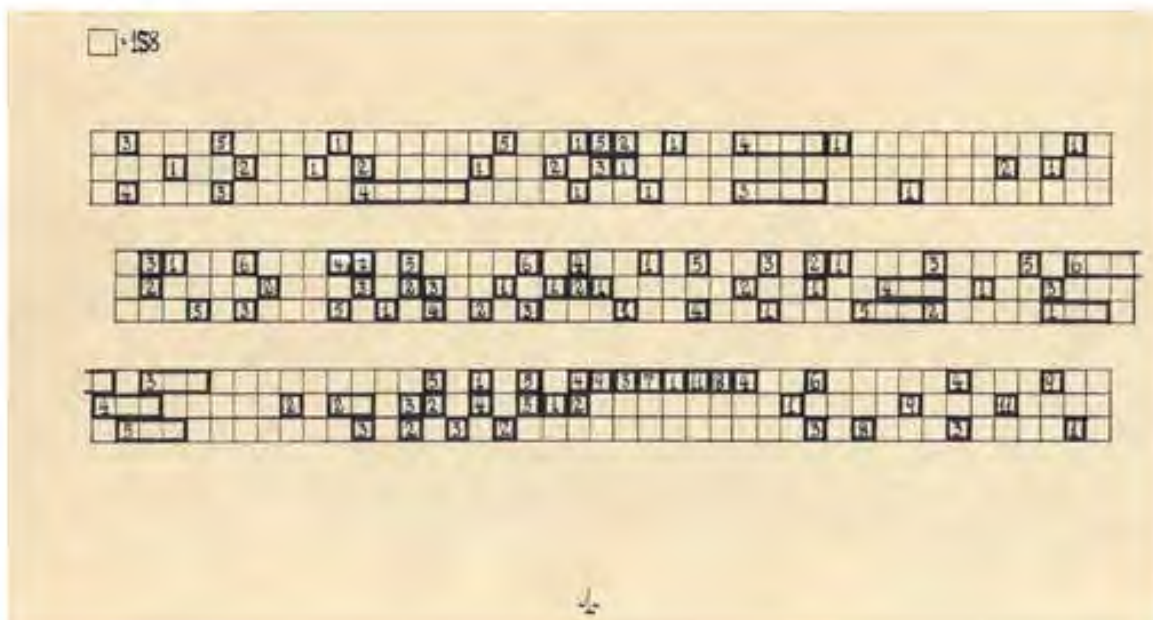
At the bottom of the page, there is a stamp that reads "STUDENT PAD" and "No. 1-12 State Medium". There is also a signature "G. CARLSON" in the bottom right corner.

The Music Library is fortunate to possess the **C. F. Peters Collection of Morton Feldman Manuscripts**. It consists of 72 scores and 7 sets of parts for compositions by Feldman. The collection provides little in the way of musical evidence for Feldman's compositional processes or thinking since the manuscripts are the vellum fair copies that Peters used to produce their publications of Feldman's music.

Two of the scores in the Peters collection are in the hand of **John Cage**, who was responsible for bringing Feldman's music to Peters. According to Feldman in "I met Heine on the Rue Furstenburg" (*Buffalo Evening News*, Saturday April 21, 1973): **"He [Cage] took my early graph scores and copied them over himself, hours of careful work. Said they were too messy."** Peters remained Feldman's publisher until 1969 when he switched to Universal Edition.

*Intersection 2*, composed in 1951, is one of the two scores copied by John Cage. This ink copy in John Cage's hand is the one used by Edition Peters to create its publication of the piece.





*Projection I*, written in December 1950, was Feldman's first work in graphic notation. This ink copy is the one used by Edition Peters to create its publication of the piece.

**PROJECTION 1**

For Solo Cello

*Morton Feldman*

TIMBRE IS INDICATED:  $\heartsuit$  = HARMONIC; P = PIZZICATO; A = ARCO

RELATIVE PITCH (HIGH, MIDDLE, LOW) IS INDICATED:  $\text{H}$  = HIGH;  $\text{M}$  = MIDDLE;

$\text{L}$  = LOW. ANY TONE WITHIN THE RANGES INDICATED MAY BE SOUNDED.

