

## A Feldman Chronology

by Sebastian Claren

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### 1926

Morton Feldman is born in Manhattan, New York, on 12 January 1926, the second son of Irving Feldman (1892-1982) and his wife Francis (1898-1985); his brother Harold is nine years older. Both parents are from Jewish families and were sent at the respective ages of eleven and three from Kiev in Russia, via Warsaw, to relatives in New York. Feldman's father works as a foreman in a clothing company in Manhattan owned by his elder brother. Later, in the early 1940s he succeeds in making himself independent, with a company making children's coats in Woodside, Queens (5202 39th Avenue), where Feldman grows up. Feldman later related that he had grown up in a wonderful middle-class environment in the suburbs of New York, in a very conventional apartment with conventional furniture.<sup>1</sup>

### 1935

At the age of nine, Feldman begins to compose; he takes piano lessons at the Third Street Settlement School on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

### 1938

Aged twelve, Feldman is taught piano by Vera Maurina Press, the daughter of a well-off Russian attorney, who had been a friend of the wife of Alexander Scriabin, had studied in Germany with Ferruccio Busoni, Emil von Sauer and Ignaz Friedman, and founded the *Russian Trio* with her husband Michael Press and his brother David. Just before the Second World War broke out she had to flee via Brazil to New York, where she taught gifted children for a very low salary at the Chatham Square Music School on the Lower East Side. When the renowned pianist Joseph Levine wanted to employ her as a teacher at the Juilliard School she declined, saying she would never leave Chatham Square. Feldman later maintained that his particular interest in a certain kind of tone first developed through being taught by Madame Press and because he had been able to experience the end of the heyday of the great interpreters. In addition Madame Press had allowed him a great deal of freedom, which he had used to develop his own ideas as a composer, although of course this was not what his teacher had in mind.<sup>2</sup>

### 1940

At fourteen, at a time when his father is still working as a foreman and the whole family has to live very economically in order to manage on his income, Feldman tells his mother that he can no longer play on the old family piano. His mother sends him to the

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1 For more about Feldman's early family history, see: <https://www.cnvill.net/mfhistory.pdf>

2 For more about Madame Press, see: <https://www.cnvill.net/mf-madame-press.pdf>

Steinway House on 57th Street in Manhattan to choose a piano; without the help of an assistant, he finds a piano with an ‘absolutely singular tone’, which helps him to develop his hearing. From then on he not only lives at or around this instrument but ‘practically in it’.

In a biographical note of 1962 Feldman wrote that his mother had always supported him in his musical interests, while his father had been ‘jealous of the intellectual areas which had always been denied to him’. It was his grandmother, according to Feldman in 1983, who had concerned herself with his education, since his parents had always been out at work; it was also his grandmother who had impressed on him that he must ‘know everything, think everything, and do nothing’. Perhaps Feldman’s wide-ranging reading habits are derived from this education. In 1973 he stated that he had always read a great deal and was currently reading five books at the same time. In the final years of his life he apparently had to renounce reading to a great extent because of his bad eyesight. During his youth Turgenev, Thomas Wolfe and Romain Rolland’s *Jean Christophe* seem to have been of great significance to him; during the 1960s the authors to whom he referred most frequently were Kierkegaard and Pasternak.

That his maternal grandmother and his father lived in the same house for fifty years without exchanging a single word with each other, Feldman said in 1983, showed him that one could get by ‘without communication’: ‘And then I developed another attitude, an attitude perhaps to the audience, to musicians, to everything outside of my exterior life. That is – I think of the whole world as my mother-in-law’.

#### **1941**

At fifteen, Feldman takes private composition lessons with Wallingford Riegger, recommended to him as a possible teacher by a friend of his brother’s who works for a publishing firm. Feldman later describes Riegger as a marvellous teacher, who although he had been the first twelve-tone composer in America, never discussed twelve-tone music, but continually expressed enthusiasm for Beethoven’s *‘Eroica’ Variations*, and gave him a number of strict counterpoint tasks. Feldman later recalled that, when he was 14 years old, he had written ‘a modal little melody and an elegant piano accompaniment’ that Riegger had shown to Henry Cowell.

At this time Feldman attends the Music and Arts High School on the Upper West Side. Together with some classmates, including the later writer Daniel Stern and the composer Seymour Shifrin, he founds a Composers Workshop, held in a Settlement School in Greenwich Village and (according to Harold Feldman) led by the Italian composer Dante Fiorello.

#### **1944**

On leaving high school in January 1944 Feldman registers for the entrance examination at New York University. On the day of the examination Feldman goes to the University with Harold, but after looking around the room at the candidates, tells his brother, ‘this is not for me’, and turns back. From then on, up to his 44th year, Feldman works at his father’s company, where, by his own account, as the boss’s son he had a quiet life, although elsewhere he writes that except during slack trading periods he worked eight to ten hours a day in the family business.

After giving up his piano lessons with Madame Press and composition lessons with Riegger, Feldman lets himself drift. Around 1944 a high-school composer friend of Feldman's sends an orchestral piece to Dimitri Mitropoulos, at that time chief conductor at the New York Philharmonic. In his reply, Mitropoulos recommends Stefan Wolpe, who had come to New York in 1939 and is teaching in New York and Philadelphia, as a teacher. When Wolpe rejects Feldman's friend because of his self-satisfied behaviour, Feldman decides to introduce himself to Wolpe and is accepted as a student.

Wolpe describes Feldman's peculiarity in 'not developing his ideas, but going from one thing to another' as 'negation'; the discussion of this behaviour is prolonged for over five years without any kind of progress. Feldman later stressed that he was grateful that Wolpe had never tried to 'question my ideas or extol any systems for me to use'. Through Wolpe, Feldman meets David Tudor, a pianist of his own age, who is being taught piano in Philadelphia by Wolpe's wife Irma, and composition by Wolpe himself. Another student of Wolpe's, Ralph Shapey, is Feldman's 'sibling rival', since they both studied with Wolpe at the same time.

