Morton Feldman: The Johannesburg Masterclasses, July 1983
Session 5: Works by Feldman (*Piano*)

Transcribed by Dirk de Klerk

Voices heard: Morton Feldman (MF)
David Kosviner (DK)
Peter Klatzow (PK)
Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph (JZ-R)
Unidentified Voices (UV)

MF: I remember having a conversation with Milton Babbitt, whose music is written like in a monastery compared to Europe. And we were talking about Berio, and I said, "I hope we don't have a rage of beauty parlours happening in this country." My whole feeling about Berio was there was a beauty parlour. [...]

And that's essentially what we thought about European glamorous music. We felt that it was a beauty parlour. And what was interesting I think about some of my early pieces is that, essentially, the instrumentation was, an Arensky trio plus chimes, an Arensky trio plus tuba. [...] But there was something in common… If you ever look at even John Cage's instrumentation of those early days, we liked, or tried to find, a kind of instrument that did not get in the way with what euphemistically we referred to as *the sound*. We wanted very anonymous type of instruments, even though we know that it's a harmonica or a this… The glamour-pusses we kept away from, or the glamour kind of combinations.

But still, as I got into the sixties, I also got involved with that kind of medieval, ad-hoc type of orchestration, like everybody else. It's only *now* that I'm back to conventional instruments, but not for conventional reasons. It's only years [since] I wrote a trio that's an hour and a half. Do you know what a trio sounds like in a kind of language that's absolutely muddy?

This is my whole problem with Jo Kondo, who writes the notes first and then he orchestrates. And he orchestrates then for cow bells, and this and that. And it sounds *muddy*. It's not *bad*, though. It's very disconcerting, because he's *terribly* clever.

[...] I'm writing, now, string quartets. I like the string quartet. I like the string quartet because what the string quartet does is that... how long can you write colour? And that you have to go back and find the *timbre* in the *pitch*. So you have to get involved with pitch and timbre as colour, and not the *other* stuff. And I find it very interesting. It makes me arrive at different kinds of formulations, different types of juxtaposition, of combinations, especially register, dealing with the string quartet. And I'm nuts about string quartets. And I must spend the rest of my life and get on the Haydn and Beethoven bandwagon. That's a great bandwagon, rather than the Boulez bandwagon. [Laughs]

DK: Nowadays it's also the Rochberg bandwagon.

MF: *No*! No. He doesn't give a damn about them, he solves *no* problems. No, his attitude is *political,* that he's going to go back to the glorious past and that the string quartet is a symbol of that past for him.

I don't choose it symbolically.

DK: Yes.

MF: As a reaction at all.

DK: I was just thinking that he's also sort of been just writing string quartets for the past couple of years.

MF: I'm getting back into… I found my own indictment in a lot of pieces I've heard here I'll never ever, ever, ever, ever use a castanet, or tenor drum, or a bass drum, ever, ever again. I'll put it in writing and you can collect on it.

PK: Not even in the orchestral scores?

MF: *Flute and Orchestra* was a very big move for me. I hate the isolated, instant percussion sound. *I hate it!!* If I want a chime, I want three of them, playing a *chord,* and all you going to get is what I really wanted in yesteryear, is the feeling of one note. I had to write a complex chord [...] for three chimes to get a

feeling. For me to get the triangles, I think I had about thirty triangles going, just to hear triangles. Three glocks to hear a glock. In my opera I had five gongs coming in, to really hear the gongs.

So I'm very interested in the…Oh, by the way, that piece was dedicated to Varèse.

PK: Which, *Flute and Orchestra?*

MF: *Flute and Orchestra*, in the terms of my feeling about percussion. But I'm really back now into a kind of *batteria* [Italian: battery of percussion]. If I write an orchestral piece again, I write a batteria. Otherwise I write for a kind of classic orchestra: 2 2 2 2, without harp, without piano, without percussion, and usually without one string section. And in my last piece, I threw out the violins, like Stravinsky did in the *Symphony of Psalms*. And when you throw out the violins in an orchestral piece, then you know why he did it. [Laughs] But percussion, now, I see as a batteria.

PK: It's a very glamorous sound, you know.

MF: The batteria?

PK: Mm.

DK: Especially considering those nine triangles sort of all tinkling along. Three glockenspiels just sort of trilling along.

MF: Nice. I don't think I could use that combination again, I think it was just for that piece.

It was really… Actually, the reason that I wrote it for that piece was to hold up the tessitura of the flute. I needed something to hold it up, and that was the idea that I had. That held it up. And I think it did.

DK: That also would be the use of the timpani, sort of like very low clusters with the three timpani, in fact.