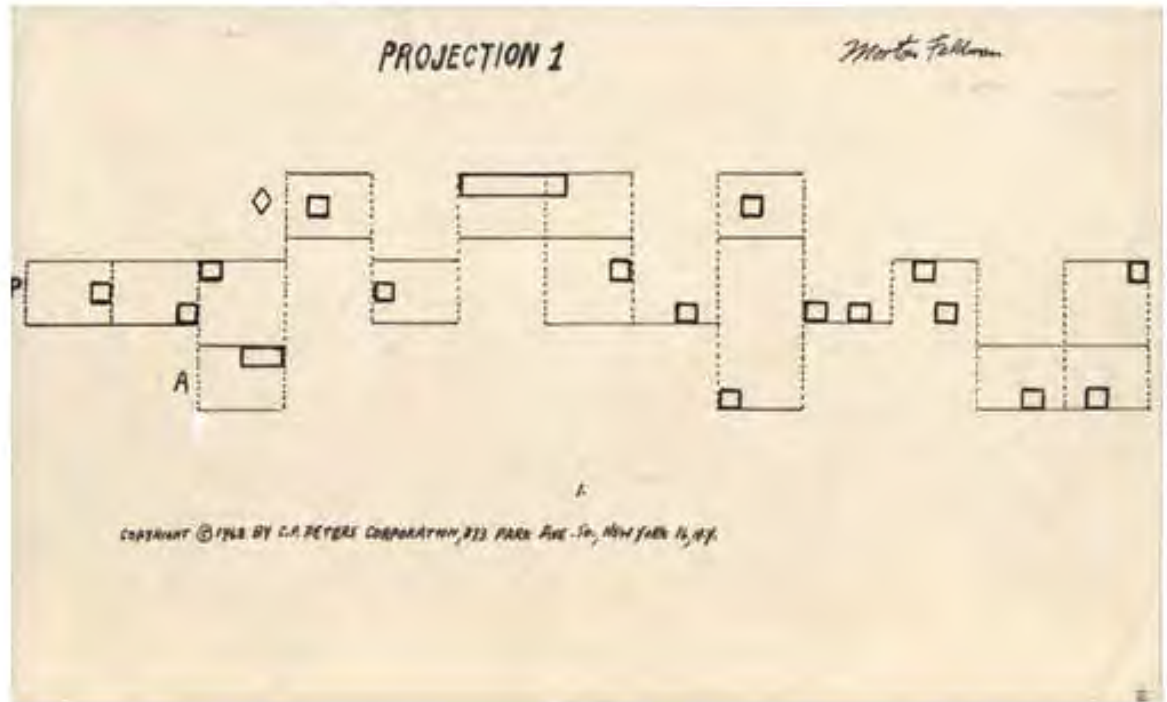
THE LIMITS OF THESE RANGES MAY BE FREELY CHOSEN BY THE PLAYER.

DURATION IS INDICATED BY THE AMOUNT OF SPACE TAKEN UP BY THE SQUARE OR RECTANGLE, EACH BOX (□) BEING POTENTIALLY 4 ICTI.

THE SINGLE ICTUS OR PULSE IS AT THE TEMPO 72 OR THEREABOUTS.

6945

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Morton Feldman at piano in his apartment in Buffalo.  
*Irene Haupt, photographer.*



## Case 3

**M**orton **F**eldman's writings, interviews, and lectures are invaluable sources of insights into his personal life, his musical processes, and his thoughts about the artistic climate of the second half of the twentieth century. The [Music Library](#) possesses a substantial collection of Feldman's published writings and interviews as well as a small number of his writings in either manuscript or typescript.

The typescripts "Mid-Way" and "I can't say that in terms of fame ..." have been transcribed and published in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman* (Cambridge, Mass. : Exact Change, 2000).



Page one of the Morton Feldman typescript, "Mid-way". The full typescript is available online.

MIXMAX

MID-WAY

[I am writing this at mid-career, and by the way things are going, what is being said about me, now I feel about myself it wouldn't be long before I will reach that ultimate goal that <sup>more</sup> art-lovers, <sup>more</sup> art-haters and <sup>musicians like me</sup> artists ~~are all in~~ <sup>come to an</sup> agreement upon.] For some I have invented a new aesthetic, for others I have destroyed music. For myself, I'm in mid-career.

Actually <sup>being in mid-career is</sup> it's a great period in an artist's life, if he is fortunate enough to even reach it, because, to some degree, well, his feelings are still his own, even though they're being pulled this way and that. But the excitement after all, is in feeling that anything can happen, especially if you're my age which is thirty-six. Do you remember in ~~xxx~~ Dostoevsky's "Hunger" starving without even thinking of looking for a job. ~~ther hero, a writer, xxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxx~~

~~yesxxxxxxx~~ We know a long time ago that his future is dismal or how Tolstol tell us that everyone in St. Petersburg knew that ~~xxxxxxx~~ Anna Karenina's husband could go no farther. What relief! Ah, but an <sup>composer in mid-career</sup> artist such as myself, en route, is a subject only he ~~himself~~ I can write about.

I was born on January 12, 1896, into a first generation <sup>(my mother was 7 yrs old when my father died when she was brought here.)</sup> Russian Jewish family, whose hold to this day is so strong on me ~~but I feel it is the nationality of New York~~ that after all these years I still think of New York as a first generation Russian-Jewish community. My father drifted from one business to another ~~ever making much of a success out of anything, but always a good provider~~ ~~living.~~ My father, who in his youth had socialist leanings

First page (numbered "2") of Morton Feldman typescript, "I can't say that in terms of fame". This is the entire typescript.

2

I can't say that in terms of fame -- that is, in terms of the cultural milieu, the fact that what I did is not of some interest. I'm also a New Yorker. I have to make a living, totally outside of music. It wouldn't be completely true to say that I don't handle myself in the world. In my musical life also I make practical decisions, decide on practical moves, perhaps deciding ~~xxxx~~ not to make a move at all. But it's all a form of shadow-boxing. It all amounts to what De Witt once told me when I was a boy. "A mad scramble for crumbs."