'One day I stopped paying him [Wolpe]. Nothing was said about it. I continued to go, we continued to argue, and we are still arguing eighteen years later', Feldman wrote in 1963.

It must have been in the 1940s that Feldman also met Milton Babbitt, with whom he regularly played poker, before the latter 'even had a music connection'.

Wolpe introduces Feldman to Edgard Varèse, without whom 'I would probably not have become a composer', as Feldman wrote in 1977. Varèse does not accept Feldman as a student, but allows him to visit him at least once a week and show him his work. Feldman considered Varèse's advice 'to consider the time needed for the sound to reach the audience from the stage, and to return to the stage', to be the most important tip he had ever been given. In addition, Varèse had been for him an example of how one could be a professional composer in America, without leading a professional life. Varèse had indeed been particularly interested in the fact that Feldman did not follow the conventional career of an academic composer, preferring to make his living in his father's family business, and had encouraged Feldman: 'You know, Feldman, you will survive. I am not worried about you.'

## 1950

Presumably in the second half of the 1940s, Feldman marries his first wife Arleen, six years his junior, who had gone to the same high school. After giving up his composition lessons with Stefan Wolpe, Feldman does not this time let himself 'drift', but continues to work intensively on his music, until, at one of the two concerts on 26 and 27 January 1950 at which the New York Philharmonic under Mitropoulos perform Webern's *Symphony* op. 21, he speaks to John Cage, whom he has apparently met before at Wolpe's house. Cage invites Feldman to come to his house within the next few days, and Feldman brings along a string quartet he has just finished, about which Cage is enthusiastic.

Getting to know Cage, who at this time is living on the top floor of an old building on the East River, from which there is a view of Manhattan and Brooklyn, is a liberating experience for Feldman. He describes his visit to Cage, who owns no furniture except a long marble table with Japanese cushions, a Steinway piano, a writing desk and a bed, as his entry into 'the world of non-things'. On the same floor as Cage

lives the sculptor Richard Lippold, and on the floor below the Swiss poet and painter Sonia Sekula. A little later, Feldman himself moves into the second floor of Bozza's Mansion, as 326 Monroe Street is known after its landlord.

In the spring of 1950 Christian Wolff, the son of Kurt Wolff, Kafka's publisher, who had left Germany in 1933 and fled with his family from France to New York in 1941, is sent by his piano teacher Grete Sultan to Cage, to take lessons in composition. The sixteen-year-old Wolff, whose favourite composer is Webern, brings a present for Cage to one of his first lessons. It is an English translation of the Chinese *I Ching*, published by Pantheon Books, the firm newly founded by his father in 1942, and is to be of considerable importance in Cage's development as a composer. Remarkably, as the youngest member of the New York School, as the composers in Cage's circle later become known, Wolff is the first to find his own musical language in a series of minimalist compositions, which contain a limited number of pitches in various rhythmic settings, and clearly go back to composition exercises set to Wolff by Cage.

In 1949 Cage met Pierre Boulez in Paris, and was presented by him with the manuscript of his *Second Sonata* for piano as thanks for putting him in touch with a publisher. Back in New York, Cage tries to organize the first American performance of the sonata. When William Masselos, first approached by Cage, announces that because of immense difficulties he cannot rehearse the piece within the envisaged time, Feldman draws Cage's attention to the fact that David Tudor has already begun to rehearse the sonata himself, and has even gone so far as to take French lessons in order to be able to read in the original Boulez' articles and Antonin Artaud's writings of importance for the understanding of Boulez' early music.

Tudor's performance of the *Second Sonata* takes place on 17 December 1950. In a letter to Boulez, Cage reports that Feldman, Tudor and he himself walked through the streets until 4am after the premiere celebration, talking about Boulez and his music.

Strangely, Feldman's *Piece for Violin and Piano*, which he described as a very important piece with which he had great difficulties because it contained so few notes, is dated on the same day as the premiere of the *Second Sonata*. Feldman adds that the difference between his *Piece for Violin and Piano* and the piece he wrote immediately before it is considerable, which suggests that this is his first mature work. On the first performance of the piece he reports in 1983 as follows:

'[It] was my introduction into the New York musical world and which ... It made me quite well known. It was just about the time I met John Cage and he called up Virgil Thomson and he said 'you must meet this young man.' Virgil Thomson was a very influential composer at that time. He had one of the few salons in a wonderful old bohemian hotel, still exists where rock and punk millionaires hang out [Chelsea Hotel]. And it was on the top floors actually of the hotel where he had these beautiful Edwardian rooms. And the hotel to me was fantastic. Not because he was living there but because Thomas Wolfe made it famous. Thomas Wolfe lived there for a few years. So when I first went into the hotel with my wife, it was just wonderful. Going up to Virgil Thomson's apartment. There were a lot of people there and John, I didn't know too many performers, and John got a marvellous young lady, who was a super violinist [Frances Magnes], and David [Tudor] was the pianist for essentially what was maybe a two minute piece. So I was quite nervous with this introduction to the New York

musical world. And the piece was played. And there was a very legendary for an American, a very legendary composer who was a very big time Hollywood composer in 1950 writing all the Humphrey Bogart movies, and that was George Antheil. And he was there and it was all very exciting. [...] I didn't talk to anybody. I didn't get into any discussions. I just sat there with my wife and I behaved myself, after all I was about twenty-four or so, not even twenty-four.

Well, the next day I spoke to John Cage and he says ... oh, I said to him 'Did you speak to Virgil Thomson? Did he like my piece?' He said, 'Well, if you must know, he said, 'Never bring that man to my house again.' He said 'I don't want to hear how much of a genius he thinks he is with every note he writes.'" [laughs] And we've had problems ever since, Virgil Thomson and myself.'

In the winter of 1950, presumably after the *Piece for Violin and Piano* in the last week of December, during a dinner at Cage's where David Tudor is also present, Feldman writes his first composition in graphic notation, *Projection 1* for solo cello. Prompted by Feldman's notation, Cage remembers the copy of the *I Ching* that Wolff gave him in the spring, and sketches out the plan for his *Music of Changes* for piano, which he performs the following year.