MF: That became an image in the piece because I have various examples of that particular idea of those instruments. One of the things that always bothered me about music is that you always heard the *high*, or you heard the *ground.* And then in this piece I wanted to make the high seem like Mount Olympus, and the low the lowest I've ever heard. Only by the contrast of them. And I did a lot of metaphors of that particular instrumental imagery.

Another thing that I'd like to bring up, and that maybe someone will want to take up later on, is the whole idea about what is *memorable* in a piece of music.

I had the shock of my life. It's that I started to think about the complete works of Schoenberg, and it was very, very difficult, even in terms of instrumental imagery or whatever, to think of anything that was really, truly memorable. This goes for Webern too. While on the other hand, that's what Stravinsky is all about for me. The opening of the slow movement of the *Violin Concerto*, there was that marvellous instrumentation of that flute the way it cuts through all this… [Bangs on the table] It's in my mind, I can never get it out.

And a lot of Stravinsky is like that. [...] What is language, what is vocabulary and what is memorable? *Why* is something memorable?

And I really got the idea in an article I read, in which this person actually says, "Why is it [memorable]?" And this is really addressed to art historians that know the whole repertoire of every Netherlander's painting, or every Renaissance painting. She has the question, Why is it that Raphael could paint, say, a face, and it's memorable? And someone else painting almost the same face with the same kind of technique and everything, a kind of characteristic face - like a vibraphone, essentially! They all had the same face and why is *his* face memorable, when there was actually nothing distinguished about it in terms of its technical position? Just what is it about it? Why it's memorable? Why is the Stravinsky pattern memorable? Why are even his *accompaniments* memorable? Like in the first movement of the *Three Pieces for String Quartet* just the kind of pantonal... [Sings] […] The pattern of it is *memorable*.

PK: It's a good idea.

MF: What?

PK: It's a good idea that is involved. I think that that is always memorable.

MF: Schoenberg didn't have good ideas?

PK: No, I don't think so.

MF: That harmonic section in the *Fourth String Quartet* is not absolutely breathtaking?

PK: Well, that's memorable.

MF: No it isn't. It's breathtaking. It's like watching a diver, "Hey, you got out of that one!" It's not *memorable* to me.

PK: Well, maybe [one of] the most memorable pieces is the third of the *Five Orchestral Pieces* because it is an absolutely marvellous idea. Is it the third, *Farben*?

MF: Yes, but what's memorable about it? What's memorable about it. On a doctorate exam, I ask them what the *chord* is, but still, I don't…What is it, the bass clarinet is memorable? What's memorable, the stillness of it?

PK: Mm.

MF: Yes it's… but you don't *remember* anything really.

PK: It's just the background.

UV: To say that it's memorable because it's a good idea is totally circular, because you can't say whether it's memorable because it's a good idea or it's a good idea because it's memorable. It doesn't get you anywhere really, does it?

PK: No, but I think [they are] very closely related.

UV: Yeah, well exactly, that's the point. I mean you can't say the thing is memorable because it's a good idea. What makes it a good idea?

MF: Yeah, but what if I ask you to…You got three days to write a paper and write all the kind of things that you could think of in music that you find memorable. [...]

What you're really doing then is building up a vocabulary for you to find a language out of…Because that's what you feel. That's what you feel is memorable, you see?

UV: Right.

MF: To me, what is memorable in the opening of the slow movement of the Stravinsky *Violin Concerto* is an instrumental presence. And it's very, very interesting the way he's scoring that first two measures. And the way he cuts through on a diagonal with the low flute. What's memorable about it is an instrumental presence that is absolutely astounding.

PK: I want to tell you that Nadia [Boulanger] used to use that piece too, as an example of very unusual scoring. For example, in the first movement, there's a diminished seventh, and it has an extraordinary quality because of the way that it's laid out.

MF: Now this whole business of orchestration is also, I feel, a very, very important thing we could talk about. Most young composers I know - until they meet me! [Laughter] - feel that orchestration is [Henry] Mancini!

My whole attitude to them, in my orchestration seminar, is to say, "Look, I like the cute idea. It's OK. But it's not orchestrated." Does it *have* to be orchestrated? The notes are going to tell the story. [...] I say, "Look, why don't you just think of orchestration as - you take a photograph, and it has to be developed. We have to *hear* the goddamn thing! And how you develop this film is essentially [...] to make that photo *apparent.*" And I say, "Your ideas don't mean anything unless they're orchestrated." Everything has to be orchestrated. Jeanne, I would suggest that you give a complete analysis of the Debussy *Etudes* and how he's orchestrating the piano in the piece. Also Satie's *Five Nocturnes*, which is unfortunately not known. They are *fantastic* pieces. They're not like the Satie that Debussy orchestrated. They are more chromatic and yet they sound just as modal.