I'm not worried about music, but I'm desperately concerned about my life in art in America. For you see, I don't like it here in America, and want to go back where I came from. I don't want the Left back, I don't want an English door. I want to go back where I came from. Where is it? Any suggestions?

There is something rotten here, and we don't have to go to Denmark to look for it. It's not the public. That was always a lie. It's not the mass media. A bigger lie. It's not the Capitalist system -- another lie. It's my colleagues. My fellow American composers. The most pedantic, the most boring, ungenerous bunch of human beings one can meet on an earth so crowded with the last men that hop and make it smaller and smaller. This earth, I mean.

It's the college boys that are deciding what's what in America. I'll leave them with their judgement. I'll leave America with my fame.

What difference does it really make to me? I'll still die a tired man.

First page of the Morton Feldman manuscript, "Piano and voices II was written".

"We can no longer, by taking thought, transcend the life that elicits by taking thought."

Alfred Haydn

in Berlin during Feb. 1977,

PIANUS AND VOICES II was written ~~in Berlin~~ <sup>in Berlin</sup> during ~~my year~~ <sup>the Feb 1977</sup> ~~as he then~~ <sup>was</sup>

The title <sup>from my "Piano and Voices"</sup> of this piece (Three Clarinets, Piano and Cello; Chorus and Orchestra; Cello and Orchestra etc.) <sup>Chorus and Voice</sup> are quite long - more <sup>simply states the composition's</sup> ~~factual than anything else~~ <sup>the simple fact of its orchestration.</sup>

What is Orchestration? <sup>However the</sup> ~~It means by which~~ <sup>sound</sup> ~~musical~~ <sup>becomes</sup> ~~audible~~ <sup>audible</sup>. Orchestration is composition. All other musical ideas eventually become unimportant - swallowed whole or pounded into sediments like the ground beneath us.

Orchestration is the life of music without "Taking Thought." In almost Freudian terms it is both the instrumental and outer reality of the composer's musical character. No other ideas in the body of the work ~~can~~ <sup>transcend</sup> ~~them~~ <sup>this</sup>.

Try and remember a musical composition you were at one time very fond of. Even a professional finds that though he ~~knows~~ <sup>remembers</sup> the music ~~well~~ <sup>with</sup> and the construction of ~~the~~ <sup>its</sup> sequences ~~are~~ <sup>are</sup> clear in his memory, he is not convinced that he is remembering and even if he denies this, he soon becomes distracted & loses the thread so to speak, and begin thinking of other things. Like anything else, the moment music enters the world of imagination, where we have to conjure it up from our memory it is soon lost to us. ~~What is not lost~~ <sup>with the quality of the piano as we played a Mozart Sonata</sup> ~~is~~ <sup>(which one?)</sup> ~~or a tune from a Schubert trio (which one?)~~ <sup>but we remember</sup> the three instruments - that will always be remembered.

It is a definition of orchestration

It has been transcribed and published in *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman* (Cambridge, Mass. : Exact Change, 2000).

The full manuscript (5 leaves) is available

*Morton Feldman Says: Selected Interviews and Lectures 1964-1987*, edited by Chris Villars (London : Hyphen Press, 2006) is the most recent collection of Feldman texts and interviews. It contains almost three dozen photographs, as well as score examples, from Music Library collections.



**F**eldman's comments were always frank and sometimes biting, as evidenced in his review of a concert at Carnegie Hall, Nov. 9, 1962, conducted by Gunther Schuller.

“Mr. Schuller's History Lesson” in *Kulchur*, v. 3, n. 9 (Spring 1963): 88-89

## MUSIC

### MR. SCHULLER'S HISTORY LESSON

*Twentieth Century Innovations: Prime Movers*, conducted by Gunther Schuller at Carnegie Recital Hall, November 9, 1992.

L'Homme et son Désir, Milhaud; Five Pieces (Op. 10), Webern; Oiseaux Exotiques, Messiaen; Octet, Stravinsky; Chamber Symphony in E flat (Op. 9), Schoenberg.

Innovations be damned — it's a boring century.

Was everything since 1900 so flashy? Was everything an audition for Dightlov? With the exception of the Webern, the compositions here assembled by Gunther Schuller were all wrought of the same self-conscious "humanism" enfolded in the labored academic experiments usual to middle-aged "enfants terribles."

This selection of material suggesting each composer's most flashy and popular aspect along with one or two of his more experimental elements seems to reflect Schuller's notion about music in general, even extending to his third stream nonsense. Of course with Webern it is another matter, though under Schuller's sentimental baton even this was just more Viennese pastry for the bourgeois. But after all, it was their revolution.

Everything on the program had one thing in common: drama. Webern's drama is arrived at through a manipulation of color and dynamics. All the rest was "pour la scène." The Milhaud was like viewing a bourgeois family on a country outing through that wonderful filtered scratchy brownish air so typical of the older French films. Occasionally the more sensitive member of the family — a young virgin of course with a white dress and Renoir eyes — gazes dreamily up at the sky. Then suddenly dark polytonal clouds begin to form. *Mou Dieu!* she's drenched, and they're running for cover.

