Morton Feldman: The Johannesburg Masterclasses, July 1983
Session 10: Works by Barry Jordan, David Kosviner, Feldman (*Triadic Memories*) & Jacques de Vos Malan

Transcribed by Dirk de Klerk

Voices heard: Morton Feldman (MF)
Barry Jordan (BJ)
David Kosviner (DK)
Jacques de Vos Malan (JdVM)
Unidentified Voices (UV)

[A long section, largely unintelligible on the recording, is omitted here]

MF: Notice, I don't talk about anybody's notes in these seminars, I don't talk about your forms, you know. I talk essentially about rhythm and orchestration. And I hope that my piano piece, *Piano,* might have given you some other kind of alternative of working rhythmically, you see. Unless you're writing in a rubato style, or what sounds like a rubato style, and it's not, like Boulez. This whole kind of directional rhythm, and the way you're going segment it and this and that, you're not going to get any mileage. It's going to be quite boring to be *on* the beat, *off* the beat, *on* the beat, *off* the beat. Actually, as a teaching device, there's a book out now by Charles Wuorinen [*Simple Composition*]. Get a hold of it, because it's an interesting book. It's also an unfortunate book, because they're using it in High Schools in small towns on the Mississippi. And when you go there, you're very kind of freaked out about how successful the pieces they play are, because of the formula of the book. But it's the Milton Babbitt system of duration, time in relation to pitch. And at least you get a different sense of a kind of nice responsibility in terms of rhythmic interest which is not that directional, you know.

[...]

BJ: I was going to ask you how you feel about using a lot of verbal instructions in a score.

MF: Well, originally when I saw Bunita Marcus's piece, that was the problem, all that kind of verbalisation. I forget the name of the charming, or gorgeous, Satie piano piece where every time you come back to the same kind of material, you use a different kind of description: *sad* or *not sad*. It's for the same inflection, in a sense, of material. I only use one verbalisation in my scores. And Bunita took it up as just part and parcel of what to watch for, if you want to write something down. The only thing I ever write in my scores, is *hold back*.

BJ: It's the tempo indication to her piece?

MF: Yes.

BJ: Quaver is 72, *hold back*.

MF: And why is that? Because you play directionally.

Now sometimes when you're very very good you know how to turn that kind of directional attitude into something absolutely *wonderful*. I wrote a piece for Dartington [*Voices and Instruments (1972)*] which Harrison Birtwistle conducted.

Every measure, whether it was short or long, had a slight accelerando to it. And it sounded like a million dollars, because that was his music. And it was very, very interesting how he took something in and got that kind of… Every measure had an accelerando. It was actually fantastic. I couldn't conduct it with that kind of… [...]

So you play very, very directionally, and you *think* very directionally. And that's part of I feel the problem of *a lot of* music, is that you're thinking directionally. What's that song again about that you're always thinking about tomorrow, and you're not thinking of today, you're not living today?

That's the same thing writing compositions. It's that you're thinking about the directional element of the thing. You're going ahead, and you have no real consciousness that where you are is where you are, you see.

You see, if you were more instrumentally conscious that a lot of rhythms come from the instrument *itself,* hearing the instruments would suggest what you should do at this particular time. You get hung up on some kind of rhythmic idea that you want to explore and there's some conflict with the instrumentation.

[...]

OK what are we going to hear? We have Barry Jordan's piece, what is this? Piano solo. A piano solo on…

BJ: Cello solo.

MF: Pardon me?

BJ: Cello solo.

MF: I thought it was a piano solo on one clef.

BJ: Not at all.

MF: I'm disappointed.

BJ: Can I play it?

MF: A cello solo. Why would you want to write... Do you have a friend who is a cellist?

BJ: Yeah.

MF: Yeah. Well, wait a minute, now this has to stop! [Laughter] This has to stop.

It's disastrous this whole… it's a kind of aspect of necrophilia, because the instrument you are writing for is kind of dead. I like it. I like it too. I secretly used to go and hear - without anybody looking or watching - I secretly used to go every time [Pierre] Fournier came to New York. I never missed a concert. All my musician friends weren't interested in him. They were going to hear [Pablo] Casals. Casals annoyed me to death. I can't listen to Casals. I turn it off the minute it goes on the radio. It's just a lot of expressive hogwash.

Fournier! A god! He makes Bach speak. He doesn't *interpret* Bach. The trouble with performers is that they don't know that composition is interpretive. We're *already* in an interpretive medium.

Why am I balling you out before I even saw the piece?

BJ: I don't know, I was trying to work it out.

MF: OK let's hear the sonata, why do you call it a sonata?

BJ: Well, there are two sections to the piece, irrespective of what you said the other day about movement form. I mean, it has two movements.

MF: And who wrote on the score? Who damaged your score? Who wrote, "The gun in the dark." Who did that?

BJ: It says, *The sun in the dark*. That's the title of the piece.

MF: Why is it called *The sun in the dark*? Why all these fancy titles down here?

BJ: Well, would you like me to explain about this title?

MF: No, I don't want to hear about your title. I mean, I've got to listen to this cello, that's enough! [Laughter] Barry's very good natured, he knows we're only kidding. [...] Did that help you - *The sun in the dark*? Was that kind of a metaphor for the cello?

