Morton Feldman: The Johannesburg Masterclasses, July 1983
Session 3: General discussion

Transcribed by Dirk de Klerk

Voices heard: Morton Feldman (MF)
Dirk de Klerk (DdK)
Jacques de Vos Malan (JdVM)
Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph (JZ-R)
Unidentified Voices (UV)

MF: This tune, just... [Sings]. There is no problem with notation. There's problem of notation when Beethoven starts to make mosaics [...] and he then gets involved with intricate variations. Then he had to go to town on notation.

So it's very difficult to talk about notation. For example in the piece with the recorders, some notation was loose, but really *wasn't* loose. All it was really doing was taking up a certain amount of time, of duration, in which there was much more fluidity and a much more liquid thing, but within a very defined *given* interval world, you see. So you can't say it's imprecise. So it's very, very, very difficult to talk about notation *generally*, and maybe on the second week we should have *specific* examples in which we can go into it.

JdVM: Look at different ways of notating the same thing.

MF: Oh, of course if you are anxious about time and you feel that the ictus is a taxi meter, and that every time it's clicking away, you don't take my attitude where you get into a cab and you say, "Drive around the park a few times." I got that from Hollywood movies! [Laughter]. "Where are you going?" "I don't know, try the other park." "That's a fifty dollar bill now!" But no-one says it. But that's the attitude people have about rhythm.

I'm very involved with oriental rugs and there's a marvellous term in Latin, which I won't use because it's not necessary. And what it really means is *fear of space*. So the certain type of rug where she has to, everything has to be filled you see. She's involved with common practice rhythm! [Laughs]. There are certain types of rugs which are very coveted, and actually very expensive, that will give you a field that is empty, say a Turkish rug from the Caucasus. They love empty fields. There was a sign of great… actually a symbol of great luxury, not to have anything. Certain Kazakh rugs around 1800, just the design and no little filigree in it, just, boom! *There!* They are very hard to find, very expensive.

The ones with a lot of information are the cheapest on the market, because they just don't look good, they just look too cluttered. And a lot of music is like that. This anxiety about time, and not making some compromise between…You see, to talk about notation, there's *another* subject. And the subject would be, that compromise between the instrument and the composition.

A lot of times there's no problem with notating the instrument because so much of our musical history was instrumental forms. A lot of young composers don't realise to what degree, for example, in Stravinsky, how much the instrument is really determining the rhythmic language of a piece. They think they are just writing a piece. They get some rhythm they say, "Let's give it to a trumpet." But someone like Stravinsky always would make that marvellous balance between compositional rhythm and how an instrument speaks. Always that kind of adjustment in the pacing of it, because also with rhythm it's what the same rhythms would sound like in different tempi in relation to instruments. For example I heard the other... Oh, last week in Buffalo, [Mozart's] *Clarinet Concerto*, which was originally written for a bassett horn because it wouldn't really make that much of a difference. Now you take the tune [Sings]… nice, huh? Give it to a violin [Sings the same tune]. You'd fall asleep, you'd fall asleep! It's the wrong instrument for that rhythm, that tempo, even for the melody.

So there are a lot of problems here. We kind of have that Wagnerian division of labour. How do you sit down and write an opera? And just exactly when do you orchestrate? A week later or wait more than a week? This division of labour for a composer, but unlike this big Wagnerian skill of keeping your cool in writing a big thing, the composer has an *instantaneous* division of labour, because he has to think about everything. Unfortunately if I have any complaint today, it's that most is just thinking of the compositional

problems at hand and they really don't have *any* feeling for the instruments, like that dismal percussion quartet that was played the other night.

A kind of joker that thinks he's going to give you a Gregorian chant on the timpani, and then do some other little… I mean, you know, as if he has the idea: Gregorian chant, timpani, and little, little extra things around it, you know. Nothing to do with percussion, you see, it has to do with *emotion*, what he might do compositionally in terms of his material.

So if you are anxious about time and it's that taxi meter and if you're working literally, which is the way most composers work…How else do you feel you can work? Music is in time is it not? And it's going [Sings] "da-da-da-da-da." Well, music is in time even if you *don't* go [Sings] "da-da-da-da-da."

I always thought of it as if I have a field in which there was no "da-da-da-da-da" or division of time, and I threw a stick in a very gently rolling brook and just by throwing in that stick, you see it go, it's moving, let the time or the current… In other words, you cannot get away from the fact that it is going, that there is a current going.