## 1951

Up to 1953, Feldman's main published compositions were the *Projections 1-5* and *Intersections 1-4*, written in graphic notation, as well as the conventionally scored *Intermissions 1-6* and *Extensions 1-4*. That there must in addition have been a series of occasional compositions, perhaps in a less avant-garde idiom, is shown by a number of programmes of dance and theatrical events where music by Feldman was played; the scores for these works seem mostly to be lost.

In January 1951 the great exhibition 'Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America' is held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Here Feldman sees for the first time a painting by Philip Guston, who becomes his closest friend over the next twenty years. Cage introduces Feldman to the Club, an association of Abstract Expressionists founded in the autumn of 1949, who have rented a loft at 39 East 8th Street and meet there on Wednesdays and Fridays for discussions and lectures. Here and at the Cedar Tavern on University Place, between 8th and 9th Streets, the nearby artists' meeting-place, Feldman meets the most important painters of the older generation (Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Ad Reinhardt and Mark Rothko), as well as members of the younger generation of New York artists (Mike Goldberg, Jane Freilicher, Howard Kanovitz, Joan Mitchell and Larry Rivers). He also meets the Viennese architect and Surrealist Frederick Kiesler; the poet and museum curator Frank O'Hara, whose poem 'Wind', dedicated to him, Feldman has twice set to music; the painter Nicholas Marsicano, for whose wife, the dancer Merle Marsicano, he writes several pieces; and the painter Mercedes Matter, who fifteen years later is to make him director of her newly founded New York Studio School. Feldman later describes himself as the only musician who regularly visited the Club, while Cage came only occasionally and Wolff never. Later, Earle Brown had 'looked in' from time to time.

In 1951 Cage gives his two famous talks at the Club on his own and Feldman's music, the 'Lecture on Nothing' and the 'Lecture on Something'; characteristically,

Feldman commented that he would have found it more appropriate if the lecture on him had been called 'Lecture on Nothing' and the one on Cage 'Lecture on Something'. Feldman himself gives a talk on 2 February 1955 on his own music called 'The Unframed Frame', which is received 'with great understanding'. During his stay in New York in the summer of 1952, Boulez also gives a lecture on his music at the Club. For Feldman the most important event at the Club seems to have been a panel discussion on 'When is a painting finished?', which he discusses up to the last years of his life.

In April, Lee Krasner, Jackson Pollock's wife, asks Cage if he would like to write the music to a film about her husband, which had been made the previous year by Hans Namuth and Paul Falkenberg. Cage declines as he 'couldn't stand' Pollock and instead suggests Feldman, who gratefully accepts the commission. The film, with Feldman's music for two cellos, which his high-school friend Daniel Stern records on two tape tracks, one part after the other, is shown for the first time on 14 June 1951 at the Museum of Modern Art. Feldman describes this commission, and his friendship with Pollock, who clearly takes him to his heart immediately and meets him as often as possible up to the time of his early death, as the 'very beginning of my career'. As payment for his music, Feldman receives from Pollock a small Indian ink drawing.

On 28 April, Merle Marsicano stages her choreography *Solo Suite: Three Dances*, with music by Feldman at the venue that later became the 92nd Street Y.

On 30 April Pearl Lang stages her choreography *Legend*, with music by Feldman, at the Henry Street Playhouse.

As early as May 1951 Boulez writes to Cage that he has written in a 'not very friendly' manner to Feldman, who has clearly sent him a letter with some scores of his own. After a visit by Wolff in the summer of 1951 in Paris, Boulez writes to Cage again in August that he has apologized to Feldman for giving the title *Structures* to his compositions for two pianos composed in 1951/52, but he had had it in mind before hearing of Feldman's string quartet of the same title, composed in March 1951. He finds the 'white squares' of Feldman's graphic notation too imprecise and too simple. By the way, he is suspicious of Mondrian and far prefers Klee. Feldman must therefore in the meantime have sent Boulez a selection of his compositions with graphic notation and stressed the connection between them and Mondrian.

Cage then writes to Boulez that Feldman cannot imagine that Boulez does not like his work and is 'somewhat mortified' that he does not appreciate Mondrian either. To Boulez' somewhat superficial criticism of Feldman's *Intersections*, that if the beginnings of the sounds are free, the endings must also be made free, Feldman had answered: 'That would be another piece.' At any rate, Feldman would send him a new *Intersection* for piano (presumably the *Intersection 2* of August 1951). At the end of the year Boulez writes that he considers Feldman's graphic notation to be a backward step, since it does not enrich but simplifies the musical vocabulary. The constant metrical unit of 60 MM, which is common to all these pieces (Boulez therefore knows neither *Marginal Intersection* nor *Intersection 2*, in which Feldman prescribes a considerably faster tempo), neglects the possibilities of irrational subdivisions offered by conventional notation. The total neglect of specification of pitch, Boulez claimed, led to a non-definition of the sound. 'Clearly I cannot sanction such an imprecise treatment of pitch.' Mondrian's paintings were the least mysterious there had ever been: 'Let us

distinguish this false science from a true science, which is less easy to decipher.’ Simple solutions, such as Mondrian’s, did not interest him. The important works were those which could not be fathomed, and this was why he preferred Klee’s paintings, the abstract as well as the representational ones, to Mondrian’s.

On 13 July Arnold Schoenberg dies in Los Angeles.

A juvenile work of Feldman’s, *Illusions* for piano of 1948, is published in the October edition of the magazine *New Music. A Quarterly of Modern Composition*.

## 1952

On 1 January David Tudor plays Boulez’ *Second Sonata*, Wolff’s *For Prepared Piano*, Feldman’s *Intersection 2* and Cage’s *Music of Changes* at the Cherry Lane Theatre, New York. Feldman later recalled: ‘I can remember once I said, “You know, John, nobody knows what to do on New Year’s Day,” and that was the genesis of a concert, one of our best.’