And look at the orchestration that he does in those two pieces. I think [they] are marvellous examples of how to orchestrate your piano piece. And when we are working on a piano piece, you just can't lay out the notes like that, ever again. You've got to promise me.

PK: Can we break on that promise?

[Tea break]

MF: And usually I work - although I don't want to admit it to myself, it's true - I work in series. I think I've mentioned that I write a certain type of piece where, as I said, the breathing thing... Then I write a whole series of pieces with different kinds of instrumentation to see how I can milk that particular aspect. This piece [*Piano (1977)*] was a series [with] the flute concerto, or the flute and orchestra piece [*Flute and Orchestra (1978)*] you heard and also a Beckett opera [*Neither (*1976/7)], an hour and ten minutes opera.

And the idea at that particular time in my life was to bring more furniture into the room, so to speak. Let's see what happens. The furniture begins to happen later on in the piece, with two systems. And then more and more furniture, in three systems, rather than thinking of this furniture on a string and filling up a linear space.

And it was both humorous and a little annoying that the head copyist in Universal [Edition] took my original score that looked like this and then tried to superimpose all the things that were happening onto one system. And it looked like a demented Ives!

Here I also felt that it was also basically a kind of visual aid that would make it easier for the performer.

Alright. Various problems like this happen in *Flute and Orchestra*. And even more so in the large orchestra in the opera.

Where with Wagner, the colour - the action was in the colour. I think in my opera the action was in the orchestra. Just orchestra, creating the mood of an opera.

OK. These three pieces which are important in this period in my life are all commissioned pieces. [...] The opera was for Rome, and I had my own singer and I had my own conductor. I didn't have my own orchestra! [Laughs]

PK: Who was the conductor for that, if I may ask?

MF: Marcello Panni, a marvellous friend. Very good.

DK: He's now at Mills College if I'm not mistaken.

MF: He's in Mills College for about two months, or a month, out of the year. As a composer, not as a conductor.

DK: Yeah.

MF: OK, so I knew that the *Flute and Orchestra* was a commission for Saarbrücken. And I heard the way the girl [Roswitha Staege] played, and the conductor's a very good friend [Hans Zender] who plays a piece of mine every year and he asked me to write a flute and orchestra piece. This one was written for… [PK is laughing] What's the matter?

PK: I'm laughing at Kossi [David Kosviner]. Is there anything he doesn't remember? He knows double bass players in Perugia. He knows conductors in Mills College. I'm *finished*. [Laughter]

MF: You know what Kierkegaard said? He said, "Well, if I wouldn't have become a philosopher, I would be a police spy." [Laughter]

PK: Alright then, let me write that down. [Laughter]

MF: You know he was very eccentric. He had one of those those top hats you always see in Danish caricatures, you know. In the hat, in the [...] top of the hat, inside, he had a mirror, and occasionally he would take it out and look in the mirror all around him in the café to see who was there. [Laughter]

I'm sure, as I tell my students, I might seem as if I'm rambling, but it will connect sooner or later. OK.

PK: The Talmudic way.

MF: We'll find a way, if there's no connection, we'll make one!

OK. So, this [*Piano*] I wrote for Roger Woodward. And it's very important that I wrote for Roger Woodward. Without Roger Woodward, I would not have written the piece. These were all for fans of mine. If I don't like the organisation, if I don't like the people, I don't write the piece. When Roger said he was going to do this in Baden-Baden, I said, "You mean, from memory?" And he looked at me and he says, "Can I keep the music on the piano?" [Laughs] And he practically learnt it. He now plays it from memory. He memorised the piece and I think it was quite a feat.

OK, so it's my memory of Roger, his dedication, where I could *eliminate* the performer. That's why I like to write for friends or people like Roger. I *eliminate* the performer.

There are periods in your life where you write just for a violinist. It's violin music, you write for a violinist. Now I write for only one violinist, Paul Zukofsky.

Stockhausen never wrote for David Tudor. But a lot of his pieces were written where he made notes how David Tudor pedals.

OK, so I saw Roger in Dartington, coming in with a Mickey Mouse sweatshirt in this very staid place. And an afro. Sitting sideways, playing the *Hammerklavier*. But when he was finished, we thought we heard Beethoven himself playing the *Hammerklavier*. Such a sensational performance. We forgot all about the Mickey Mouse sweatshirt, it kind of looked nice and appropriate, whereas before it was just annoying.

Alright, so I want to write a piano piece. How do I go about writing a piano piece? I get concentrated. I sit down at the piano, and instinctively I went for a balance, which was *discovered*. I discovered a balance that made at least that position interesting for me, rather than just starting off with a

nice chord in the middle or something like that. There's something very precarious about the balancing of this piece.