So I always found that, to get involved with an anxiety of rhythm because you feel that music is flat, so to speak. Unless you keep it up, it's going to drop dead, discontinue... Something's going to happen! So we have to make many, many divisions of exactly what goes into the making of notation; the instrument, *where* it is, the *notes*. I could take a D-flat and write something. I could put it down on a C and I cannot write in the same way, the same rhythm you see, just that little difference is important to me.

That's why I myself cannot think of a compositional idea unless I hear an instrument. I cannot write, like Jo Kondo, a series of pitches. I cannot do it. I don't just hear an E-flat playing, I hear a flute playing in E-flat or I hear a piano playing in this and that you see. So I myself am very instrumentally oriented. And my sense of pacing instrumentally was highly influenced by the music of Edgard Varèse, the way he did it. I remember when I was 16 and I came to visit him and he only said one thing to me, that's all he had to say. He said, "Remember Morton, the amount of time it takes the instruments to speak from the stage to out there." He said, "That's very important." That's the only thing he ever said to me in the thirty-odd years I knew him. There's one bit of advice and I was always very mindful - the amount of time it really takes that instrument to project.

So in that sense, when I teach an orchestration seminar, I always make a diagram of the orchestra and I would say, "Well look, from the trombones to over here there's a hole, you see. There's not a hole on the paper, but there's a hole."

So, no matter, it doesn't have to be a conventional setup. And many times I would have them making not so much a *sitting* arrangement - what you find in scores - but just a kind of an acoustical reality situation that looks at what's happening at this particular tempo in this particular register, that you're going from here to here and it's the shock of the fragmentation is just too much.

A very interesting example of this is in one of Boulez' first compositions. I forgot the name. What's the famous composition in which he revised? The first revision is pointillistic, in the conceptual way of Klangfarben. The second way was the *beginning* of *Boulez*, more continuous. And it was the beginning of Boulez. But Boulez is *not* that involved in his music with Klangfarben, in that kind of dissection you know, that kind Webernesque kind of thing. And it's very interesting to get a hold of that score to see this change of having the instrument *not* go "bum..dee..bum..dee" [regularly] but rather go "bum-bum…dee, bum..bum..bum-bum" [irregularly] in terms three, four, whatever it is, to make the right notes for the right intervals in the dissection of his twelve note row.

Another great example of that is in the *Sonatina*. Forget about analysing it in a sense as a twelve tone row. The best thing to analyse is that, out of the row, what notes does he give the flute, where does he give it. What notes does he give the piano, where does he give it. And his registration. And the rhythm of that particular instrument that's playing. It's a very easy piece to catch it because there's only two instruments. And I think it's one of the most glorious examples of a genius at work that you could see. Genius at work, the right *ear*, everything fantastic. And forget about the row. The row is like in a, like a *gold* American Express card, but *gold* you know? Not the *green* one like the one I have.

Which really raises…I'm sorry I didn't catch your name out in the hall?

DdK: Dirk, Dirk de Klerk.

MF: Yes. When you asked me what part the ear plays in something like that. It's, it's a very, very interesting question and I hope we really can go onto it.

Or for example in a piece that you are going to hear this afternoon. I might mention it again so don't feel that I have nothing more to say about the piece.

Yeah, it's only because it's the only thing to say about the piece, so I'll say it twice. Give you a perfect example how the instruments made me prove my rhythm and the kind of instruments that I use to create that rhythm.

In the piece, *De Kooning*, it opens up - they don't have an antique cymbal [for the performance here], you'll hear something else - it opens up with an antique cymbal, into a piano sound, then I think into a violin, into something else. The format of the piece is: pick up on the other person's sound as it begins to decay. Of course, it's a very funny thing at rehearsal where everybody had different concepts of when something decays. And it's a lot of fun. But there's generally a consensus. In other words, if you're still hearing something, you see. So the thing is not really to be on top of it but if you're *still* hearing something.

Of course some things don't decay [...]. So you have to adjust to that. But in general the principle is, play your note, as it begins to decay the other instrument then plays *their* note.

So when you hear the opening what you hear is a realistic rhythmic shape; *ping* [the cymbal] doesn't last very long, the high note in the piano doesn't last very long, the violin harmonic lasts longer, that is then broken up by something else and then if you hear it, it's a shape. And if we notate it, and though notate in ten different ways we see that it's essentially, in the quintessence of its shape, just slight variations on the *same shape*.

And that's essentially what my chancey, aleatoric music is. [...] It's nothing chancey or aleatoric that I don't give the rhythm, the rhythm is inborn, so to speak. And the acoustical reality of the fact that *this* doesn't last very long and *this* lasts longer.