BJ: No, it's not. It's totally different.

MF: It's not a bad metaphor though if you think about it, *The sun in the dark,* not bad.

BJ: It's a terribly bad performance the intonation is vile and the tempo markings are not nearly adhered to.

[A recording of Barry Jordan's *The sun in the dark*, for solo cello, is played]

MF: Marvellous. I didn't hear the piece before, it was great. I think for the less experienced composer here it is to some degree a contradiction of what I was saying about common practice rhythms. I mean, the rhythmic shapes that Barry has in this piece are not going to win a Pulitzer Prize. However the piece is totally professional, because the man understands the nature of the fact that if he has rhythmic shapes and knows how to juxtapose them, and is conscious in his piece that he needs this or that you know in terms of the right place at the right time, then that's what makes the piece sound so professional, you see.

[Gap in recording]

MF: Essentially, all I really wanted to say is, that I'm giving you the dot.

And the dot is very, very effective And if you recall it in my flute and orchestra piece where she's going... [Sings], and then... [Sings], just that little bit of, in fact, just holding it back.

I feel we have to write more about *hold back,* and how to notate *hold back,* rather than just write *ritard. Ritard* doesn't mean a damn thing, it doesn't mean a thing. How are they going to shape *ritard*? Or an *accelerando*? I don't allow my students to use things like that. I only allow my students to put…

I gave one kid a heart attack. Obviously he played in a High School band. Eh? See what I mean?

BJ: Mm.

MF: You know what kind of music he wrote?

BJ: Mm. [Laughter]

MF: I says to him, "What the hell is that?"

He didn't *know* that you could use a *staccato* marking.

I said, "You mean *this*?" It changed his whole life. [...]

Again, it's related to the instrument. What good is having a compositional rhythm if it's lousy on the instrument?

Right. I mean, are you an organist? There's a certain type of pacing that you feel the organ *speaks*. Take that sensitivity to your own instrument, like the cello.

Barry, what do you think about what I have to say? Do you disagree?

BJ: No, I don't disagree at all.

MF: Here's the point about role playing: four sixteenths, sixteenth, dotted eighth, triplets… You develop... You become drugged, drugged!

You take a look at a measure in which you would have three beams with a dot and there's only one measure, say, like that in the piece. And you looked at it and you say it's inconsistent to the piece, you don't use it. The thing is that, if you want to do things like that, do it and learn to live with it.

We had a great poet... We still have but he disappeared, and I haven't seen him in years. His name is Gregory Corso, a fabulous poet, marvellous poet. And he wrote a poem, *How To Live With The Atom Bomb* [*Bomb (1958)*]. And many times there are atom bombs, in a sense, that we can't live with in our own notation, or something. Because it's inconsistent with the role-playing of a certain rhythmic style.

Of course, if you get the right kind of role-playing, like John Cage or Boulez, you're off the hook, you know. I mean, it's a terrific part you play. You don't really know if it's role-playing after a while. But for most of us, it's role-playing. Consistency, to me, is a kind of role playing. Conformity is role playing. Non-conformity is role playing. So if conformity doesn't get you - after me, chorus! – non-conformity would! [Laughter]

Who was it? Emerson? Said, about consistency is the Hobgoblin...

JdVM: It's the Hobgoblin of petty philosophers.

MF: Consistency?

JdVM: Yeah.

MF: You like Emerson?

JdVM: I've only read a very little of his stuff, but I quite like it, yeah.

MF: Thoreau?

JdVM: No.

MF: You don't know Thoreau? You got to read him, you got to read Thoreau. [...]

That's a very interesting discussion, this whole business of consistency. Look at the Stockhausen *moment form.* That's *also* compulsive consistency.

UV: The problems is, you can't avoid consistency.

MF: Well then, we have to... like in our life, we live more or less consistent lives, but we orchestrate the day don't we? That's what gets us through life, we orchestrate the day. That's why I'm so involved with orchestration, because in much of my music it's pretty monolithic. Naturally, for myself, I don't say it's consistent, I say it's monolithic.

Kosviner, what is the title [of your piece]?

DK: furG.

MF: furG, isn't that a curse word, "furG you," or something?

DK: Or, "furG off."

MF: What does it mean?

DK: It doesn't.

MF: You invented the word?

DK: It's like - what is that other title? - *Lucrative Matches With Clocks*.

MF: Do you stay up nights thinking about this?

DK: I write the titles, then I write the pieces.

MF: You get the titles first, huh?

Originally I thought it was *for G.* You know, these crazy titles. And I think it's [bad] translations into English. Takemitsu sometimes has titles that, like English words, but they are used in such a way that I can't figure out exactly what they mean!

You got a nice handwriting. Terrific. Elegant. What kind of pen do you use, a rapidograph?

DK: No, it varies, depending on the paper, the size of the system, the size of the staves, whatever. Sometimes I use similar to what you are using, a sort of italic nib. If it's quite small then I use... There's one felt tip that I use that's rather nice. It doesn't spread when you're writing.

MF: It's very, very important. I once wrote in an article, that if I ever found the right chair, I'll equal Mozart. And I was looking for a kind of comfort to work in. I finally found that chair. But it's very, very important to find a comfortable pen. It could make the difference of a career and a non-career, your pen.