Then I go ahead and I'm just writing the piece. Notice, essentially this is also a demonstration of how I keep from a directional rhythmic thing, just by not writing the rhythm in a kind of common practice way. And it's obvious, the sixteenth note only a dotted… see? [They are examining the score]

UV: Mm.

MF: And then here.

UV: Yes.

MF: Or sixteenth note, half note, see? All in the 2/2. In other words it's 2/2. I'm making that sub-division in the middle myself as I'm writing. But I'm getting away from a kind of common practice pacing in its placement see? And as I told you earlier, I'm a closet serialist. [Laughter] So, instinctively, just *instinctively,* I don't come back in the same place as it's going. Do you understand that? I just don't come back in the same place.

[Looking at DK examining the score] He's having a marvellous time. [Laughs]

DK: I'm enjoying this.

MF: OK, then I would do other kind of crazy things. I loved this. I used it in another piece. It was very, very important for me. Instead of looking for complicated rhythms, this is almost like a jack-in-the-box, something within something. We all know what a triplet is, we all have a feeling ingrained of a triplet. What I did here, was put the quarter note *here* and the eighth note here. I kind of liked *that* framed with *this.* And the reason I'm doing that, is creating, or isolating a certain type of… I tried to make an *image*, rhythmic *imagery* rather than rhythm. Isolate where the rhythmic thing becomes almost an image.

As I'm writing and I get to… here's another one. Eighth note, very important for me. I couldn't write this particular piece if I didn't do this.

Then I begin to look at the piece. I don't disagree with Nietzsche when he said the first ten steps could be improvised, but after that you need a plan. [Laughter] And it's true, whether a plan is a system, again on a scale of one to ten, I don't know. *Strategy* is the word I use*. What do I notice about the piece?*

[...] And I see that there is an interesting mixture between *downbeat* and *off* the beat. And I kind of look at it. I'm not formulating any ideas about it, but I notice it.

I'm kind of looking at it, and looking at it, and I see that, as Debussy said, you don't begin with laws, but the piece arrives at them. And essentially, if I don't want to call it a *law,* at least I would call it a kind of *behaviour* of the piece as it's going along.

Now what was interesting for me was, how do I bring in more furniture? I have no idea about it, but what I notice is, is that on many of them there was nothing on the first beat. And then I looked at the piece, and this is what I mean about getting ideas. I always make a neat copy. I cannot go ahead... I spend my day writing, like everybody else. It's division of labour. Then I make the neat copy, because I don't want it to pile up. Also, while I'm copying, neatly, I'm getting ideas, or I'm thinking about it. Subliminally or consciously. That helps me think about it.

I take a look at a page, and immediately I see how one system is on the downbeat and one system is on the offbeat. And I see that there's a relationship also sound-wise. And I see a kind of collage going, if you want to use that term. Just in terms of, it looked *nice*, my eyes jumped up. I refer that to like the reflex [Snaps fingers] of a terrific musician. And I think that as composers you have to learn about that reflex [Snaps fingers]. That reflex [Snaps fingers] enables you to have ideas, otherwise you are in love with everything you are writing and everything you know seems it's going to be fine. So I'm always ready [Snaps fingers] with that reflex to grab on *anything* that's important to, at least, continuing two more measures, not three or four. I would sell my soul to the devil just to have another measure! Maybe not the devil, but certainly to Peter. [Laughter]

So essentially that was the reflex here. Now if I see that it kind of works as a collage, the problem that I would ask myself, or the question I would ask myself next: do I find new material to put into this idea, or do I use old material? And then I became a very fat squirrel, and the idea came to me. Gather the notes and when you have enough, then go back to a certain place and then put it on top. And so what you have here now in terms of the format of the piece is that, every time these come in, it's material that you heard before in the cracks. And there it is - the piece - essentially.

I'm gathering that when you see that there's nothing going on here, I'm gathering more, I'm gathering more nuts. And then you're going to find it here and many times I don't *vary*. I don't vary the material and then I have moral problems like John Cage had in the *Music of Changes*.

If you ever take a look at the *Music of Changes,* there are whole sections where you see a pedal. Just very briefly, what he did - it's a kind of serialistic piece in terms of handling all the parameters. And he had the parameters for various kind of pedallings which you would put in arbitrarily where it came out [according to] the tossing of the coins for the *I Ching*.

There are two measures with pedalling - loud pedalling and soft pedalling - but there's no music! [Laughs]. For John Cage it just turned out that way. So he had to decide, "Am I going to keep it in, or…" Being that he's very pedantic, he kept it in.