So it has the two basic elements of music, the long and short. And varying degrees of what is short and what is long. And that's essentially what *De Kooning* was all about: the long and the short. And the rhythmic shape in terms of how long it would exist acoustically. And also in the directions [in the score] is that there should always be something in the ear, unless there's a notated size, there should always be some acoustical connection which you make.

One of the biggest problems is that I don't…You see my whole problem, my whole thing is that I want to really personalise this. Where everybody else has their own ideas about what they are doing and they don't have to explain it you see. That was my dream thirty-five years ago, but it hasn't helped talking about this for thirty-five years. And it really hasn't helped the situation, because everybody then wants some kind of clear conception about it, you see. So it's a big problem.

Because as I was saying to that gentleman, there's nothing as foolproof as a fugue. It's one of the most fantastic forms ever invented. I don't know…I don't know *who* invented it. It is absolutely sensational. Then how come there's only about five or six great fugues where there was no discrepancy about what's going on? It's not like the sonata related form. It's not like some joker coming in and adding another tune into it you see. It's perfect, and yet there is only a few great ones you see, only a few.

UV: Professor Feldman.

MF: Yes.

UV: If you write for a solo voice for example.

MF: Yes.

UV: Do you particularly gear the rhythmic shape and so forth to the capabilities of a certain singer, in a way that the voice is such an individual thing, so much more than an instrument?

MF: Well, I feel that most, a lot of singers have troubles with rhythm. And if I could interject the situation where I engaged a singer, a magnificent young singer in my college, who is married to a Lutheran minister, and she had a very difficult rhythmic passage. So I suggested that she worked with a marvellous percussionist to get the pattern, and she ran off with the percussionist! [Laughter]

So if you have a wife who is a singer then don't write difficult rhythmic parts! That's a true story and…

There are some instruments in a sense that maybe you should not get into a rhythmic mess, again to the instruments.

I'm writing a piece now and I'm having great difficulty. It's a piece I have to write for a very good friend - Alan Hacker, the English clarinettist. He asked me to write a piece, it's already on the programme for October. A clarinet quintet [*Clarinet and String Quartet (1983)*]. I don't like clarinet quintets. There are only two good ones and I know I'm not going to write one like Brahms. My music is not that kind of a music that has, again, background and foreground. Again, it's clarinet on top and a string quartet. So I'm having trouble. Also clarinet is not like the flute. The clarinet has to play a little more, has to keep playing a little more, you just can't pick it up and have it.

I was having a lot of trouble. And it also doesn't do rhythms the way you say it. You can't really have it to really become a rhythmic thing you see. I am not saying that it's a limited instrument, but there are a lot of things within my language it can't do. So I'm having a lot of trouble, I can't give it…I can't find its material, just can't find its material.

And so that became the theme of the piece. I always make a virtue out of a necessity, like Freud I use my neurosis for my… I do, I really. Actually, if I have trouble with something, I then make the trouble the subject and the subject of the piece is the clarinet looking for material. So there are a series of try-outs, they try this, then they try this, then they try that, while the string quartet doesn't have any problems, the string quartet has its problem already built in and that I already can handle it. The only problem the string quartet has that, how does it fit into the body politic of this other one that's having a problem, given that the string quartet doesn't have a problem. Well it's very interesting so I'm really having a problem exactly and I know exactly what the problem is. I don't know how to solve the problem.

But I enjoy that too. I enjoy writing anything that doesn't have a problem. There are some pieces that don't present problems at all. I mean I'm not totally paranoid, I don't feel that you always have to have a problem. But of course the pieces that don't really have a problem aren't that good pieces. [Laughs]

Even to find the right notes on the clarinet…I really can't do.

UV: If the string quartet doesn't have a problem then how is that going to augur for your piece? You say that pieces that don't have a problem are not your good pieces?

MF: Well, the string quartet doesn't have a problem because it's much more flexible so I can find things for it to do even though …. For example I'm working with the string quartet in a way I've never worked before. I usually am involved with voice leading, like just in the past three years I've written two very long string quartets, where I was involved in the voice leading of sorts. While in this piece I wanted a very disorienting effect and so I wasn't using voice leading, but just having series of chords that have nothing to do with each other. A, B, C, D, E, F, G and then juxtapose them without elegant voice leading. Just elegant chords and just out of context, very disassociating context, while this poor clarinettist looking for material, adding to the disorientation of the piece. Not all pieces of mine go towards disorientation, but the key word to write this piece is "disorientation." Actually, I wrote down on the score: *disorientate*.