OK. Kossi, do you write at the piano?

DK: Yes and no.

MF: You check it out at the piano?

DK: Yeah.

MF: OK. What kind of piano do you have?

DK: It varies. It depends where I'm writing.

MF: OK. When you first played this on the piano, did you try it with just the top note first, and then the bottom note first? Did you immediately have a kind of octave idea about it?

DK: I wanted the low sound for the low octave, but I felt that it was almost too indistinct. You needed a slight something above it to define it a little bit more.

MF: Yes, because maybe you were working on a lousy piano.

DK: Possibly yeah.

MF: You got a problem. Remember my Michael von Biel story?

DK: Mm.

MF: The bottom was too lugubrious, the middle was not so hot, the top has it's own problems.

[I suggest that you] fool around with the opening. First one [way], then the other. Actually, and I can say this to you - probably we're the only two people I could say it to in this room - what do you think about Jewish octaves? And I'm serious, I call them *Jewish octaves*.

DK: What are they, sevenths?

MF: Major sevenths.

You know what's fantastic - and this was told to me about some of the fantastic performers at the turn of the century, like Mischa Elman, Bronislaw Huberman, all those guys that came from Odessa, you know. Because of Heifetz. Heifetz made it. And then there was a marvellous story by Isaac Babel on this whole Jewish community in Odessa. And they were all beating up their kids to practice the violin, because Heifetz made it. And they all came one after another, they were all about two years or three years older than Heifetz, all these great violinists, you see. Because they were beaten up to practice the violin. It was a way of getting out of the ghetto. Because a Jew couldn't go to a big city, he needed a pass. But instead of becoming a mechanic in the big city, the Jews became violinists.

OK. So what I'm really trying to say is, that I was told that if there were perfect octaves, they'll get no applause. Because people wouldn't hear the difficulty. So they purposely... and so this whole idea of Jewish octaves. And essentially, to me, a major seventh is an octave, many times. It's a *schmutzy* [Yiddish: dirty, grimy] octave.

[...]

I feel that the octaves [in your piece] are not good enough. What we all have to learn as composers is the difference between *solutions* and *problem solving.* And that most music settles too quickly for solutions. This is a too off-the-cuff solution. It might work beautifully in another piece. And I think that will be the, kind of, almost philosophical level, at least, of what I felt when I first heard this piece. It was demonstrated from the opening measure. You found a solution. And most of your settings are not problem solving, but solutions.

Now there are two [kinds of] problem solving. There are those that set themselves a problem and then they go ahead and solve the problem. I was never that kind of a composer. I think that if you set off to solve problems, you are going to solve them. I like to get involved with problem solving, but I don't know what the problem is, you see. But I'm problem solving. And I wake up many times, mumbling to myself. And just like Beethoven, I creep to the piano. And I thought maybe I was solving some problem in my sleep.

I feel we *solve* things in our sleep, and we look for solutions when we are awake. And many times when I go to my own work, my concentration tries to get in between a kind of completely conscious way, and that state of almost falling asleep. And yet I'm totally conscious. That's my formula to begin a piece. Many times, I go to write a piece when I'm tired, and I have to fight through to get this particular thing.

All of us work best in certain parts of the day. You have to learn all these things. Just learn *when* to work, *how* to work, in terms of this inner clock. [...] You cannot be a composer unless you hang around the house all day and wait.

I remember I had a summer house once and the marvellous American painter, De Kooning, came over to visit me. And I was sitting at my table that I had set up in the kitchen and it was kind of cold. A rainy day out on Long Island. And he comes in, and he says, "Jeez, you look like Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment.*" He says, "What are you sitting like this for, you're just sitting." I said, "I'm waiting." "Oh," he said, "you mean you're working?" [Laughter] That's cute. "You're working," he said.

OK, so that's it, Kossi. That's all I have to say about your work on the first stage. The philosophical element about being an artist. And then after it's finished we'll talk about some technical elements, OK?

[A recording of the first movement of David Kosviner's *furG*, for flute and piano, is played]

MF: Yes, we *all* do it, we *have* to do it. Fixed registers, fixed notes. I think you went in the wrong way, you made a left turn instead of a right turn. I would have liked where the problem would be more difficult. That is, within the piano part, start changing the notes, and keep more or less the same pitches in the flute and maybe add a little bit.

What would have happened if you went to the right instead of the left?

DK: Yeah.

MF: You know the first movement of those *Three Pieces for String Quartet* of Stravinsky?

DK: No.

MF: How many here knows the *Three Pieces for String Quartet*?

Oh brother! A great piece, an unbelievable piece, one of the most important pieces he ever wrote!

And he has, in the opening he has - it's a polytonal piece - and he has three patterns going. I go back and I analyse it every five years, and I change my mind every time, I don't know what the hell it is! I don't know what it is.

And in many ways it's a kind of Steve Reich piece insofar as the overlapping and the phasing in and out. It's a *marvellous, marvellous* piece. It's short. And it has a kind of a Russian folk tune as the material. Kind of modal.