On 18 January Jean Erdman and her Dance Company perform the choreography *Changing Woman*, with music by Feldman, at the Hunter Playhouse. Henry Cowell’s article ‘Cage and his Friends’ is published in the January edition of *The Musical Quarterly*.

On 10 February the first performance of Feldman’s *Intermissions 1-5*, by David Tudor, takes place, again at the Cherry Lane Theatre.

On 2 March the Living Theatre, directed by Judith Malina, presents the premiere of T. S. Eliot’s *Sweeney Agonistes* with music by Feldman.

On 2 May David Tudor performs Feldman’s *Extensions 3* and *Intermission 5* at the New School for Social Research, which is followed by a discussion led by Henry Cowell.

Cage and his life partner, the dancer Merce Cunningham, on one of their joint tours make the acquaintance of the dancer Carolyn Brown and her husband Earle, who, after completing his studies in engineering and private tuition as a composer, is himself teaching composition in Denver. Cage and Cunningham suggest that the Browns should come to New York to work with them. According to Cage, the group of composers consisting of Cage, Feldman, Tudor and Wolff breaks up on Brown’s arrival in New York, because Feldman protests against the acceptance of Brown as a new member of the group. According to Brown, Feldman at first welcomes him and invites him to his house, but later falls out with him because Brown defends Boulez’ interest in mathematics. Feldman himself suggests that Brown’s relationship with the group was only peripheral, and that he was only accepted because his wife was a first-class dancer. Immediately after his arrival in New York Earle Brown writes his most famous compositions, *October 1952*, *November 1952*, *December 1952* and *Twenty-five Pages* (1953).

At this time Feldman, ‘like everyone in New York’, is in psychoanalysis and cannot believe that Brown manages without an analyst. Possibly Feldman’s admiration for Freud’s enthusiasm for research and hard work, which he continually expresses in his final years, dates from this period.

On 29 August, at the Maverick Concert Hall in Woodstock, David Tudor performs Cage’s epoch-making *4’33’’* (influenced by Robert Rauschenberg’s ‘White

Paintings'), Wolff's *For Piano* and *For Prepared Piano*, Feldman's *Extensions 3* and *Intermissions 1-5*, Brown's *3 Pieces for Piano*, Boulez' *First Sonata* and Henry Cowell's *The Banshee*.

One of the reasons for Cage's interest in having Brown in New York is a project for electro-acoustic music which he has founded with the financial support of Paul Williams. Brown is in fact Cage's most important helper in the protracted realization of four compositions: Cage's *Williams Mix*, Wolff's *For Magnetic Tape (Suite by Chance)*, Feldman's *Intersection for Magnetic Tape* and Brown's *Octet I*. Cage recalls later that within one small box of Feldman's graphic notation of *Intersection for Magnetic Tape* they had to cut up and reassemble 1,097 fragments of a tape of previously recorded sounds.

After the possibility of a visit to New York by Boulez in August 1950 had collapsed, Boulez arrives there on 11 November 1952 in the context of an American tour by Jean-Louis Barrault. He stays about a month, living in Cage's loft, gives a talk on his music at the Club and performs his *Structure I* with David Tudor. During his stay it becomes clear that the differences between the American composers in Cage's circle, who at this time support the use of random processes and various forms of uncertain notation, and the serialist Boulez, are too great to be overcome. At any rate, the correspondence between Boulez and Cage practically breaks down after 1952, and in the few letters exchanged after this date, there is no further discussion of controversial points.

### 1953

The dancer Merce Cunningham, for whom Feldman wrote his *Variations* for piano in 1951, founds the Cunningham Dance Company, whose musical director Cage becomes.

Cage introduces Feldman to Robert Rauschenberg, whom he himself met for the first time in the spring of 1951 at an exhibition of Rauschenberg's at the Betty Parsons Gallery, and came to know better in the summer of 1952 at Black Mountain College. Rauschenberg, who has just come back from a six-month trip to Italy with Cy Twombly, sells Feldman one of his 'Black Paintings', later considered among his most important works, for 17 dollars, all that Feldman happens to have in his pocket at the time. In the same way he sells another of the Black Paintings to Earle Brown for 26 dollars, the amount of a repayment on a telephone bill which Brown had just received. Feldman was to sell his Rauschenberg in 1987 for 600,000 dollars.

### 1954

Feldman's *Three Pieces for Piano*, the earliest of which is written in February 1954, are the first of a new group of works in which he concentrates almost exclusively on the sound of the piano and writes the most sparsely instrumented compositions of his whole career.

The actual reason for the break-up of the group of composers centred on Cage probably lies in the fact that Bozza's Mansion, the building in which Cage and Feldman live, is demolished in 1954. With Tudor and some friends, Cage moves to an old farmhouse at Stony Point on Long Island, an hour and a quarter's distance from New York. Feldman visits Cage only once, since his extreme short-sightedness makes the steep path leading to Cage's house highly dangerous for him. Not long after Cage returns to New York in 1970, Feldman moves to Buffalo, so close contact over a longer



period is still no longer possible. Since the autumn of 1951 Wolff has already been studying classical language and literature at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and visits New York only during the vacations. Feldman and Brown had fallen out in the previous year. Towards the end of his life Feldman said that although Cage thought they had had conversations during the 1950s, he himself had the feeling that he and Cage never really talked to each other, but had only created a 'caste order' to decide who was doing the important work. The Radio Happenings of 1966/67 and the conversation between Cage and Feldman of 1983 published in *Res* probably give a flavour of this kind of exchange.

On 4 October 1954 Feldman gives a talk at the Raud School for Social Science with the title 'Frontiers of Music. The Structure of Contemporary Music'. Two days earlier Cage and Tudor had left for Europe to perform Cage's *Water Music, 34'46.776'' for a Pianist* and *31'57.9864'' for a Pianist* on 17 October in Donaueschingen, 19 October in Cologne and 25 October in France. In Donaueschingen they also perform the electro-acoustic compositions from Cage's 'Music for Tape' project, which include Feldman's *Intersection for Magnetic Tape*.