JdVM: You said earlier that it seemed very important to realise that music is…When you are writing music you are dealing with metaphors. Could you expand on that a bit?

MF: Well, I think it's the difference between a good tune and not such good tune, a great tune, a memorable tune… I mean, how many of those fantastic classical pieces you know, the orchestra starts, the piano is full of atmosphere, like in Beethoven, Brahms. Everything is fantastic, the set-up is there, everything is there, but there's no great tune. Even if they wanted something evocative, or maybe felt that they would, they wanted different things, maybe looking for something else, but the *atmosphere* of the romantic period might have come in and the atmosphere was enough. [...]

I mean there's a reason why the first lines of poetry are so important: "I wandered lonely as a cloud."

Kafka was great. To learn about that is to really immerse with Kafka. Kafka was a master of the opening line, like the great tune, the great metaphor. "Someone has been telling lies about Joseph K." Fantastic. Can you imagine writing a tune like that?

[...]

UV: Professor, I'm very interested in how far you regard the solving of technical problems as being involved with the solving of the conceptual problems.

MF: One man's problem is another man's bagatelle.

UV: It just seems to me that…..

MF: I mean that's the problem. The problem is how hierarchical is…What is the value judgement of the fact that you've solved certain problems? And how much do you know that you're not just reinventing the fountain pen?

I knew a guy like that who was supported by his wife. She was mad about him and he was an inventor. You'd go up to his house and he'd say, "I want you to taste something," and you taste it - it's coffee! [Laughter] She caught on after thirty five years. I think she wrote a book on inventions or something.

That's a very interesting thing: just what is the problem? And just what is the mileage in the problem? Some people feel that some problems are not important. I'd say one of the greatest problems in modern time was the discovery of infantile sexuality. And the Swiss contingent, the protestants, Jung, said, "That's a Jewish problem. [Feldman laughs] It's not an important problem."

So I'm interested in only three notes and working with those three notes, like bugs on a slide, watching the way they are going, what are they doing. I don't think that [Vinko] Globokar is going to consider it an important problem.

So we have the whole hierarchical notion of what is *the* significant problem. Some people feel just the way I felt about *counterpoint:* that it's just a question of *reality*, it's not even a question of counterpoint.

Some people feel that it's *form*. I had a talk with Penderecki, to him there's only one form, sonata form. He says there's no other form. OK maybe he's right. To him that's reality.

UV: So it's quite closely tied in with the whole concept of notation is it not?

MF: It's tied up with notation. It's really tied up with material and defining for yourself what's material. The reason my music would sound terrific and there's nothing there is because I believe in my material, essentially. I believe in my material the way Penderecki believes in sonata form. I believe in my three notes. Or if you knew my piano concerto which essentially just opens up the first image as D-flat. But it's how I orchestrate that D-flat and how I pace that D-flat. I'm very impressed with my D-flat. No melody could do what my D-flat does. I believe in the material, I was tripping on that D-flat.

That's another thing to discuss: what's material? It's marvellous - like Clive Bell - to have guidelines, and write a book about, say, 'significant form,' or something. It's terrific to have those guidelines.

But my concern, and being that I am spending some time talking about music, and being that I'm… To me in the past thirty years, it's like a graveyard.

Not for *me,* but for hundreds of composers that I meet and that seem to disappear. And the problem that I have with my own students is that, and one of the reasons that I almost feel that composition should not be taught in the university. In fact I feel that anything requiring talent should not be taught in university. Hindemith's great remark. He comes to his friend, "I've invented a system, I've invented a system! Anybody could do it! You don't have to be gifted, anybody could do it. I invented this system!"

Maybe all systems were invented so anybody could do it. [Laughs] But seriously and fundamentally, I think the most *important* thing is, how do we learn what our own piece needs and how we go about doing it - even conceptually.

The enigmatic element about my own music is not… I'm a closet conceptualist. I'm no different than everybody else. How could you not be a conceptualist with those twelve notes looking at you, segmented? How could you not be? How could you not look at it and say, "Hey I'm going to put this with this and this with that"?

I don't want my ear to take over even though it's a terrific ear. I don't like somebody just sitting down, grooving, like a bunch of night courts, in love with themselves. [Laughter] Or someone in love with their mind which is just as bad as a night court. And the big problem is how do we do this dance of death, and believe me it is a dance of death, between the ear and the conceptions and judgement. That sense of judgement, that instinct that says, "It's tempting but I'm not going to write a piece for four recorders." It's certainly tempting. What makes that instrumental judgement? What makes you decide what instruments you are going to write for? No-one ever talks about that.