So here's the point. The point is, in terms of historical models, it's natural for the flute to take a trip. And from Schubert on, it's perfect for the accompaniment to be as it was. Here, if you made a right turn, it would not be a solution. Because you are going to have a lot of problems around what notes am I going to get into on the piano? Why am I doing this? How do I get out of this? And it's in the *how to get out of it* that you're going to get your ideas.

DK: Mm.

MF: Not that there's anything wrong. I remember a terrible, gallows humour joke about a… I hope there's not a hunchback in here! But this fella marries a hunchback, madly in love. He has no complaints whatsoever. She never met his folks, he was happy. He was marvellously happy. They go to his folks. He rings the bell, looks at his wife and says, 'Sweetheart, try and straighten up a little bit!' [Laughter]

There's always one little deformity in the piece and the thing is, don't try to correct it you know. Start from the beginning, you know. If you had these problems that you can't cope with, then you can't cope with them. Let's go right onto the second part.

[The second movement of David Kosviner's *furG* is played]

Here's a very, very, very interesting problem. It's not the same as about Peter, yesterday, in terms of, perhaps, juxtaposing different kinds of material. But I do feel here, that some of these segments would work better in different relationships between each other. I think that the first thing that, *again,* which I give out to everybody, including myself, because I have the same problem with many pieces: the whole concept of beginning, middle and end, you see. Just in terms of the set-up. That is, you're beginning a movement, you've got a piece for flute and piano, and you start with the flute solo. It's a set-up. All those historical set-ups.

One of the most important aspects in my teaching is: *when does it begin?* When does it *really* begin? What is the real beginning of the piece?

I remember when I was a young man with some of my early piano pieces, I didn't want… I didn't really get it from anywhere. I didn't get it from Cage. The music that he was writing at the time was beginning, middle and end. But I had this notion I wanted to get rid of the beginning, middle and end, which was so historically ingrained in me that, no matter what I did, if I went back to it two days later, it was a beginning! And the only way I *learned* anything, is when I finally had to kill off my ego, and the fact that I'm writing it. And I would find some place, maybe in the fourth measure, something where it *arrived*! And I'll begin *there*, at its arrival.

And after all this terrific stuff, I had to throw it away, I couldn't use it. But after a while I didn't care, because I felt that was the only way I could have done it. Then, little by little, when I caught that feeling of arrival, where, no matter what I do in the piece, I don't have the feeling of a beginning, middle and end, [then that's where I begin].

And of course, the ending. That marvellous ending that every student does wonderfully, and that every composer does wonderfully. And because of it, it's kind of the same.

I once did a diabolical thing on a doctorate exam of somebody's. I gave out a few scores. I think it was the last movement of the Schoenberg *Fourth [String Quartet]* - there was a Bartók quartet, there was Hindemith quartet - where the ending, or it was the last movement - one of the movements, the slow movements - where you end with a nice chord, and then the viola comes in on a *false note*. Schoenberg, Hindemith, Bartók. The three of them used it. It was a swanky ending. How else are you going to end with a string quartet?

Think of the chord. Think of a Bartók chord, then the viola with the wrong note. Think of a Schoenberg chord of that period and the viola with the wrong note. Think of a Hindemith chord with the viola with *almost* the wrong note. [Laughter]

DK: We can tell you're not a Yale graduate.

MF: Oh, he [Hindemith] was an influence… The day he died, his influence was over. The *day* he died. Not a week, not a month, the day. I think it was the next day I got a phone call to come up and give a lecture. [Laughter]

OK, they were frightened of him. He was such a good musician, such a great musician. He would ask a student, "How many instruments do you play?" Not, "What do you play?"

He wasn't a bad violist. As you could tell by his very beautiful *Viola Sonata*. That nice romantic tune. He should have thrown out the last movement, however.

Where were we?

So, of course, the form of the piece here, in terms of the set-up of the flute… I like this type of writing, which is dangerously episodic. It could be *wonderful* writing, it could be exciting writing. So, in other words, the episodic element to me is not a negative thing. But I think it's a question of being more shrewd in your selection of *what* goes with *what*. Because look Kossi, you're through-composing anyway. You're not a formalist, you know. You're through-composing.

DK: Yeah.

MF: So, you don't have to have a vested interest in terms of A, B, C, D, E, F, G… Mix up that alphabet. Spend a little more time, especially when you're in a piece where the tendency is to be episodic. Be a little more suspicious, that, maybe it is not working out. A little more paranoiac. Your Jewishness could help you there.

You're a little too comfortable. You think, because you're doing it, it's going to sound alright. *Not* in episodic writing! Because it's like you're stopping on a dime. You're moving, you know? Even a tune like... [Sings] has the danger of being episodic in terms of where it would break off. The minute you want to get

out of that consistency of the pacing or the consistency of making moves, you're damned, you've got a problem.

That's essentially my criticism of this. It's almost the same criticism I gave Peter.

DK: Mm.

MF: Almost the same, not quite the same, but almost the same. You can't win. For example let's turn to page 9. In fact let's have a kind of group discussion on this. Let's spend a little time in looking at Kossi's piece. That would be pages 7, 8, 9.

So it's not bad, it's not bad. It's only three pages to confront here.