But I did the same thing. There are some places where I got a simultaneity in the layering. I don't call it layering, because it's vertical. But I had a simultaneity that was kind of difficult, pianistically. But then when I looked at it, I felt that you could play maybe two notes very quickly as a grace note, making adjustments, like you would if you had small fingers and get the chord. There was no problem. The two people that learned this never complained. But it only happens twice [in the piece].

DK: Can I ask a question quickly?

MF: Yes.

DK: I don't see any pedalling marks whatsoever here especially when you've got like two or three systems.

MF: I understand exactly what you mean, but in the end what do I have?

DK: Hold pedal until end. Hold *middle* pedal until end.

MF: Yes.

DK: But that's for the last two pages, pages 28 and 29.

MF: Right, which shows you... Remember I told you about the woodwind deficiency?

DK: Mm.

MF: Well, obviously there's a pedal deficiency! [Laughter]

No, really, as one of the Popes once said about the fact that the Renaissance was programming all this religious painting. He said, "Huh, can you imagine telling Michelangelo how to paint a religious painting?"

You don't tell Roger Woodward how to pedal. And I don't allow my students to put in pedalling, I think it's amateur, putting pedalling on the score. [...] If you don't know how to pedal it don't play it.

PK: Yeah, but what if it's rather an original pedalling, something that somebody wouldn't automatically do?

MF: You mean like a trill? [Laughter]

PK: It's a very unusual effect, and even Chopin used it. It's called, "vibrato pedalling".

MF: Roger uses it here. When I write a piece for Roger I don't want to put in the pedalling. First of all, all pianos are different. In fact I tell people that play it to please play it on a Steinway.

This piece could never be played on a Broadwood, which is a terrible tinny sound and the gradation is lousy. And the Bechstein is not for this. I asked for a Steinway, I wrote it on a Steinway, I wrote it on a terrific Steinway, I want it played on a terrific Steinway.

OK. I have another piece [*Triadic Memories (1981)*] which I am going to play for you, only you, before I go [see Session 10], because it's an hour and a half. And I have just half pedal down throughout the piece. And that was an interesting idea how to get ideas. Very briefly, that I couldn't use the same chords for a half pedal.

I mean, there's a reason that Steve Reich uses those particular notes [in his *Four Organs (1970)*]. They sound best on a nice Italian organ, cheap organ. Those are the notes that sound best. I had to find a whole new vocabulary of notes, registrations, things that sound best for just a half pedal. And it's amazing that when Roger took his applause after this performance of *Triadic Memories* with the half pedal, he got up and he kind of toppled over, because his foot was numb from the half pedal for an hour and a half! [Laughter]

Then of course what's very interesting, though I don't call it the arch form. I mean, you get on top of the mountain, how do you get off the mountain? Which may feel kind of a nice arch form. I didn't think of it as an arch, I just thought I was getting off the mountain, you see.

OK, that's essentially what came to mind... Also, my attitude. And I was very interested in reading a very important scientist in America talking about the problems that he has with students. And he says that his students begin with a mess.

Actually it's appalling, he said they begin with all kinds of mathematical formulations, they begin with a mess and they arrive at *nothing*. And he said that what he does is kind of make a visual of it, and see the implications of what mess he should go into. And that's very much part of my compositional philosophy.

I am not looking for a mess, I don't want a mess. To me, *any* idea is a mess. But I don't mind getting into a mess when it seems that it's going to work in a way that's beneficial to the piece. Then it's no longer a mess, it's that which is appropriate to the piece.

OK. Also all those questions that I brought out here this morning are questions that I ask myself. Language, vocabulary. I think the question that I ask myself here -you can't programme it, but you can be conscious of it - was the one right before we broke, when I said, "What is memorable? What do you remember, and why do you remember it?"

And I was very, very conscious of… I wouldn't use such a pretentious word as "memorable" as a composer. Only *after* you write the piece! Remember what I told you in terms of really learning your own piece and memorising it? As I was writing it, I was very interested in what I *remembered,* as opposed to that which I *didn't* remember. And I might have been just a… on a level of concentration and selection. But I gave myself the undertaking to remember everything.

Ozzie, what… Ozzie? Where did I get Ozzie from?

DK [aka "Kossi"]: I don't know.

MF: You don't look like an Ozzie! Could we ask you to turn the pages? I don't want to stand here and…..

DK: No, I'll turn the page. I've got longer arms than you. Big stretch.

[A recording of *Piano* performed by Roger Woodward is played whilst the score is followed]

PK: I'm very disturbed at how *far* he is from what's written in the score, rhythmically speaking. He's *way* off, sometimes.

MF: Oh, so is Glenn Gould with the recording of the Schoenberg piece. And it's my favourite performance. [...]