"Oh you brought in a piece for violin and piano today, let's see it!" Not, "Now why would we need a violin and piano?" There's a great story about Stravinsky and a little known composer by the name of Alexei Haieff, who's one of his Russian friends, and a kind of guy who we would call a society composer because of his connections. He always got ballet commissions or something. A very classy fellow, a nice man. And he brought a violin concerto to Stravinsky. They knew each other for forty years but he could never call Stravinsky by his first name.

I think [Robert] Craft, if he wrote about this, would be more important for young composers than the others [he writes about].

So anyway, Alexei brings in this thing. He had worked two years on this thing and he said, "Can I show you this?"

He said, "Yeah, put it down!" as if it's already diseased. That he was looking at it - it's already poxed - from a distance. He doesn't want to touch it. He opens it up, closes it and he says, "Alexei Haieff, this is not a violin concerto, it's a *trumpet* concerto!" [Laughter]

He was probably right you know, nice fanfare tune… you could hear it.

Who tells you what instruments to use? What's the difference between orchestration and arranging?

UV: What is [the difference]?

MF: Huh?

UV: Could you tell us what the difference is?

MF: I asked the question.

UV: We can't answer any of your questions because you keep contradicting yourself.

MF: Where did I contradict myself? Give me one contradiction.

UV: I'm at a loss to grab onto anything because if I listen long enough I feel that you….

MF: You mean that I leave it?

UV: Yeah.

MF: Oh well.

UV: When you leave it and you…Provocative maybe in a good sense because it's got…We're trying to understand what *you* are thinking about.

MF: Well, essentially, consciously playing the role of the devil's advocate, actually… For things that we might want to talk about. I'm not having to say anything for the time that I am here. I'm just throwing these out.

I'm fishing. I'm looking really for a subject where I feel some kind of response. [Laughter] Just *facial* response. Then, usually, if I see a little facial response, like I have - you can't see it like me. If I see something, if I lean on a subject, it's because I saw the look, the sparkle, the recognition [Snaps fingers] or something.

He shook his head once and I stayed on it for about two minutes. [Laughter]

UV: Could I ask to go back to that question of not using four recorders? I still don't really understand why, and I didn't understand, when you were responding to the piece, what actually you were saying. I like the sound very much. I am trying to think now: are you saying it was conceptual and should he never have conceived it for four recorders, or was it a personal choice or what?

MF: No, I'm not saying that at all.

It's nothing mysterious, it's just a question of…I'm going to exaggerate just to make the point.

I once went to a wedding where the father, they put him in a full dress suit, but they didn't take care of the shoes. He came with yellow shoes. I feel that instrumentation is very much like that. It's that you have to be very careful to use certain instruments, certain type of combinations, it just… it's just not right, now.

Making a law is not right, it's evidently a taste thing…It's just not right.

The thing, the only way to handle this is as a consensus. Is to have a vote and tally it up.

Can you use four recorders, no matter what you do? Or you can't use four recorders, no matter what you do? I think one has to vote on it.

Let's do it now. Raise your hand if four recorders don't bother you and it sounds perfectly right and you wonder why I'm picking on the man. Raise your hand if four recorders sound good.

UV: Which part of the question is it?

MF: If there's nothing wrong with four recorders in any context.

UV: Any context?

MF: Any context, nothing wrong with four recorders in the context of a contemporary piece or a piece written today. Can I see those hands just once more so we can get a tally here? It's perfectly OK to write for four recorders, right?

UV: In principle.

MF: In principle. And how many question it? Raise your hand, please.

Why do you question it?

UV: Well, I felt again it amounts to a taste thing. Because [my friend] and I were talking about it earlier. It seems that this whole thing can get terribly subjective, that we can even take tallies and take a vote on the matter. But regarding the matter of the recorders themselves, I think that it's questionable insofar as the actual literary material it has chosen. But again in principle I don't think that there's anything that militates against the choice of four recorders. So it's pretty much a context thing.

MF: Why wouldn't Boulez write a piece for four recorders?

UV: All the low ones are too soft and the top ones are too loud.

UV: Why wouldn't *you* write a piece for four recorders, you haven't told us that yet.

MF: I'd rather use a harmonium.

UV: Why?

MF: Because I want to get that particular sound.