Maybe the problem is, is that every section is a beginning. For example, maybe it's a section of beginnings! Maybe he got fifteen symphonies, four string quartets, eight pieces for four recorders in this thing. [Laughter] I mean, think of it. What if you are on the bottom of page 9. Open up with the crash of the piano into the high flute. Is that not a very successful beginning?

How do you like that as a beginning?

DK: Yes, as Barry says, “It's been done.”

MF: OK, let's find something else. We're not laughing at you, we're laughing with you.

DK: Are you sure?

MF: Positive.

OK, Barry says it's been done.

Well, how about beginning at the bottom of page 8, where the crotchet equals sixty. You like *that* beginning?

DK: I worry about this piano episode now. Maybe that ought to be out.

MF: Alright, we’re not making it an episode.

DK: As a beginning for something?

MF: No, it's the beginning of the piece. We're rearranging your piece here. [...]

Or, how about the second measure on top system on page 9 - the solo piano thing, right? - as your beginning? And then we immediately go into the second measure on page 8, where the crotchet is 160, how is that for a beginning?

JdVM: It's a very beginning type of beginning.

MF: Oh, it's a beginning type of beginning, yeah. Oh I'll find you something that's really cute! [Laughter]

OK. How about throwing out the first line. You think you could give it up?

DK: You mean the low piano octaves?

MF: The quasi - what the hell is that? The quasi Liberace bit. [Laughter]

DK: You mean this one?

MF: The opening solo! The movement. That quasi Liberace movement. How about throwing it out, and just start elegantly with the low note?

Just start... [Sings] in beautifully into a beautiful register of the flute.

DK: Mm.

MF: Or throw out the second system, and then start in the beginning of the third system. With the same idea, but already it's not like *ebb-tide.* I call this the *ebb-tide school* of composition, a little bit like this, a little bit more...

In other words, start [...] eagerly, rather than sitting there with Dorothy Lamour. What do you think of that? In other words get into the action immediately.

In fact, we could even throw off this first measure of the third system, and just start with the A-flat *before* the bar line and then you start with the piano line and then into it immediately. How is that?

Or, let's throw off the first four notes, and just start with the E to the F-sharp into the A-flat. We can keep the silence in there.

DK: Wouldn't it sound like it's coming from nowhere?

MF: That's what a piece like that should sound like.

How much set-up do we need? In other words, one of the big problems here is, where is it's beginning? And I feel that every time you have a different kind of set-up, you have a different kind of constellation of notes. It's not a question of stopping and going, and stopping and going.

[...]

Sometimes very important things in the piece could be an element of padding. We don't really need it, but we can't get rid of it, because it seems significant. And I think that's one of our diseases, that the minute the composer writes something, it either becomes functional or important to that piece, you see. That's why you can't discuss an artist's sense of self-critical powers. You can't have a course on self-criticism. I mean no-one can teach you. That's why everybody accepts it that either you have it, or you don't have it. But I think that you could develop it, I think that you can develop it.

I studied with a twelve-tone composer. He never criticised me for my rhythm, but he did bring into my life an aspect of rhythmic *shape*. [...] Just the term *rhythmic shape* changed my compositional life. I cannot really write anything that's not shaped. Even my early free-durational of music, when I wrote it I was shaping something. The only thing I wasn't shaping was rhythm. I was shaping duration. I was shaping time-blocks.

So that's what I'm saying, it's that there has to be some kind of assemblage in a precariously difficult piece where its formal presentation is not clear. I feel you have the material, it's not a question that you have wrong material. Every segment that you have that could be a beginning is very good material, but I just don't think it's in a right relationship with the other material.

That's why I feel every time I write a piece it is from starting with an empty page. And nothing helps me. I have to understand the nature of my material in terms of its format. Some pieces are collage, some pieces are assembled, some pieces are like Bach - I have to start from the beginning and work. I mean every piece, even though it might sound the same, starts with an approach that is appropriate to the music.

We are not looking for a better form here. We're looking, like in some of Debussy's *Etudes*, for a kind of a very interesting stop and juxtaposition. That's what Stravinsky got from Debussy. With you it's not a question of stop and juxtaposition, but what kind of modulation of material, transformation of material, really works best in the piece.

That's why Boulez could not get involved with multiple choices, like in his *Third Piano Sonata*, when he kind of - à la Earle Brown - tried to make this open form. It kind of freaked him out, you see. Because he knew he didn't have the right material for an open form. I feel that this material is kind of open formy to some degree.

Now we got the problem: Are you going to build up psychologically, dramatically, like with an audience, like a piece of theatre, that you can have your loud note come in at the right time in terms of the structure of the piece? Are you going to psychologically assemble it? Or are you artistically going to make choices which might not be successful?

There is method to my eccentricity here in going over the piece in terms of where could its possible opening be. Only to show you that some of your imagery, as openers, was somewhat conventional. [...] They are like conventional gestures. In other words, if you want to go up high, like on page 9 on the bottom system - that's a typical kind of thing to do in terms of a loud sound - you already *had* that register on the top of the page. The fact that you come in loud in the same register to me is not enough of a differentiation, you see?

DK: Yeah yeah.