But this bourgeois music is very optimistic. Before you know it, the sun is out again — and thank God for *jolie de vivre* and Vuillard's portrait of Edward G. Robinson and his family.

Messiaen on the other hand is more robust. (Not that Milhaud isn't full of energized Gallic counterpoints.) Messiaen is *artistically* Gallic and considerably more abstract — remember he's a younger man. He is fascinated by complicated rhythmic cells derived from the East and shows a curious preoccupation with bird calls.

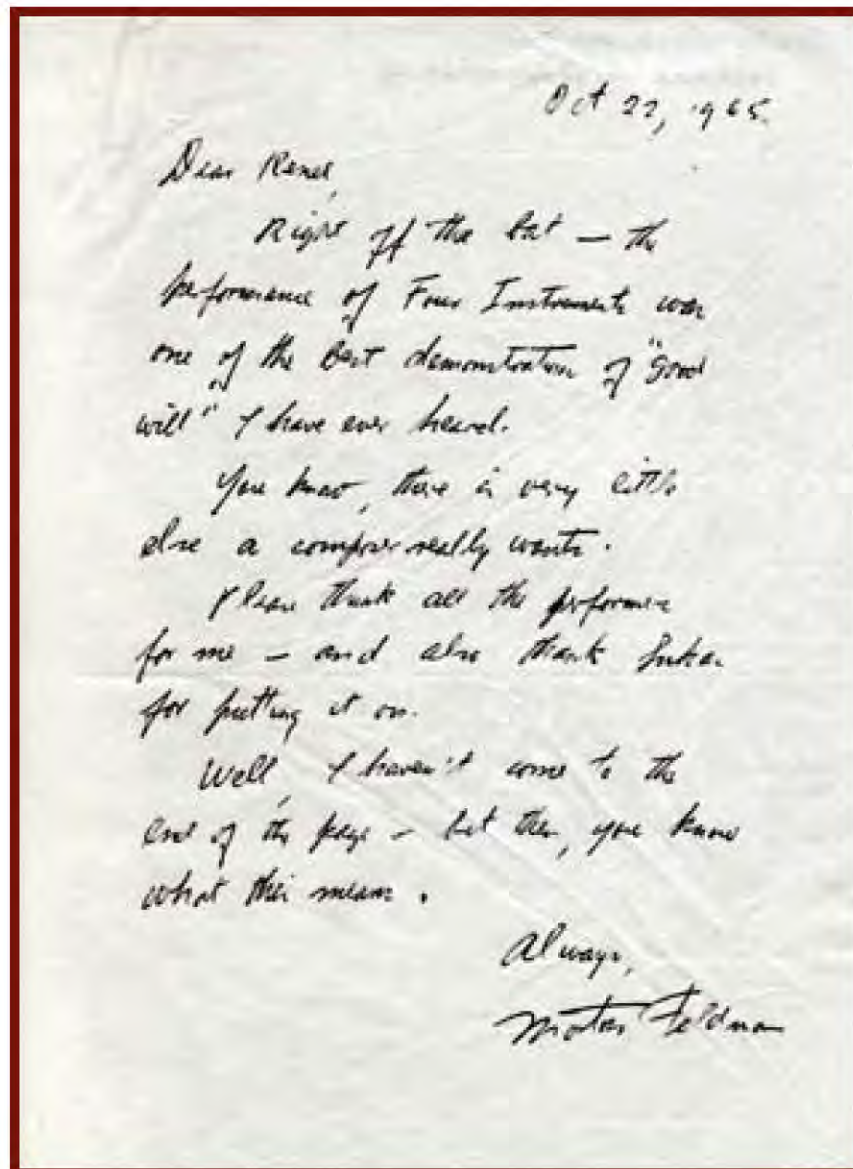
Out of this poor man's aviary a sustained piano chord in unbelievably bad taste raised the audience to a state of exaltation. I closed my eyes. Slowly the same bourgeois family came into focus. This time they were endlessly climbing hills — or was it always the same hill? In the frenzy around me I couldn't quite determine. Let me say only that Paul Jacobs' playing of the piano part was so brilliant, so matter of fact, so Olympian, that one felt he should be climbing not hills, but mountains. This, unfortunately, ruined the outing for the other members of the family, but that is merely incidental.

Stravinsky's offering was a neat little neo-Classic ditty which our family also enjoyed – but this time from a balloon. Oh, how they enjoyed themselves as they glided over Provence, then dipped toward the Spanish border and over to North Africa. It's true the trip to the Russian steppes proved much too long and exhausting an attempt, but happily the balloon soon turned about, heading safely back to Paris and Vuillard's portrait of Edward G. Robinson and his family.

My own journey on this night of nights was soon brought to a close. I left quite soon after the Schoenberg began. Need I say more? Not that my adventures were over with the concert . . . But that we must leave for another time.

MORTON FELDMAN

A note from Feldman to managing director of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts, [Renee Levine](#), October 22, 1965. Lukas Foss arranged for a performance of Feldman's composition, *Four Instruments*, on an Evenings for New Music concert.