UV: Would you have suggested to him using that material that he presented and that whole concept? Could you have suggested to him other combinations without completely starting from scratch, was that material usable? What's different?

MF: This is a horrendous problem. I mean it's just a horrendous problem. Is there a kind of DNA - never mind history, never mind anything - is there a kind of DNA of what to use, and what not to use?

All right, Ligeti would use a hundred metronomes. I don't think Ligeti would use *four,* because the metronomes was involved with the polyrhythmic world that he was in. The kind of continuing…the kind of machine that Ligeti was in. So it was like another extension of a kind of machine music, gone berserk. And different times, different times that these different periodicities would create.

It's a big big problem, I have it all the time. A student comes in with a piece for four guitars. I say, "What the hell are you doing?" Someone else would come in, especially in Canada: four saxophones. Toronto. They love saxophones. With the tape delaying.

Well, what are you going to do? What are you going to do? Become an enemy of the con instrument company? You don't write for four saxes, don't ask me why, you just don't do it. Sometimes you don't need an excuse. Sometimes music, you know, like a child, you just say, "No, you can't do it." You just can't do it, it's not got mileage in it, that you're wasting your time. It's: why are you doing it?

UV: Is there anyone that could imagine a situation in which the choice of instruments justified itself?

MF: Well, instruments are really, essentially... There's a big joke you know, there's a historical joke. The person is interested in the music and feels that the instruments are cosmetic, but most pieces are famous only because of its instrumentation.

I mean if you… Sibelius wasn't a dope, and some of his key schemes were not uninteresting. But if you take away the orchestra from Sibelius, what have you got?

We know pieces where the glory of that particular instrumental combination. We don't single out certain pieces in history only because we like their ideas.

JdVM: Maybe that's why piano reductions are so unsatisfactory? I do think that Debussy can't see that.

MF: Huh?

JdVM: Debussy. He wrote for piano first, and then orchestrated it later on, you know.

MF: Well, he was very lucky because there was a kind of closeness between the language. But I don't say that his orchestral music was pianistic. I would say his pianistic music was orchestral. Because, if you would want to analyse, say, the *Etudes*, they are fantastically orchestrated. So he had a tick. He was always orchestrating anything. Pick up one, he had to orchestrate, that's why he ruined the Satie pieces, they are over-orchestrated. But orchestration, you know that was…He was very lucky, both orchestra and piano were king, simultaneously, and that's Debussy just at that moment. And he was a fabulous pianist, I understand.

UV: What about your four famous fugues? Do they depend again on their orchestration in a sense of pitch levels and so on?

MF: Everything. I mean it's the instrument that determines its registration, where it's going to be, what it's going to sound and for that matter Bach's music is to some degree orchestrated.

I once helped somebody pacing. She was entering a contest with the *Goldberg Variations* and I was helping her pace it. And, I mean, it's purely orchestral music. And I know you would get into it, for instance, thinking of saying: "Cello pizzicato. That left hand," because of that particular theme. You get to see how the cello speaks if you get the right pacing with something like that. So my whole discussion with the *Goldberg Variations* with that particular friend was: I orchestrated it, I actually wrote in instruments, this, that, you know.

JdVM: What do you think of the Webern orchestrations? What are they doing, are they justified?

MF: I feel one piece I heard, the *Six Pieces for Orchestra*, is a masterpiece. I feel everything else is quite arbitrary. In fact Harrison Birtwistle once asked me, "Do you think he really ever *heard* a saxophone?" [Laughter]

I don't like, I don't like the later…they get on my nerves. I feel they are arbitrary. I don't feel that he could do instruments. I think he had a composite rhythm, I don't think that he used the instruments well.

UV: What about the orchestration of the Bach *Ricercar*?

MF: All right, I may get a bit excited about that, yes. But it's the *Six Pieces for Orchestra,* when everything was new, and strange in the beginning. A marvellous piece. But *Five Pieces* then he re-orchestrated and they sound very *classy* and a little too good, you know, the later orchestration.

He arranged them, he arranged them for some grade. But for a certain type of music, especially in the polyphonic world, for example like Schoenberg or Berg, there's certain instruments that they learnt to use that sound very good, very articulate, for their lines.

You see the whole use for the bass clarinet, and the pieces were crucial to the articulation of a lot of that music, especially Berg in the Chamber Concerto and the beautiful line material. So they had to reinvent different kinds of instruments. Hierarchical instruments are not very good for their material.

UV: I'd like to say something, I'd like also to speak Afrikaans because I can express myself better. Yes.