MF: All you have to do is become a little more registration conscious. In other words, I think if you fool around with register instead of juxtaposition, ideas here will be better. And listen to that slow movement I always talk about, the Stravinsky *Violin Concerto*. It's one of the greatest examples of how a consciousness of registration pays off. Way, way up high, you're up there! And the way he has that flute coming in. Just there, you know, just cutting through there. It's just fantastic! Just the first two measures, and perhaps one of the greatest two measures in the history of all music in terms of instrumentation and registration. Absolutely sensational measures. Sensational!

DK: I think what you told us just now, I think that's probably why I use the flutter-tongue. I probably realised that I had used that register already, and just tried to give a timbral change.

MF: You've got to catch it. I mean, remember that new thing that I'm bringing into your life, that compositional reflex like a terrific performer. You've got to catch it, you've got to catch it. Work under the impression that you're with Bernstein and you've got to make an entrance! Make-believe I'm a composer, I'm Bernstein. And you've got to make that compositional cue! You've got to be right in. It's an instinct. You'll learn how to do it. You wouldn't know how or why. You wouldn't, in any kind of cause and effect explain, really, *why* you did this, but you have the reflex to know that you did it. In John Cage's lingo, you must be

open and susceptible to divine influence. And that's what he's talking about. Because it *is* divine influence. You must allow something other than your brain and your limitations.

The history of music is *not* made by what we can do. The history of music is made by what we can't do. It's a virtue of our limitations, a qualification of our limitations. Remember your *Landsman*, Freud - wonderful remark when he said that man is a god with artificial limbs.

You've got to put it in this kind of humorous dramatic context. It frames, it frames the problem, you see. It frames the problem.

OK now the last… I don't know why you went back to the ABA there. I don't know why you started off with the big flute solo. Naturally, if you want to think what the hell you're going to do you're writing a piece for piano and flute, you don't want the damn thing boring them, so you think, "Well, a flute solo."

You see, but I don't see it as a flute solo. I see the danger of all beginnings of a piece as a kind of set-up. To you, it's a long flute solo. To me, it's an introduction. Psychologically, it's an introduction. I'm waiting - when's the piano coming in? How can I sympathise or identify with a composer who decides, in a flute and piano piece, you're going to write a long flute solo? How can I not have some anticipation?

Unless you write a flute solo that makes me forget where I am, and who I am, you see.

In the *Talmud* there's someone called the Angel of Forgetfulness. And I think terrific composers have it. For terrific composers that Angel of Forgetfulness comes in, and they begin the next movement, or they begin the next section. And we don't know where we are. We don't have the residue of past pieces. Now, to get there you might need a completely different type of material than that you were writing to write the piece. Completely different kind of material. What that material is, no-one is going to give you.

OK. All your pieces present very interesting problems, every movement you have here is an interesting problem. Especially for someone who composes through. It's not that you don't have concepts, they're all interesting. Each one presents a problem. For example, in the third movement, the whole idea of a kind of conversation between the flute line and the notes on the piano. So let's jump to that, let's jump to the third movement.

[The third movement of David Kosviner's *furG* is played]

MF: A little bit like the slow movement of the Beethoven's *Fourth Piano Concerto*.

DK: Beethoven?

MF: Well, the pianist does something, you know. That's the prototype for this idea. And was there anything like that before that particular movement?

That's not an insult, comparing you with Beethoven.

Maybe the instinct for a move was right. Composition is like… a suicide leap. We don't have that many alternatives. That's why I feel that you should look for alternatives with very *discreet* moves. That when you move pitch-wise, it should be very *discreet.* And when you make discreet moves, you're like growing up, discreetly. The rhythm gets more... The registration... If anyone would ask me what's the most important aspect of composition, and I had to think, and I am against hierarchical concepts, so under torture - but it will *have* to be under torture! - I'd say registration.

The repetition at the end is quite gorgeous, quite beautiful. Maybe they are right, there's nothing like a tune. [Laughter] Maybe they are right to invent new concepts of what a tune is, or the juxtaposition of what a tune might be, like Bunny does. She's not going to give up a tune because Boulez wrote a few articles. No, she has to invent the *new* idea of a tune. She's not going to just give up a tune. And that's the problem, you see, the whole idea we *give up* tonality, we *give up* atonality, we *give up* this... We're always giving things up, and we had nothing to begin with. We're giving up that which we never had to begin with.

You listening, you're pacing things. I actually feel that the pacing again... What is this *anxiety* that notes have to be connected to each other. What's that anxiety? [...]

I think the pacing is a little too head-on with each other. If you were driving a car, you'd be continually hitting the next bumper in front of you. I'm not saying that you had to be twenty feet down the highway behind every car, but I mean don't be on top of the damn car. You're bumping into it. You're taking away its natural breathing, the natural elegance. You're getting a little nervous, you see. You don't feel the pauses, you're feeling the lines. But the actual clocking of the durations, you don't seem to be convinced about it. But you don't want them too far, and obviously you don't want them too near.

[Lunch break]

[After lunch, a recording of Feldman's *Triadic Memories*, performed by Roger Woodward, is played]

MF: [After the premiere of this piece performed by Roger Woodward] most of the people I knew just walked, and nobody said anything to me. And the following morning I had rave reviews in five London papers. And you know, they're always ready for the kill. Five rave reviews!