Oct 22, 1965

Dear Renee,

Right off the bat — the performance of *Four Instruments* was one of the best demonstrations of "good will" I have ever heard.

You know, there is very little else a composer really wants.

Please thank all the performers for me — and also thank Lukas for putting it on.

Well, I haven't come to the end of the page — but then, you know what this means.

Always,  
Morton Feldman

Transcription of above letter:



Oct. 22, 1965

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Morton Feldman at the University at Buffalo Music Department retreat, April 9,  
1975, First Presbyterian Church, Buffalo, N.Y.

*Leo Smit, photographer*



Porthminster Beach, St. Ives, Cornwall.

Photo: E. Nigro, John Deak Collection

ZDC 829



The "Provincetown" of Britain  
 is not bad. Never had  
 a great holiday before  
 - the charming small hotel  
 bit with "Howdy Do" as  
 you amble down to the beach  
 with everyone smiling at each  
 other like idiots oh well.

Morton

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**ST. IVES.** Cornwall, is one of Britain's most beautiful towns. A fishing harbour at its one of the most remarkable inlets along Cornwall's rocky coast. St. Ives, with its narrow streets and picturesque old houses, is a favourite haunt of artists, and an ideal centre for those who wish to explore the westernmost tip of England's coast. St. Ives takes its name from St. Ivo, said to have come from Ireland in the 5th century, and the excellent 15th century church is dedicated to her. Make you will find all the amenities for an enjoyable holiday.

Published by John Deak (Publishers) Ltd., 25, Bank Street, London, E.C. Printed in the Republic of France

Postcard from Morton Feldman to Jan and Diane Williams.

## Vertical Case Left

Morton Feldman composed his only opera, *Neither*, in 1977. The one-hour work has one character, no plot, no events, and a libretto by Samuel Beckett of only sixteen lines. The first performance took place May 13, 1977 in Rome at the Teatro dell'Opera.



Morton Feldman with image of Samuel Beckett superimposed  
*Unidentified photographer*

One leaf of a sketch for the *Unheard Footfalls Only Sound* section of *Neither* is held by the Music Library. It shows an earlier working of the vocal line and supporting chords.

Unheard footfalls only sound

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation on aged paper. At the top, the title "Unheard footfalls only sound" is written in cursive. Below the title are several staves of music. The upper staves contain complex, dense handwritten notes and symbols, some of which are heavily scribbled over. The lower staves show a more organized musical structure with notes, stems, and some annotations. At the bottom of the page, there is a line of lyrics: "unheard footfalls only sound". The lyrics are written in a simple, handwritten font and are aligned with the musical notes below them. The overall appearance is that of a working draft or sketch for a musical composition.

Critical reactions from the press and the public were mixed as demonstrated in these two reviews.

Review of *Neither* premiere performance by William Weaver, *International Herald Tribune*, June 14, 1977.

The evening's most important event was the second work, Morton Feldman's *Neither*, being heard for the first time anywhere. The painter, in this case, was Michelangelo Pistoletto, who doubled as director. His work was not very arresting or enhancing: some thumbprints of light on an off-white backcloth and an aimless crowd that wandered on and off the stage. Feldman's elegant score is a fine-knit, understated elegy (to a text by Samuel Beckett), a world of nuance, with the soprano's voice acting as shy soloist, the words becoming a kind of vocalize.

It is a long piece – lasting about an hour – and rightly demands the listener's concentration. The audience of the Rome Opera is not famous for its concentration or for its manners. Many of those present reacted with forced coughing, then whistles, then dubious witticisms. The presence of a tin whistle suggested that the demonstration was not entirely spontaneous or directed totally against Feldman. As usual, the Roman theater is riven by political dissension and the object of the demonstration was probably, at least in part, the opera's brave artistic director, Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi.

Despite the shameful display, the soprano, Martha Hanneman, sang with admirable aplomb and with touching purity of sound. Marcello Panni – the evening's able conductor – kept the orchestra going, though understandably there was some nervousness, and Feldman's steady pianissimo was not always maintained.

Review of *Neither* premiere performance by Bayan Northcott, *The Sunday Telegraph*, June 26, 1977.

For a few heady minutes at the Rome Opera I thought I was at last about to witness a genuine theatrical riot of the kind that greeted some of the masterpieces of modernism over 60 years ago – though anything less like *The Rite of Spring* than *Neither* by Morton Feldman, which was receiving its world premiere, would be difficult to imagine.

After all, the special thing about this 52-year-old New Yorker's music ever since he emerged from the group around John Cage in the mid-1950s has always been its extreme slowness and quietness, its lack of concern with self-expression, or drama, or anything except pure, contemplative sound. Actually the new work – a 70-minute procession of immensely gradual chord changes, with an intermittent soprano obligato to words of Samuel Beckett – suggests a certain shifting of ground, even an element of dialectic in its occasioned contrast of gentle note-clusters with more mechanical, Birtwistle-like iterations, apparently evoking Beckett's gnomic contrast of "impenetrable self" and "Impenetrable unself."