### 1955

On 1 January 1955, in association with an exhibition of Rauschenberg's 'Red Paintings', a concert takes place at the Charles Egan Gallery exclusively of works by Feldman, namely his *Extensions 3*, *Intermission 5*, *Three Pieces for Piano*, as well as *Structure II* and *Extensions V* for two cellos, neither of which was ever published. Feldman plays the piano pieces himself, insisting that his own piano be brought to the gallery for this purpose. Claus Adam and Seymour Barab play the compositions for two cellos.

During the winter of 1954 Rauschenberg met Jasper Johns. Over a period of several months a friendship forms between the two artists and in January 1955 they move into a factory building on Pearl Street, where they live for the next three years. Through Rauschenberg, Johns meets Cage and Feldman. Feldman later compares the artistic relationship of the extroverted Rauschenberg and the introverted Johns, who together break through the supremacy of Abstract Expressionism in American art and prepare the ground for Pop Art, to the relationship between Cage and himself.

### 1956

On 30 May a concert organized by Cage and Feldman takes place at the Carl Fischer Concert Hall in New York, at which Feldman's *Structures* and *Three Pieces for String Quartet* are performed for the first time, by the Juilliard Quartet.

On 11 August 1956 Pollock is killed in a road accident. In an unpublished obituary, Feldman writes that Pollock's life represents a double tragedy: 'both death and a life in the art world came too soon'. So even at this time, Feldman sees public cultural life as the most important obstacle to living art.

Having apparently separated earlier from his first wife, Arleen (the exact date is not known), Feldman marries his second wife, Cynthia, who in the years that follow also takes over the organization of concerts. At first he lives on 19th Street in the same house as the painter Barnett Newman, later moving to 337 Lexington Avenue, near Central Station.

## 1957

On 1 January a further New Year's Day concert takes place, at which Feldman's *Projections* and *Intersections*, that is, all the pieces written so far using graphic notation, are performed.

The *Piece for Four Pianos*, first performed on 30 April at the Carl Fischer Concert Hall in New York, is Feldman's first composition in free durational notation, which becomes his dominant form of notation during the following six years. In 1961/62 he writes the *Durations 1-5*, in which he transfers the notation, first conceived at the piano, to various chamber-music settings.

At a meeting arranged by the painter Paul Brach and Feldman to find a new gallery-owner for Rauschenberg, Leo Castelli meets Johns and immediately offers him an exhibition in his newly founded gallery in January 1958, while Rauschenberg's exhibition is planned, only after repeated requests, for March of the same year. Both exhibitions cause a sensation. Johns' exhibition is the most successful debut any American artist has ever had: the Museum of Modern Art buys four works on the spot, *Green Target*, *White Numbers*, the first *Flag* and *Target with Four Faces*. With this exhibition Castelli establishes himself as the most important gallery-owner of the Pop Art generation.

## 1958

In his article 'Sound - Noise - Varèse - Boulez' Feldman attacks Boulez for the first time as a 'magnificent academician' without 'elegance' or 'physicality', thanks to whose successes 'we will hear more of Varèse, John Cage, Christian Wolff and myself'.

On 15 May the 25-Year Retrospective Concert organized by Johns, Rauschenberg and Emile di Antonio takes place, as a look back at Cage's development as a composer over what is now a 25-year period. The last part of the programme is the first performance of Cage's epoch-making *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*.

In the summer Cage travels to Europe with Tudor for a second time, and gives three lectures on 'Composition as Process' at the International Summer Course for New Music in Darmstadt.

On 17 August in New London, Connecticut, *Summerspace*, one of Merce Cunningham's most successful choreographic works, is performed with a set by Robert Rauschenberg and music by Feldman. Asked how it was possible for Cunningham, Rauschenberg and himself to work independently on the same piece, Feldman replies: 'Imagine that your daughter is getting married, and I tell her that her dress will not be ready until the morning of the wedding, but it will be a Dior model.' With *Ixion*, the score for *Summerspace*, Feldman has returned after some four years to the graphic notation of the early 1950s, which he now uses repeatedly up to the end of the 1960s.

## 1959

As the second edition in the New Directions in Music series, Columbia Masterworks issues a recording of early compositions by Feldman, ranging from *Projection 4* for violin and piano (1951) to *Piece for Four Pianos* (1957).

## 1960

In October Feldman writes *The Swallows of Salangan* for mixed choir and 23 instruments, which receives its first performance on 5 March 1962 in Brussels under the direction of Mauricio Kagel.

Feldman is commissioned by Jack Garfein to write the music for the film *Something Wild*, starring Garfein's wife, Carroll Baker. At a preliminary meeting Garfein complains that Feldman has written a gentle piece in E flat major for string quartet and celesta for the rape scene at the beginning of the film. 'My wife is being raped, and you write celesta music?' Feldman is paid off and replaced by Aaron Copland, who writes one of his most important film scores for *Something Wild* and in 1964 reworks it as an orchestral piece with the title *Music for a Great City*.

## 1962

The New York branch of the publishers Edition Peters, who have been publishing the work of Cage since 1960, now takes over the publication of scores by Feldman and Wolff. In a letter of 11 February 1962 Feldman sends the contract, signed on 6 February, to Walter Hinrichsen, the director of the firm, with the following note: 'To say I am highly delighted would be an understatement. After all, it was through Edition Peters that I first learned to love music.'

The painter Franz Kline dies of a cerebral apoplexy on 13 May. In his memory Feldman writes his first dedicated piece, *For Franz Kline*, completed on 26 May.

## 1963

One day Lukas Foss, who has missed his flight at La Guardia airport, calls Feldman at his father's business to ask him if he would like to meet for lunch. Feldman, whose main task there appears to be to negotiate contracts with his father's business partners, asks Foss to come and pick him up. He quickly puts on working clothes and positions himself at an enormous ironing machine. When Foss comes in, he sets the steam to full strength and plays the 'artist in chains'. Foss is deeply shocked and cries out, 'Oh, Morty! This will not do. We must get you out of here.' When Foss tries to arrange a teaching post for Feldman at a big university, the responsible committee admits that Feldman is an important figure, but doubts that he is capable of teaching anything.