So, it raises a lot of interesting questions. I really wanted you to hear it, because otherwise you wouldn't have heard it maybe until six, seven years from now. [...] It would have been nice to play you, now, Aki's version, but we're not going to do it. As a philosopher you should be interested more than as a musician. Aki plays it very differently, and gorgeously, just gorgeously. He plays it like it's Beethoven. Well, he has a right to his point of view.

DK: Do you have any preferences?

MF: No, I love them both. They're dedicated, the both of them. It's a kind of Ying and Yang situation. They've never met.

DK: It still works for you both ways?

MF: Well, it's the same music. Aki is a little stiffer, and the stiffness does something too. It's different. It's just different. I'm not going to say it's feminine or it's this or that. I would just say it shows the big spread of the piece. The spread of the piece is from Satie to Beethoven. It's a nice spread. That's the way I felt it. She plays it, not like Satie, but, you know, but... it's there. She plays it differently. She doesn't *interpret* it as much as he does. She plays it very airy... [Sings] In a way, in a kind of transcendental way, just airy... No reflection, no nothing.

Actually, she stops time even more than he does with that very airy… Also, no lack of or loss of energy. It raises a lot of questions. The question is, no more audience. When I listen to the piece - and you know I'm not an arrogant person - I feel that the piece doesn't need me, and it doesn't need an audience. It doesn't need us. And that's what I'm into now. I want to write a kind of music that doesn't need us to survive, including the composer!

You cannot *assemble* a piece like this. There's a certain type of music that's organic, and a certain type of music that is inevitable. And I'm into something now which is inevitable, but not making sketches of finding the right way, or the wrong way. I would try all the ways in the piece how to do it - and it extends the duration of the piece - rather than saying there's *one* way. And I get my own kind of inevitability by going *here*, going *here*, going *there*, not finding the *inevitable* way. But it is inevitable nevertheless, with all its side-trips.

The only thing is that you don't know which is composition, and which is performance. Because I too am performing. When I make a move, it has to be a move on the same kind of… I don't know, it has to be an energy. I don't know the word for that move in terms of material. But I can't juxtapose here.

Now, the only problem I find with a long piece like my [first] *String Quartet* - which is a better piece, and it's an hour and a half – is that it does seem like it's a novel. In fact, we refer to it as a *novel form.* It's the only piece that could bring on the cast of characters to take a bow. That's what I was doing, I was very conscious as if it was a play, like a Bergman movie, and one theme comes and walks, you know. What's interesting about a long piece is you do things you never would have done in the short one. [Laughs] Never. It's marvellous, I'm very into it, very into it.

But the last piece I wrote exhausted me, the [second] *String Quartet*. It's two and a half hours [sic]. But I don't think it's too long. You know, it's like, plays within plays. I can't even consider the movements, it's almost like A and it's very different, and I go into a B that is so right, the pacing, and I can't help it if the B takes forty minutes. What's forty minutes? If you can afford it.

DK: Talking about the length of pieces, I remember seeing a movie called, *Elliot Carter at Buffalo*. Do you remember it?

MF: Oh my god, how did you see that?

DK: It was at a film festival in Cape Town.

MF: Oh well, I had a fight with Elliot Carter.

DK: Yes, and the two of you were discussing the length of pieces.

MF: Oh right, this was in my house? Mm. OK, it's a funny story and I think it will be a comic reprieve a little bit before we go to the last piece. I think I mentioned I never got along with Elliot Carter since I was a kid. I have no idea what was the reason. He never liked me. He liked Rzewski, maybe that explains it. He's helped Rzewski's career tremendously. Well anyway – Oh, they're both Harvard.

OK, so we spend eight, nine thousand dollars for Carter for his seventieth birthday, and I throw a little dinner party just for a few people, including the people who are making the film. It was done very well because we didn't even know they were like doing the film. It was a very famous film maker in America, [D. A.] Pennebaker, did that [Bob] Dylan film *[Don't] Look Back*. Did you see that film at all? OK.

So, you see me talking to Elliot Carter and I'm saying to him, "You know, what the world doesn't need is another twenty-five minute piece." And Elliot Carter, on film, says, "What do you mean?" "Well, the pieces you are doing here are twenty-five minutes." I didn't realise I was on camera, but it was in my home and I think I kind of gracefully got out of it, and there's a cut to some other kind of conversation.

Now, wait a minute, the funny story - and I'm not name dropping composers, they are my friends. Two days later I get a phone call from Steve Reich. And after we discussed what I could do for him, I said, "You know Steve, I made a boo-boo with Elliot Carter. He was up here the other day I said to him at the time, on camera, 'What the world doesn't need is another twenty-five minute piece!'" Steve says, "You mean like mine?" [Laughter]

Four or five days later, I'm in New York having lunch with Charles Wuorinen, who is a very big yet young established figure in America. [...] And I tell him about this funny thing with Elliot Carter and Steve Reich. And I said, you know, this whole business of what the world doesn't need is another twenty-five minute piece. And he says, "You know, all my pieces were about twenty-five minutes."

I get back to Buffalo again, and we're having a concert of a *very* interesting composer. We both studied at the same time with Wolpe and his music is very much like Wolpe's, but he has a fantastic flare for writing music and his name is Ralph Shapey. [...]