All the same, it was the old Feldman, the timelessness and hush (there are only six loud bars in the entire score), that Michelangelo Pistoletto chose to emphasise in his staging: placing the young American soprano, Martha Hanneman, motionless downstage and faintly illuminating the gloom behind her with pools of light fluctuating in counterpoint with the slow breathing – as of some sleeping giant – that Feldman's muted grindings and sussprations sometimes suggested, through which wandered lost groups of male figures like Giacometti statues vaguely come to life.

Could it be then, that after so many decades of noisy *avant-garderie*, only the monotonous and minimal retain any power to outrage? After half an hour or so the increasingly restive audience had had enough. "Dance a salterello!" shouted a voice from the boxes. Someone else began to toot a penny whistle; soon the battle of shushes from the stalls and counter-cheers from the gallery was in full swing.

And then . . . it all simply faded away as the Feldman ground on, either hypnotizing into enlightenment or boring into acquiescence – with minimal art one can never be quite sure – finally leaving, if not exactly an impression of aesthetic plenitude, at least a suggestive mood and images to hover in the mind.



Morton Feldman



Martha Hanneman



## MORTON FELDMAN

Morton Feldman nato a New York il 12 gennaio 1926 ha studiato composizione con Wallingford Riegger e Stefan Wolpe.

A 23 anni conobbe John Cage ed entrò a far parte della sua cerchia insieme ai compositori Earle Brown e Christian Wolff e al pianista David Tudor. Sempre negli anni '50 Feldman fu molto vicino ai pittori espressionisti e astratti di New York e queste amicizie furono determinanti nella formazione dei principi su cui si basa la sua musica.

Attualmente Feldman insegna alla State University of New York a Buffalo e dirige il Center for Creative and Performing Arts.

Durante un suo soggiorno italiano Feldman ebbe un colloquio con Mario Bortolotto, pubblicato con il titolo « Intervista con Morton Feldman » nella rivista « Lo Spettatore musicale » del gennaio 1969. Ne riproduciamo il testo quasi integralmente:

*Morton Feldman parla soltanto l'americano di New York, o per essere più esatti l'americano della comunità israelita newyorkese. La sua conversazione si avvale di una singolare attitudine all'apofrasi, ora ridanciano ora virulento. Va da sé che le categorie, come si vedrà anche dall'intervista, sono radicalmente estranee alle consueti nella critica, la storiografia e la stessa teoria musicale del più avanzato Occidente. Nessuna tenerezza per Darmstadt. Moltissime espressioni sono sottolineate, doppiate o zvilate da un accento e una mimica incomparabili. Quasi impossibile interromperlo: lo abbiamo ascoltato. Ci ricordammo poi delle affres du style, e del tormento di Proust per rendere i tic di Charles Swann. Abbiamo abbondato, magro rimedio, in virgolette, corsivi e maiuscole.*

E' quasi canonico cominciare con i ricordi, le più memorie degli studi.

*Ho studiato pianoforte con una meravigliosa vecchia signora, allieva di Busoni. Essa aveva studiato a Pietroburgo, ed era amica di Skrjabin. Tecnicamente era molto precisa ed esigente, le lezioni erano interessanti. Quando studiavo con lei, mi lasciava una grande libertà, e questo m'è servito a sviluppare le mie tendenze compositive, anche se questo non era nei propositi dell'insegnante. L'unica cosa moderna erano i Preludi di Skrjabin. (Non amo la sua musica, ma le sue nevrosi, che in un certo senso m'interessano molto: personalmente, voglio dire).*

*Ho studiato composizione con Riegger, uno dei primi compositori seriali americani. Conosceva Ives, Varèse, Cowell. Io avevo sedici anni. Dopo Riegger, ho studiato con Stefan Wolpe. Eravamo ottimi amici, ma discutevamo sempre accanitamente. Wolpe non mi ha mai perdonato di aver detto che Beethoven era un grande musicista, ma non "musicale" (come Schubert). A quell'epoca, a vent'anni, incontrai Varèse.*

*Non ho mai studiato con lui, ma volevo farlo. Varèse aveva solo tre allievi. Ha avuto la più grande influenza sulla mia vita: non solo la sua musica, ma la sua persona. Mi disse: "Essere un musicista è facile, ma aver coraggio è difficile". Erano un esempio il suo isolamento, la generosità verso i giovani, il modo di sopravvivere.*

*Adoro la sua musica, ma è troppo Varèse. Musicalmente è importante specie perché fu il primo a fare una azione diretta, fisica, con i suoni, si da non lasciar tempo all'ascoltatore di essere implicato nella retorica. La sua musica apre il ventesimo secolo. Boulez chiude il diciannovesimo.*

*Alla fine della sua vita, Varèse ascoltò un mio pezzo, Durations IV. Pensò che gli fosse*

Program for premiere performance of *Neither*, May 1977, Teatro dell'Opera, Rome.



Photographs of soprano Martha Hanneman during performance of Morton Feldman's opera, *Neither*, at the Teatro dell-Opera, Rome, May 1977.