Feldman writes the music for a film by Hans Namuth and Paul Falkenberg on De Kooning, which is shown for the first time on 4 September as *De Kooning*. This composition is the first of a new group of works, whose scores are notated in alternating time structures. The programmatic cycle of this group of works is *Vertical Thoughts 1-5*, written between April and August 1963 and first performed at the legendary Town Hall Concert on 11 October 1963, organized by Cage with the object of reconciling Brown and Feldman with each other. In the same year a recording is released including Brown's *Music for Violin, Cello and Piano* (1952), *Music for Cello and Piano* (1955) and *Hodograph I* (1959), as well as Feldman's *Durations 1-4*.

## 1964

On 6, 7, 8 and 9 February the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under Leonard Bernstein performs Brown's *Available Forms II*, Cage's *Atlas Eclipticalis* and Feldman's ... *Out of 'Last Pieces'*, a graphically notated orchestral work with piano solo, which is played by David Tudor. At one of the performances Feldman, to the

annoyance of Bernstein, forces Karlheinz Stockhausen, who happens to be in New York at the time, to take a bow on his behalf.

During his first published interview Feldman meets Brian O'Doherty, who becomes one of his closest friends in the 1960s and in his writings takes up a rather defensive attitude to the most recent artistic trends such as Pop Art and Minimal Art, which seems influenced by Feldman's thinking at the time.

In a further interview Feldman calls Stockhausen a revisionist who wants to humanize Cage's and Feldman's work, in order to found a school and achieve power. As a response to Stockhausen's *Zyklus* for a percussionist, he writes *The King of Denmark*.

Presumably in the same year, Feldman meets Boulez at a dinner-party with some colleagues and spends the rest of the evening with him, describing it as follows: 'I left the gathering quite late with Pierre Boulez, and we walked over to the Cedar Tavern. We closed the bar that night. Closed it, in fact, for good - the building was being demolished. We talked about American literature, very little about music. There was nobody there I knew; the older crowd had stopped going some time back. Somehow it didn't seem right that I should spend that last evening with Boulez, who is everything I don't want art to be. It is Boulez, more than any composer today, who has given system a new prestige - Boulez, who once said in an essay that he is not interested in how a piece sounds, only in how it is made.' Possibly Feldman is referring to that evening when he states twenty years later that he once had a seven-hour conversation with Boulez which had changed his life, although Boulez was not aware of this. He admired Boulez' attitude, just as he admired that of Varèse, Wolpe, Cage and Beckett.

### 1965

Edgard Varèse dies on 6 November at the age of 82 from complications following an operation. In an obituary published in *Perspectives of New Music*, Feldman writes:

'Being that music is our life, in that it has given us a life - did we make things *clear*? That is, do we love Music, and not the systems, the rituals, the symbols - the worldly, greedy gymnastics we substitute for it? That is, do we give *everything* - a total commitment to our own uniqueness?

Have we no examples of this? Is this not Varèse? Do we only have models for scale tinkering and instrument clinking? Do we think Varèse is now something to dissect? Are we making ready the test tubes? Remember, there was no funeral. He escaped.'

### 1966

After his reconciliation with Earle Brown, Feldman writes a detailed article about his colleague.

In the spring and autumn of 1966 Feldman goes on three lecture tours in England, where he gives, among others, his paper, subsequently published, 'The Anxiety of Art', and meets the pianist John Tilbury and the composer Cornelius Cardew, with whom he has already corresponded. Feldman, who has come to Europe for the first time with the help of a Guggenheim Fellowship, is enthusiastic about the

serious reception he experiences in England, and from now on spends one or two months a year in England. In 1973 he even considers settling in England the following year.

On 25 July Frank O'Hara dies as a result of an accident. In his memories of O'Hara, published six years later, Feldman writes: 'Unlike Auden or Eliot, who never stopped writing for the undergraduate, Frank O'Hara dispenses with everything in his work but his feelings. This kind of modesty always disappoints culture, which time after time has mistaken coldness for Olympian objectivity. ... Throughout the first half of the twentieth century everyone was sure it was Picasso; we are only now beginning to see it was Mondrian. How could anyone have known or guessed? The work seemed so limited, so simplistic, so unambitious. ... Not that I am comparing Frank O'Hara with an austere artist like Mondrian. What I am saying is, it may be Frank O'Hara's poems that survive when all we now consider "epic" is shot full of holes, nothing remaining of it but its propaganda.'

Between 9 July 1966 and 16 January 1967 Cage and Feldman meet in the studio of the New York radio station WBAI for five conversations, which are published in the form of transcripts in 1993.

Although Feldman and Stockhausen have already met on the latter's first trip to the USA in 1958, they seem to have got to know each other better only during Stockhausen's long stay in the USA in 1966/67. Two anecdotes which Feldman liked to relate frequently come from this time:

'I remember once, it was a New Year's banquet on Long Island, he [Stockhausen] was here for a few months with someone who had a very big house. He had invited me with Lukas Foss and our wives, to this house, for the banquet. It was a crazy evening. The owner of the house had invited his own friends too, well-to-do people from the Long Island area. And all the young girls who were there thought they were going to dance, you see. But for two hours, he played only Stockhausen. And everyone started to leave. The owner had not two, but perhaps one hour of my music on a record, and he played it. At the end, Karlheinz leapt up, dramatically, and said: "I have just decided, I have just decided that ..." "What have you decided?" I asked him. And he replied: "I have decided to use you in my music."