He calls me up, "Morty can you substitute another piece on my programme?" [...] And I said, "How long is it, Ralph, about twenty-four minutes?"

There's a silence. And I hear, "How did you know?" [Laughter] Actually it's been taken up by students from all over America, "What the world doesn't need is another twenty-five minute piece." But they think I mean process pieces for an hour, that's the problem.

OK. We're going to finish up the Festival appropriately, with the man who is essentially responsible for it and that's Jacques. He began it, and you're going to end it.

JdVM: It must be my historic moment!

MF: OK. The reason I really wanted to suggest this piece of Jacques' is because it's barred. And I know that most of you know that most of his music is not barred. And, essentially, what happens when you bar music, regardless of what style it is, the material seems to develop imagery, which essentially doesn't seem to happen in an unbarred piece. And I think that an unbarred piece for whatever reason is essentially a conceptual piece.

Why don't we listen to it?

[A recording of Jacques de Vos Malan's *The Shadow, the Skeleton & the North Wind*, for viola, cello and piano, is played]

MF: Now. Here's the problem at hand. You cannot discuss a piece like this in terms of composition, unless you consider all the parameters. So we are discussing all the parameters. but we're not discussing the main parameter that one would think would make a composition. And that's "composition."

However, in an exposed piece like this, the orchestration is crucial to the piece. The people that play it are crucial to the piece.

Ive produced marvellous, lousy concerts - you know those marvellous, lousy concerts with a lot of notes and everything? A lot of applause and everybody is happy? We've been hearing them all your life. If they got a lot of notes to play, everything sounds wonderful. In a lousy way. [Laughter]

This piece had a lot of problems [in the performance]. [...] Alright, what is the problem? The problem – let's start with the top instrument, the viola. Notice how scratchy a viola sounds on a harmonic. Avoid them.

The viola has pitch problems. Tuning problems. The viola going in and out of tune, somewhat. Unless they are playing something - a passage. If they have to come in with a note out of the blue, it's very, very difficult. They're finding their way. Be very careful, because if the composition doesn't get you, the violist will! And did she get me! [Laughter] Most violists are kind of crazy anyway. Very eccentric, most unhappy of the string people.

BJ: Somebody said they have a saying, "So young, and already a viola player?" [Laughter]

MF: [Laughs] So young, and already a viola player!

There's a new breed of big time violinists, however, that like to pick up the viola. And they are doing great with it. The future great viola players are going to be violinists that, in a very crowded field, switch to viola in about when they are thirty-two. There's this Israeli, this marvellous violinist that's playing a lot of the viola now.

DK: [Pinchas] Zuckerman.

MF: Zuckerman. His *Harold in Italy* as the best around. It really is. Because he's a violinist. [Laughs]

The best version of my *Viola in My Life* [series] was - really should have been called *The Viola in Her Life* - is for orchestra and viola. And Paul Zukovsky is going on tour with it for the State Department with Aaron Copland and Morton Gould. [Laughs]

DK: What a combination!

MF: You know who Morton Gould is? [Sings]

DK: He wrote the *Latin-American Symphonette*, or whatever.

MF: He's great. I once spent about six hours with that guy. He knows every esoteric piece that ever was written. He says that I had to get together with him, he has a fantastic correspondence that he had as a kid with Charles Ives. An interesting man, nothing fazes him at all. That's why he could write... [Sings]. You have to believe in your material! [Laughter]

DK: What else are you going to believe in, the commissioning fee?

MF: Alright, so we have a viola, and we have this kind of staggered entrance between a viola and a cello. And I think the problem is, essentially, is that they really don't match, in a peculiar way. I'm trying to think now in all my string quartet writing, would I ever move from a viola tone to a violin tone? I doubt if you could find it. In thousands and thousands of measures. I might move from a violin to a viola, and then I would do something, you know. It's a big, big problem. I think *there*, just as I told you, in terms of the interval concern, whether you move to the right, or you move to the left at that particular time, according to the note, according to the registration, has to be a very careful decision. Or an instinctive one that's right. I don't think that you could take a bunch of notes and just hand it either to a viola or a violin.

How many good strings does a viola have? The D and A strings. They got essentially two good strings that really speak nice, and after a while when it gets a little higher, there's a pressure, a little tuning.

UV: And then on those strings you can't really have a very quiet sound either.

MF: Do you play the viola?

UV: No, I play the violin and mess around with the viola.

MF: This whole business of families matching, might be to some degree illusory. Unless it gets involved in a very colouristic foreplay, as you would say. I mean, look at how far Schoenberg was away from colouristic writing, eh? And then conjure up, and I hope you know it, the Schoenberg *Trio*, that he wrote in California. And he's back to colouristic writing, as transitional or whatever, his moves from one instrument to another. Get hold of that piece with the score and the record, and you'll see what I mean. After twenty-five years straight music, he writes a piece for a violin, viola and cello, colouristic.

And I don't know if there's a moral there, but I think that's interesting. Maybe because that's the more conventional way of doing it. In the same period, when he wrote an organ piece [*Variations on a Recitative (1941)*], it's tonal, you see. I don't know the reason for it, but I think it's interesting.