JdVM: Tell me and I'll translate.

UV: Is hierdie probleem dalk nie te erg nie: dat ons hier te doen het met ’n probleem wat te doen het met iets wat…Daar bestaan nie soort van ’n universele konsensus nie. Ons probeer nou maatstawwe kry waarvolgens ons dinge kan oordeel. Of dit goed is, of sleg. Maar eintlik kan mens nie teoreties sê dat enigiets kan goed wees nie. Óf sleg. Daar is so baie persoonlike smaak. By voorbeeld, iemand wat in Indië bly – sommer iemand primitief, of so, sal nie ’n Beethoven-simfonie aangenaam vind om na te luister nie. So daar bestaan nie werklik ’n maatstaf waarvolgens mens alles kan [be-oordeel nie]. Dit is ook waar die orkestrasie bykom, en alles. Maar dis ’n veel wyer probleem wat in al die 20se eeuse kuns uitkom. Vroeër was daar ’n soort van ’n universele konsensus in Wes-Europa oor sekere dinge. Dit bestaan nie meer vandag nie. Alles is aanvaarbaar. So waar trek mens die streep, wát is aanvaarbaar en wát is nie

JdVM [Translating]: OK, the question is that the universal concept or the university acceptable yard stick which existed at least in Western Europe, no longer exists. And that, now we look at things in a broader scale - first of all so that you have to ask yourself, how is Beethoven going to go down in India? And, do we not, in fact, create problems for ourselves by *trying* to find yardsticks which don't exist any longer? And if these yard sticks don't exist any longer then where are we?

Isn't everything just taste now?

MF: I would like to know what are the yardsticks. How to put something together? The tonal systems?

UV: It's more a case of the difference between something sounding good or not sounding good. It differs from one individual to another. That is something we know very little of.

MF: But aren't we pre-empting our judgement?

How about those chords in the *Third Symphony*, do you think it sounded good? I mean did the music, we are assuming that this music sounds good?

UV: Which third symphony?

MF: The Beethoven.

UV: Yes.

MF: I mean to what degree? I mean did Wagner really sound good?

UV: Well, it doesn't sound good to me.

MF: I think there is always a question of what sounds good and what sounds not good and I think that the discussion of yardsticks *always* existed. I think there was *always* confusion.

UV: But cannot one raise the question that… for instance this orchestration for recorders: why can't it be good, why can't it sound good? What is wrong with it? To some people it can.

MF: What can one say. Of course! But *still,* this whole business of, say, in a philosophical way, this whole business of solving the problem of diversity. That's what you're talking about. You feel diversity is chaotic. That's the impression I have.

UV: No.

MF: No. Well you feel…do you want standards?

UV: No, but I feel that we are trying to create artificial standards in order to judge the artistic value of music.

MF: But some people do have better judgement. Just take it out of art.

UV: But why do they have…

MF: Take it out of art. Make it less surrealistic, take it into life. Some people do have better judgement than others.

UV: Why do they have better judgement - because they know more?

MF: No.

Because they… Some people are born with judgement, or wisdom. I once had a conversation with an American composer, Lukas Foss. And he was telling me how wonderful Stockhausen is. And I said, “ That's very true.” I said, “He's all right, Karlheinz… even more, but he doesn't have wisdom in the music. I don't get any feeling of wisdom. So Lukas thinks a minute and says, “Do you think wisdom is necessary?” [Laughs] It was a very funny moment. Some people have better judgement. There was that thing I quoted on

the other day when this biographer of Freud's was saying, "How did he know where the important *subjects*, the important *phenomena*, to research, to pursue [are], without any models, without any precedent?…Unless maybe Greek tragedies…I mean, how did *he* know? All the other people *didn't* know.

He had good *judgement*, maybe. And maybe not even *wisdom*. He had an instinct, or feeling, that there's something here to pursue.

This is something that you can't teach, obviously. And I don't think it's a question of taste. I don't think that, when I decide on something, it's a question of taste.

I think I decide on things and, and relative to my…to *judgement* decisions, like I'm a judge. Judgement…judge. And I have to make a decision, and I have to come to a verdict. I *have* to make a decision. I can't lock myself up and, say, wait six years in jail while I make the decision. And one has to make that judgement. Especially if you are working. You're at your table, you're working, you want to do something. That day, you have to make judgements.

Now, as far as what to use out of this judgement, in this diversification. Many times the victor - and that's the reason I was interested in playing Bunita Marcus's piece - because many times the victor is the one that knows where the synthesis is.