*Unidentified photographer*

**T**he Music Library has seven recorded lectures by Morton Feldman. Four of these have been fully transcribed and the transcriptions are available online.

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Nicola Walker-Smith's transcription of Feldman's April 15, 1973 pre-concert comments about Christian Wolff was published in her article about the relationship between the two composers in the Autumn 2001 issue of *Musical Times*. (Available to University at Buffalo library cardholders through JSTOR. [The transcription of the lecture and an audio file of the lecture](#) are available online.

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Morton Feldman was presented with an award for musical achievement by the National Institute of Arts and Letters in May 1970.

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND LETTERS  
THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ARTS AND LETTERS



633 WEST 155 STREET - NEW YORK, N. Y. 10032

Recipient of an Award in Music

MORTON FELDMAN, born in New York City in 1926. For the quality of his musical thinking, for the quiet persuasion of the aesthetics inherent in the music.

*William Maxwell*  
William Maxwell  
President of the Institute

May 26, 1970

The American Academy of Arts and Letters

AND

The National Institute of Arts and Letters

CEREMONIAL



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Tuesday afternoon · May 26 · 1970

AT THREE O'CLOCK

Academy Auditorium 632 WEST 156 STREET · NEW YORK

Presentation of Awards by the President  
of the Institute

WILLIAM MAXWELL

Institute and Academy Awards

*IN ART*

LELAND BELL	RALSTON CRAWFORD
CHARLES F. CAJORI	ALLAN D'ARCANGELO
KENNETH CAMPBELL	HARVEY WEISS
GIORGIO CAVALLON	

*IN LITERATURE*

BREWSTER GHISELIN	JAMES ALAN MCPHERSON
GORDON S. HAIGHT	N. SCOTT MOMADAY
RICHARD HOWARD	GRACE PALEY
PAULINE KAEI	F. D. REEVE
JERZY KOSINSKI	KURT VONNEGUT, JR.

*IN MUSIC*

WILLIAM ALBRIGHT	MORTON FELDMAN
ARNOLD ELSTON	GEORGE BALGH WILSON

Awards of Specified Purpose

Charles E. Ives Scholarship

JOSEPH C. SCHWANTNER

Marjorie Peabody Waite Award

RAMON GUTHRIE

Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Foundation Awards

GEORGE SCHNEEMAN      JONATHAN STRONG

Loines Award for Poetry

ROBERT HAYDEN

Morton Dauwen Zabel Award

GEORGE STEINER

## Vertical Case Right

**P**ercussionist **Jan Williams** (University at Buffalo Music Department faculty member, 1967-1996, and Co-Director of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts, 1974-1976) took 56 photographs of Morton Feldman during the tours of the Creative Associates in 1974, 1977, and 1979.



Morton Feldman studying Persian frieze at Persepolis, Iran, August 1977  
*Jan Williams, photographer*



Morton Feldman at Land's End, England, August 1977  
*Jan Williams, photographer*





Martha Hanneman and Eberhard Blum pointing at Morton Feldman, Harrogate,  
England, August 1977  
*Jan Williams, photographer*

**Irene Haupt**, a resident of Buffalo since the 1970s, photographed in his own apartment and other informal settings many times. Her photographs of Feldman have been used in numerous publications, including liner notes for many recent recordings of Feldman's music.



Morton Feldman examining a carpet in Buffalo, N.Y.

*Irene Haupt, photographer*



Morton Feldman and cat  
*Irene Haupt, photographer*



Morton Feldman at the piano  
*Irene Haupt, photographer*

**Rolf Hanns**, a German photographer and artist, took several photographs of Feldman at Darmstadt in July 1986. The shots include both formal poses and informal shots.





## *Feldman Unpublished Manuscripts, not including sketches*

<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Location of score</i>	<i>Instrumentation</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<i>19??</i>	[Composition]	Paul Sacher Foundation	Horn, Celesta, String Quartet	
<i>194?</i>	I loved you once	Paul Sacher Foundation	Voice, string quartet	
	[Composition] 194?	Paul Sacher Foundation	Piano	
<i>1943</i>	First piano sonata (To Bela Bartok)	Paul Sacher Foundation	Piano	
	Dirge : In memory of Thomas Wolfe	Paul Sacher Foundation	Orchestra	
	Jubilee	Paul Sacher Foundation	Orchestra	
	Night	Paul Sacher Foundation	String orchestra	
<i>1944</i>	[Sonata for violin and piano]	Paul Sacher Foundation	Violin, piano	
	Preludio	Paul Sacher Foundation	Piano	(is this Andante moderato in Claren list?)
<i>1945</i>	[Composition] 1945	Paul Sacher Foundation	String orchestra	
	Self portrait	Paul Sacher Foundation	Piano	
<i>1946</i>	[Sonatina for violoncello and piano]	Paul Sacher Foundation	Violoncello, piano	