The second anecdote is as follows: 'He [Stockhausen] came down one morning and he said, "Morty, what's your secret?" And I said "Karlheinz, I don't have a secret." He says, "You must have a secret. Don't tell me that every time you decide what note to use you have to think of eighty-eight." (You see, the keyboard.) I said, "What's eighty-eight notes, Karlheinz?" But he wasn't satisfied with that answer. And then I went on, I saw that he was looking for some kind of confrontation, I said, "Karlheinz, I don't know if you know that Nero", I was really saying that he was Nero you see, "That Nero had a brother. Let's say that you're Nero and that you wrote epic poetry and I'm his brother and I wrote lyric poetry. Well Nero said to his brother, also the way you're saying to me "What's your secret?" the lyric poet rather said, "Brother Nero, I have no secret." He says, "You must have a secret. Torture him for the secret." And then he tortured him for the secret and he brought him back after this poor fellow had been tortured, he was all mutilated, and he says "Really Nero, I have no secret." And then Nero looks at the guards and says "Finish him off."

## 1967

The painter Ad Reinhardt commits suicide on 30 August at the age of 54.

In three great compositions at the end of this group of works, *First Principles* (1966/67), *False Relationships and the Extended Ending* (1968) and *Between Categories* (1969), Feldman links the changing time structures with elements of the preceding group of works, allowing groups of instruments notated in different time structures to run alongside each other.

### 1969

Presumably as a result of his contacts in England, Feldman changes his publisher. The first score to be published by Universal Edition is *In Search of an Orchestration* of 1967. From 1970, all Feldman's scores are published by Universal Edition.

### 1970

In 1965, Mark Rothko accepted a commission from John and Dominique de Menil to design a series of murals for a chapel, to be built in Houston, Texas. In the last years of his life, during which Feldman and he are particularly close, Rothko mainly works on the paintings for the Houston Chapel, for which purpose he rents an enormous studio on the Upper East Side. He finishes work on the paintings in 1967, after which he begins a series of works on paper, replacing the warm colours of his earlier paintings with grey, brown and black. Rothko does not live to see the dedication of the Houston Chapel on 27 February 1971, since he commits suicide at the age of 67 on 25 February 1970, almost exactly a year earlier. Shortly before his death Rothko founded the Mark Rothko Foundation, which was to administer his estate exclusively for benevolent, scientific and/or educational projects. Feldman is one of the directors appointed by Rothko. Later the Mark Rothko Foundation becomes the object of scandal, not however involving Feldman, on the grounds of embezzlement and contravention of Rothko's last will.

The painter Mercedes Matter founds the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture in the former building of the Whitney Museum of American Art (8 West Eighth Street), and makes Feldman, whom she has known since the early 1950s, director of her institute.

The painter Barnett Newman dies on 4 July at the age of 65.

Boulez is appointed chief conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. In June 1970, when he does not allow a single American composer to be represented at the Ojah Festival in California, the composers Alvin Lucier and Robert Ashley send an open letter to Lawrence Morton, the artistic director of the festival, in which they accuse Boulez of consistently imperialistic thought and of attempting to maintain the illusion of European superiority. The letter is signed by a further 18 composers, including Feldman.

In the summer, Feldman teaches at Hawaii University, where a piece dedicated to his old piano teacher, *Madame Press Died Last Week at Ninety*, is performed on 13 July. After separating from his second wife Cynthia and breaking off an affair with Lulla Adler, a granddaughter of the famous actor Jacob Adler, he begins a new affair with the viola player Karen Phillips, for whom he writes the pieces under the title *The Viola in My Life*, the first of a new group of works in conventional notation.

In October Philip Guston exhibits his new, figurative works for the first time, at the Marlborough Gallery. A friendship of twenty years breaks up because Feldman does not know what to say about these new works.

### 1971

At the dedication of the Houston Chapel on 27 February the de Menils commission Feldman to create a composition in memory of Mark Rothko, to be performed in the chapel. Feldman chooses the instrumentation of *Rothko Chapel* – percussion, celesta, viola, soprano and contralto solo, as well as double mixed choir – bearing in mind the spatial conditions of the chapel, and incidentally providing yet another obbligato viola part for Karen Phillips. He spends the spring of 1971 on the country estate of the de Menils at Pontpoint, France, in order to be able to work undisturbed. The first performance of the composition takes place on 9 April 1972.

Igor Stravinsky dies on 6 April 1971 in New York and is buried on 15 April in Venice. Feldman writes in an obituary that, although in the realms of aesthetics and feeling he represents a totally opposite point of view and does not understand Stravinsky's feelings, he nevertheless feels sympathy for him. He includes in *Rothko Chapel* a repetitive melodic line that he wrote on the day of Stravinsky's funeral.

### 1972

From September 1971 to October 1972, with the help of a DAAD grant, Feldman lives in Berlin. On his life in Berlin, Feldman commented: 'Life in Germany is so *boring*. You *have* to write masterpieces to keep interested. In six months I've completed the piece for three clarinets, piano and cello that I started in London [*Three Clarinets, Cello and Piano*], written a 20-minute piece for chorus and orchestra [*Chorus and Orchestra I*], and two pieces for five pianos and voices lasting 45 minutes each [*Five Pianos and Pianos and Voices*].'

Feldman does not mention perhaps the most important piece from this period, *Cello and Orchestra*, completed in January 1972. In *Cello and Orchestra*, for the first time since the early 1950s, Feldman uses widely extended repeating patterns, such as would play a decisive role in his works of the 1980s. Almost all his compositions during the years that followed are either commissioned works or compositions written for a certain fixed constellation of interpreters. This is an outward sign that for the first time in his career as a composer Feldman was being given the public recognition due to his artistic importance.

On 4 April Stefan Wolpe dies aged 70. Fourteen years later, Feldman dedicates to him one of his last pieces, *For Stefan Wolpe*, for mixed chorus and two vibraphones.

At the first performance of *Five Pianos* on 16 July in Berlin a major confrontation takes place between Cage and Feldman. Cage, who has apparently misunderstood the instructions for performance of the score, written in a new form of 'free durational notation', plays for twenty minutes longer than the other pianists and screams at Feldman after the performance that he is a 'poetic extremist'. In August Feldman states in an English interview that it was not his but Cage's music that changed when they met in January 1950. In a further interview he adds that the actual alternative was not between Cage and Stockhausen, but between himself and Stockhausen, since

Stockhausen had long ago assimilated Cage. Cage counters two years later with the statement that Feldman had made a discovery twenty years earlier and remained faithful to it up to that day.