Let's say Schoenberg: The elliptic harmony of Wagner, and the classical form of Brahms. Let's put it together and see what happens. Marvellous synthesis. And everybody has to find…If you're confused I would say to make a virtue of confusion. If you are confused, there's a reason. Instead of blaming it on yourself, learn how to make judgement within that confusion.

It's only the recording industry that got us involved with India. If you ever want to read Berio's account of going to London on some kind of trade fair, and he went on a boat from India in the Thames. It's fantastic. In his book - it's one of the funniest things you ever want to read - how he went, and he heard the music of Southern India. Which to me has always been very tame, right? And he'll write about these whirling dervishes that he heard in London! [Laughs]

And look at the way Berio would like to make his synthesis a kind of hippie synthesis in his *Sinfonia*. The way Stockhausen is making *his* synthesis. Actually there is a mad scramble today for synthesis. But I tell you now, it's not working. Because I don't think that syntheses are the answer. I think that the Hegelian idea of synthesis is no longer. At the same time you have *nothing* to do with India.

And to what degree you want to get rid of *ethnic* elements in terms of universal *artistic* ones, is a good question.

UV: If the whole problem boils down to one thing, and that is right and wrong. Who is right and who is wrong?

MF: No, that is *not* the problem: who is right or who is wrong. It's one who can make a certain type of judgement that frees you to work. It's not a question of right and wrong.

[...]

UV: But the composer for example of this piece for four recorders... He's made an absolute decision that he's going to use four recorders plus…

MF: I don't know what kind of decision he made, I'm not convinced about his decision.

UV: OK, so he made a certain decision. In order to write that piece he had to make a decision and that was his judgement. And your judgement is that it was wrong and so we seem to be landed up with that the person who is right is the one who is just more emphatic. I don't think we are getting anywhere. [...]

MF: Well, how about Stravinsky telling this guy after two years work that it was not a violin concerto it was a trumpet concerto. Are you going to take a 1960 California student's attitude, "That's what you think!" Are you going to take that attitude? "That's what you think!" Can you take that attitude? That Stravinsky tells this guy that it wasn't a violin concerto it was a trumpet concerto.

JZ-R: Yes, but that was because of problems of articulation of that instrument.

MF: There was no *problems*, the guy didn't write a *violin* concerto. He was a lousy composer, there was no problems whatsoever, really.

It's not a question of might makes right, it's a question the guy didn't have a sense of the right material for the violin, it was some kind of cutesy part piece in which he goofed. Have you ever *heard* the piece? There must be a reason.

It's a sort of question of arriving at our independence in terms of free will. We don't *have* free will there, our will is determined by our *judgement*. And then what is our *judgement* determined by?

UV: According to you, intuition.

UV: And your concept of a certain sound.

MF: Intuition, education, knowledge, experience, everything.

JdVM : My intuition tells me it's lunch time!

MF: It's not a question of arriving at arrogant a priori decisions about something. When I tell my students, “Why wouldn't Boulez - or some other name - do *that*?” Do you think it was because they didn't think of it? You and your four lousy saxophones? That is it because there was *not* a question of authority, or leadership. But there was only me…*me* and my four saxes. There's an arrogance on the part of the person that asked for the four saxs, rather than saying, “Now wait a minute, let's see what the other Doctors have to say,” you see? Are we free to write what we want, and are we really free, ultimately, to just say anything goes? Now what's happened today is another kind of nihilism and it's not a nihilism of John Cage’s. That is not nihilism, that's artistry. The nihilism is that every level says, “Anything goes,” and it doesn't. It just doesn't.

JZ-R: No, but I don't think I'm saying that.

MF: Well, for me if you say four recorders are OK, you're saying anything goes. For where I am, where my judgement level is. Now we can't have a contest in saying who's judgement is more correct in this matter, can we?

JZ-R: But how do we know that the composer thought, “Anything goes, therefore I try four recorders”? Maybe he had a concrete, absolute decision for using those four recorders.

MF: He could.

JZ-R: Well, then we get back to the decision of judgement.

MF: All right, then, um…

JZ-R: But you don't think he could.

JdVM: Well, we’re working from the premise that he didn't sit down and think of combining four recorders.

MF: He's not a criminal, he's not going to get a traffic ticket. [Laughter]

But I'm not going to take his piece back to New York, that I'll tell you. That's my judgement.

But I'm quite sure the Recorder Society would be delighted. So there's a place for all of us.