<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Location of score</i>	<i>Instrumentation</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<i>1948</i>	Two pieces	Paul Sacher Foundation	Violoncello, piano	
<i>1949</i>	Lost love	Paul Sacher Foundation	Voice, piano	
	Episode	Paul Sacher Foundation	Orchestra	
<i>195?</i>	For Cynthia		Piano	
<i>1950</i>	[Composition, string quartet] 1950		String quartet	Claren states the work is mentioned in an article but no score location is stated
	[Composition] 1950	Paul Sacher Foundation	2 pianos, violoncello	
	Three dances	Paul Sacher Foundation	Piano	Are these complete?
<i>1951</i>	[Composition] 1951	Paul Sacher Foundation	Violoncello, piano	
	Music for the film "Jackson Pollock"	Paul Sacher Foundation	2 violoncellos	
	Three Ghostlike Songs and Interludes	Paul Sacher Foundation	Voice, trombone, viola, piano	



<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Location of score</i>	<i>Instrumentation</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<i>1952</i>	Extensions 2	David Tudor Archives	Piano	According to Claren this work was withdrawn? Program located at Tudor Archives
	[Composition] 1950-1952		Violin or viola, Wind Instruments, Violoncello	This appears to be Intersection 3. The first 5 "measures" are in an article by Henry Coewll in Musical Quarterly, 38:1: p. 131
	Intermission 3	David Tudor Archives	Piano	
	Intermission 4	David Tudor Archives	Piano	
<i>1953</i>	Extensions 5	Paul Sacher Foundation	2 violoncellos	Marked withdrawn in Claren? But, has an Edition Peters 6933 number stated.
	Structure 2		2 violoncelli	Score lost? Program for 1955 performance located at University at Buffalo
	Intersection +	Paul Sacher Foundation	Piano	
<i>1954</i>	Music for the film "Sculpture by Lipton"		??	Claren states the work was cited in a works list but no location of the score is shown; date is "before 1975"
	[Composition] 1954	Paul Sacher Foundation	Flute, bass clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet,	
<i>1957-1962</i>	[Composition, string quartet]	Paul Sacher Foundation	String quartet	
<i>1958</i>	[Composition] 1958	Paul Sacher Foundation	2 pianos	

<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Location of score</i>	<i>Instrumentation</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<i>1959</i>	Trio		2 Pianos, Cello	Cited by Metzger in Encyclopedie de la musique but no location of score is stated
	Instrumental Music		Small Orchestra	Claren p. [575] states source of citation as Metzger in Encyclopedie de la musique but no location of score is stated
	[Composition, 15 instruments]		15 Instruments	Claren dates it before 1959; work listed in Metzger in Encyclopedie de la musique but score location not known
<i>1960</i>	Arr. Of Josquin's Tu pauperum refugium	Paul Sacher Foundation	Chamber ensemble	
	Something wild in the city: Mary Ann's theme	Paul Sacher Foundation	Horn, celesta, string quartet	Possibly from the sketches?
	Montage 2 on the Theme of "Something Wild"	Paul Sacher Foundation	Jazz ensemble	
	Montage 3 on the theme of "Something Wild"	Paul Sacher Foundation	Jazz ensemble	
	Score for untitled film	Paul Sacher Foundation	Flute, horn, trumpet, trombone, tuba, percussion,	This matches the work listed on p. 574 in Claren. Music labels: City, The Beach, etc.
	Sin of Jesus (Score for untitled film)	Paul Sacher Foundation	Flute, horn, trumpet, violoncello	This matches the untitled film music listed on Claren p. 558.
	Piece for seven instruments	Paul Sacher Foundation	Flute, alto flute, trumpet, horn, trombone, violin,	
	Wind	Paul Sacher Foundation	Voice, piano	
<i>1962</i>	Followe thy faire sunne	Paul Sacher Foundation	Voice, chimes	
<i>1963</i>	[Composition] 1963	Paul Sacher Foundation	Percussion, celesta	
	Merce	Paul Sacher Foundation	Percussion, piano/celesta	

<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Location of score</i>	<i>Instrumentation</i>	<i>Notes</i>
<i>1964</i>	[Composition, violoncello, piano] 1964	Paul Sacher Foundation	Violoncello, piano	
<i>1966</i>	Possibility of a new work for electric guitar		Electric guitar	Score possessed by Christian Wolff?
<i>1968</i>	Samoa	Paul Sacher Foundation	Flute, horn, trumpet, trombone, harp, vibraphone,	Music for a film
<i>1969</i>	Music for a Film on Vietnam			This must be Peter Gessner's film, Time of the Locust, which is available on VHS
<i>1970-1977</i>	[Composition] 1970	Paul Sacher Foundation	Clarinet, voice, violoncello, double bass	
<i>1972</i>	Trio for flutes	Music Library, University at Buffalo	3 flutes	Reproduction located in program for 1989 Berlin concert; score in possession of Sophie Kotanyi
	Half a minute it's all I've time for	Warsztat Muzyczny	Clarinet, trombone, piano, violoncello	An ensemble?
	For Stockhausen, Cage, Stravinsky and Mary Sprinson		Violoncello, piano	I don't see this in the Claren list, only Villars's
<i>1975</i>	Music for a Film on Willem De Kooning		??	Source of title?
<i>1984</i>	[Composition] 1984		Violin	