PK: How would you feel about this piece being done on three pianos?

MF: No, no way. I have another… I don't have it with me. Thank God, otherwise I'd make you hear it! I have another performance with Aki doing it.

PK: Who's Aki?

MF: Takahashi. She's Japanese, so it's stricter. Very elegant. I like them both. Very strict.

PK: He gets what the piece is about, there's a marvellous floating ... But…

MF: The *mood*, he gets the mood. Aki doesn't have that right. She's stuck between the kind of objectivity and subjectivity. And just stuck in there some place. It's because of this piece she asked me to coach her on Chopin, and pieces like that. And we worked on the big Chopin *Ballade* together.

She's doing it now and having big success with it in Japan. Actually, she was very jealous of Roger's performance. But not necessarily just this performance which she heard. But afterward I played - I don't know if you know it down here, it's on RCA London I think - the Liszt transcription of the *Eroica* for piano. Well, after she heard it she got *sick*. Anybody here familiar with it? Roger Woodward's - you know it?

JZ-R: Yes.

MF: It's quite sensational.

JZ-R: Yes, it is sensational. That would make any pianist sick.

MF: Then she decided to expand her literature. She wanted to do both, because she felt she wanted to get some of that into her own playing. Yes, it [Woodward's lack of rhythmic strictness] doesn't bother me. The only thing that bothers me in the piece is the ritard.

PK: Mm, but you know there were little things. For example where it moves very quickly from one system to another, where I think it should be more close together. He takes his time over moving those.

MF: Right. Aki does do it.

PK: There's no doubting that it's very beautifully played, but I want to hear...

MF: She does it. I'll send you her cassette. And it's elegant, it's marvellous, I have no complaints about it.

PK: Why not three pianos?

MF: It's a surreal question to me. Like ask me, Why aren't you Princess Margaret? [Laughter]

PK: *Why* aren't you? [Laughter]

MF: It's one piano, it's called *Piano*.

PK: Well, we could just add an "s". [Laughter]

MF: I couldn't have written the piece with it... You know that game when you fill a glass of water to the top, actually to the brim?

PK: Mm.

MF: And then you start gently putting pennies in it?

PK: No, I've never done that.

MF: Play it, it would be a nice game.

PK: What happened?

MF: I just suggest you get a lot of pennies because until it floweth over, you're freaked out having pennies keep fitting into it. And it's a nice game to play. And I was doing that in here. I was putting pennies into this glass of water! And then I decided to have that little more quixotic. Aki plays it better. He's a little too accented [Sings]. The shape is a little too… She does it more […] And I thought if I put *that* in there, it will fill up, a little more action.

I tried to fill it up with the […] I don't know how many. I cut it out now. I will never write a piece like it again but I don't think I could have got more pennies.

PK: No, look alright, I agree with you. My question is obviously in a certain sense ridiculous, but since it divides up into three layers...

MF: You know, somebody said to me once which I recall. He was a very stupid guy. He was a violinist. And he said to me once, "Listen you're wasting your time. If you want to write good music, you have to go back to Vivaldi."

But he also said to me once, and I thought it was intelligent, he said, "You know most people make a mistake. When they play pieces for two pianos, they chose two pianos which sound the same. You shouldn't. You should chose two pianos which sound different, and then you get an interesting counterpart and it's different from a duet." Or a normal piano and a prepared one. [Laughter]

PK: Yes, that certainly does sound different.

MF: Well, I mean, that kind of thing. That's why Ligeti for example, in some of those pieces, would have a quarter tone distance apart, you see, something like that. If I was a polyphonist, I would have written a piece for three pianos.

PK: I would like to hear the layers in this piece a little bit more clearly. Just *something*, maybe that's the mistake that I'm making?

MF: Well, there was an element of obscurity here. Obscuring things sometimes. That's what the black is, the black loud notes are doing it.

PK: Mm.

MF: They are obscuring things and then having the other thing in a sense not really come out as background and foreground but actually coming out of that which was already obscured, you see.

PK: Mm.

MF: Essentially the performance would be different, it would be. I'm orchestrating the piano.

PK: Yes.

MF: I mean I had to do it on one piano.

PK: Mm.

MF: No two pianos could get, when he's doing that lilt, kind of, he's back and forth and rocking. Oh, that's my favourite part of the whole piece. He's rocking back and forth and hear these things. No two pianos would be able to get that. Really, really.

I mean, why don't you do *Zyklus* for four percussionists?

DK: It would be a damn sight easier.

MF: It will sound better. The connections are never quick enough [Snaps fingers] as they're going to a note you know. They're never quick enough, even the best, never quick enough to make the… [Snaps fingers]

PK: You see then you really could get, here, if you look at this section...

MF: Why don't you do like what Ravel did to a more primitive Mussorgsky, why don't you re-write it? [Laughter]

DK: He's probably going to.

PK: It's actually not unlike *Why Patterns?* in some ways, the way that it works. It's like one person playing *Why Patterns?*.

MF: [...] There's another piece of mine which Aki does with Paul Zukofsky, one of the best performances I've had made. A piece called, *For John Cage*, one of my best pieces in recent years. And it's just for piano and violin. And unlike *Why Patterns?* which was not in the same space, but in the same format, there was an aspect in this piece - in the violin and piano piece - which doesn't have this mood at all, it's much more… It's on one stave, the piano part. Ah, but of course, there are chords. But I only use the chords that I could fit into this one stave. OK. And the whole idea of this piece that seemed to interest me at the time is that they are both in the *same space*, you know? It was a fascinating problem. They are both in the same space.

This whole idea that if you have the clarinet is playing on C and the oboe on E, you know [Laughs], that kind of piece I didn't want to do. I wanted to have them in the same space, and it worked out beautifully. It worked out beautifully, but the genesis of that *in the same space* of two worlds, or three worlds *in the same space,* interested me. Rather than spreading it out, layering it. You see, I'm not really layering it here.

And I was very careful with the registration of the piece, where it was. I had to decide for myself just about *where it was*. Where the hell is it? Every piece you hear, whether you know it or not, is in *some place*. A *key* is a place.

OK, we have time for two questions.

Ozzie? You've got a new name... Kossi, ask a question.

DK: No, I'm not going to, I like the enigmas.

MF: What? Wait a minute! What do you mean? That's a question. Why enigmas? Where's the enigma? One man's enigma is another man's answer.

DK: No, I like it the way it is!

MF: You like it the way it is?

DK: I don't want to ask any questions about it. Except, of course, that what I also find very disconcerting are these rhythmic discrepancies. But I mean again that's got nothing to do with you, it's got everything to do with the performer. I just find it a bit disconcerting.

JZ-R: Do you mean you find the score disconcerting?

DK: Yes, I'm sure if you just listen to it on its own you wouldn't find it disconcerting.

PK: Maybe, from that point of view, he shouldn't have played it from memory. How would he have done it if he didn't play it from memory?

MF: Mechanically.

PK: It's *amazing* what he has memorised, it's absolutely staggering!

MF: But doesn't he sound as if he *has it*, that it's *there*, huh?

PK: Yes it does.

MF: OK. [Laughter]

When thou goest to a performer bring thy whip. [Laughter]

I think it's a sensational performance, just a *wonderful* performance.

PK: I want to play it, but with the music.

MF: And two other pianists. [Laughter]

DK: And three page turners.

MF: On the same bench.

PK: No, no.

Now, that *wouldn't* work!

[...]

MF: Alright, listen. Before we close up, please participate. Be a little more active, and let's just touch on this whole aspect that I talked about earlier, about language and vocabulary. Because it is not that I'm not uninterested in vocabulary but I'm beginning to find vocabulary not so much in musical *material* or musical *systems* but the vocabulary, say, of memory as a historical device, right? The vocabulary of a… *frame*, huh?

And what I was trying to do in this piece - and I think I did it well and then I decided I'm not going to do it, I'm *not* going to do it - is try to make my music, in some kind of half-hidden way, more formal. And I decided not to do it. And that's the switch *immediately* [Snaps fingers] into *Why Patterns?* you see? And then *Why Patterns?* already, I was corrupted again. And I didn't have this problem. [Laughs] But it was a very tempting problem in this piece.

PK: Is *Why Patterns?* after this?

MF: Very soon after this.

DK: And *Flute and Orchestra* was just before this?

MF: I don't know. I think I was writing them at the one time. I can't remember actually. You have to look at the date, but it was one right after another, actually. There was no time, not even a half a day in between.

And it's a question can that be a synthesis, that *formality* and to some degree, *informality,* in terms of the fact that it's certainly not functional harmony. But it could be analysed in some degree almost there, certain aggregates. There must be something here. And see if I could mix the both. And not the other more amateurish way of aleatoric, far-out aleatoric notation, kind of formal notation that sounds… I always know, for example, in a piece, which is the aleatoric section and which is the you know the… I think we all do now.

PK: The aleatoric sounds worse.

MF: They don't sound good at all. I don't consider real music aleatoric. You know what I mean: *graphic* - Earle Brown - and then regular music, and then zig-zag, then regular music, is a disaster. As opposed to between the tight and the loose idea.

To me the tight is making it *framed*, somehow. Not being concerned what's being framed, but making it framed. Which I do in this piece. I think I do.

[...]

PK: Can I ask you something about rhythm?

MF: Oh, my favourite subject.

PK: There's a very interesting point….

MF: But I can't dance.

PK: And you don't play the castanets.

Well, let's consider this not as the piano piece but as different kinds of layers here. Where you have a rhythmic situation like this, where you have one part that is going along, in a pulse, a fairly stable kind of pulse. And you have other parts that are certainly off it, and irregularly off it.

MF: Yes, all within the same ictus.

PK: Right.

MF: A collage of the same pulse.

PK: Doesn't, to the listener, this, then, tend to recede as background material? Because of the fact that it's absolutely regular, absolutely stable.

DK: It's not absolutely…

PK: No, but just let's say that if it was absolutely regular, absolutely stable it's relatively there […]

MF: Maybe background material is that material which you don't hear again.

PK: No, which you come to accept for granted.

DK: Maybe really more like a bas relief, that the other things come more out, because they are not so regular and other things are just a tone, you know, they are slightly back. It might come out later in the piece.

MF: Well, there was a very interesting thing I did with my kids where I played the first few moments of *Jeux*, when it opens up at the beginning. And I said, "Is that background, or is it just a simultaneous colour?" You see what I mean?

And what's interesting about the recording… Actually it would make a very interesting compositional seminar, to play say two recordings of *Jeux*. Play the Boulez recording, and how you don't get the background and foreground in that recording as you would do in another recording.

And, before we go, I'll tell you something else you could write down. And perhaps the most important thing which will give you a key to the later part of the twentieth century. And that is, that maybe now we should think of *everything* as *primary* material. And I think that's a very important point.

PK: Everything?

MF: [Shouts] *Everything*!

Yelling does not make it true, you understand! [Laughs]

PK: You know it's a very interesting point that maybe the history of music is *cumulative* rather than *substitutive. A*nd if you mean what you say now, that would bear that out. Do you see what I mean?

MF: That was the whole revolution in… Where was that concentration camp for Wagnerians? Bayreuth! [Laughter]

That was the whole problem with the orchestra there when Boulez went to conduct, because he was treating everything neutral, giving everything a kind of neutrality, without the background and foreground that they had been used to playing Wagner all their life. That was the revolution, that was what it was all about, it wasn't Wagner! That he did everything transparent.

And I just wonder how Debussy will feel and how Wagner would feel if they could hear their own work and were confronted with the whole idea of the whole problem of how much more *beautiful* it sounds when it's not background and foreground. Now, it all has to depend on our ears, of course.

One of the big problems I always have with my music is that the information and its variation was in the vertical, you see. Who hears that?

PK: Is it?

MF: What?

PK: I was just thinking, is it really in the vertical? Yeah, I suppose it is. I was just thinking of how a piece like *For Franz Kline* for example…

MF: I mean, if you're not listening to the vertical piano and if you're not really listening to it, it's mush.

PK: Yeah, I see what you mean.

MF: Of course, when it really gets down, and I'm a composer like anybody else is a composer, the only thing I'm composing is essentially that aspect which I felt has been ignored in music. And that is how beautiful, and how wonderful - if you're lucky - the concentration on the vertical is. And by the vertical I don't mean a bunch of ninth chords.

I got to play you my High School concerto sometime with the ninth chords. With a terrific Gershwin melody. I'll send it to you. You can play it with the new contemporary chamber group!

[...]

UV: I want to ask something that might seem like a very naive question. I gather that you work at the piano.

MF: I compose everything at the piano.

UV: When you were composing this piece, for instance…

MF: Let me tell you about my use of the piano.

I compose on the piano. To me, if you write away from the piano - I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings - if you're writing away from the piano, you're typing. And, to me, writing at the piano, is longhand. And I learned that distinction from Hemingway. That's why those guys like to write in the café. [Laughs] He didn't want to go back to his room and *type*.

Now, when he is writing, we don't understand his involvement as we read say, a sentence such as, "Back home in Michigan." And he's about to tell the story about his youth in Michigan. He doesn't know that he's seeing Gertrude Stein, talking about placements in Cezanne, we don't know that. He writes it out like this. "Back" space "home" space "in" space "Michigan". He wants to see what it looks like. *Then* it's, "Back home in Michigan." Then it's prose.

First it's isolated as word, word, word, word and [...] then he would ask what the meaning would be when you put the words together. So that's how I use the piano.

I use the piano to slow me down, to slow down how clever I could be, how interesting I could be. And if I wrote away from the piano, then it will all sound like Finnissy, you don't hear nothing. And with that insult to the United Kingdom, we'll call it a day! [Laughter]