In August Feldman teaches for the first time at the Dartington Summer School in England, where he meets the Australian pianist Roger Woodward, who replaces David Tudor for him, since Tudor has meanwhile become mainly preoccupied with electro-acoustic music. He dedicates to Woodward his *Piano and Orchestra* of 1975 and, together with Aki Takahashi, his *Triadic Memories* of 1981.

Meanwhile the efforts of Lukas Foss to find Feldman a teaching post have at last borne fruit, since Feldman moves from Berlin straight to Buffalo, where Foss is chief conductor of the Philharmonic Orchestra. Feldman is first appointed Slee Professor for a year at the State University of New York at Buffalo; the following year, the appointment is extended for a year, and in 1974 it is transformed into a permanent professorship, named at Feldman's wish the Edgard Varèse Chair.

Immediately before taking up this post, Feldman clearly stresses that composition cannot be taught. He has always adopted a very ambivalent attitude to the distinction between amateur and professional composers, since he believes that these categories are based not on the work they have done, but on their respective training. He says Boulez' only criticism of his music consisted in the fact that he earned his living in his parents' business and not in the world of music. However, he develops in the course of his teaching career into a passionate teacher, which he himself links with the fact that as a little boy he wanted to be a rabbi. On another occasion, however, he stresses that the only person to learn anything in his classes is he himself, and that he always recommends his students not to go to university, but study with private teachers, as he himself had done. His teaching method seems to have stayed largely the same over the years; while, even before taking up his activity as a teacher, he announces that he will have to teach the students to listen, he states in 1983: 'I don't teach composition per se, but I go at composition by way of its acoustical reality. That is, I teach orchestration.'

Feldman's decision to move to Buffalo surprises all his New York friends, who would never have believed that Feldman, the archetypal New Yorker, could live in any other city but New York. The personal isolation to which he exposes himself by his move to Buffalo seems however to have helped him to concentrate totally on his work, and to develop the discoveries of the compositions he created in the 1970s and 1980s.

### **1973**

*For Frank O'Hara*, the first large-scale composition to be completed by Feldman in Buffalo, is dedicated to the memory of his friend Frank O'Hara, who died seven years earlier, and is the second composition after *For Franz Kline* in which the title and dedication of the piece are identical. Feldman wrote it for the tenth anniversary of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts at Buffalo University, and it was premiered on 5 December 1973 at New York's Carnegie Hall. The oboist Nora Post, a member of the Center, becomes Feldman's constant companion for the years that follow.

### **1975**

After Feldman's professorship has been transformed into a permanent chair, he founds the June in Buffalo Festival, in which, in 1975, Cage, Brown, Wolff and Lejaren Hiller



take part; in addition, together with Jan Williams, he directs the Evenings for New Music of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts. A scandal is provoked at a performance of Cage's *Songbooks* under Petr Kotik, when one of the performers strips his partner naked on stage, which angers Cage so much that on the following day he allowed himself to comment, 'Whenever people do the worst they can, they do it in my name'. In his indignation over this incident, Cage threatens never to return to Buffalo, a threat which however he did not carry out.

Bunita Marcus from Madison, Wisconsin, begins to study with Feldman. She is his most important student and is encouraged by him by all possible means. After gaining her doctorate in 1981, she refuses Feldman's proposal of marriage and moves to New York, remaining however his inspiration and intimate companion throughout the last decade of his life.

## 1976

In the spring, Feldman begins preliminary work on his Beckett opera.

In June, Feldman takes part in a tour by the Creative Associates of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts, which includes the Near East. In Shiraz he buys his first Oriental rug.

In July Feldman completes three compositions in which he is preparing himself to work with Beckett: *Orchestra* (3 July), *Elemental Procedures* (18 July) and *Routine Investigations* (24 July).

After attending the premiere of *Orchestra* on 18 September in Glasgow, Feldman comes to Berlin to meet Samuel Beckett and ask him for a text for his opera. Although Beckett is at first not inclined to write an operatic libretto, in conversation with Feldman he after all develops an interest in the project and, before the end of September, sends the text of *Neither* to Buffalo. Feldman begins work on the opera even before Beckett's text arrives in Buffalo, and completes it on 30 January 1977.

## 1977

On 22 January *Elemental Procedures*, the central section of Feldman's Beckett Trilogy, receives its first performance in Cologne.

On 8 June the first performance of *Neither* takes place at the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome, conducted by Marcello Panni with a set by Michelangelo Pistoletto; the Roman performances of *Neither* are greeted by tumultuous protests by the Italian audiences, who clearly cannot endure an opera without conventional dramatization. After a revival in October 1978 in Berlin, at which Beckett is said to have been present, and a concert performance in New York on 21 November 1978, *Neither* establishes itself after Feldman's death on the programmes of international opera houses.

Presumably on the occasion of the premiere of *Neither*, Feldman visits Cy Twombly in his studio in Rome and is enthusiastic about Twombly's works, which at this time are largely unknown in the USA.

## 1978

In a particular kind of midlife crisis, Feldman asks himself if music is actually an art form or just a superior form of entertainment. In a situation where his career is proceeding with such success that he need no longer concern himself with commissions and performances, Feldman makes a decision to risk writing the kind of music in which he need no longer worry about the length of the composition, bearing in mind the conventional concert situation, or the difficulties facing the performers and the possibility of a performance, or the expectations of the public, or his own expectations, in order to find out if music can be treated as an art form. The results of this decision are longer and longer compositions, culminating in the five-hour-long *String Quartet (II)* of 1983.

Later Feldman announces that at the moment when he wanted to free himself from the audience, he won a new audience. He is referring to the fact that the first two pieces lasting for an hour and a half each to be performed, that is, the *String Quartet* of 1979 (premiered in 1980) and *Triadic Memories* of 1981 (premiered in 1981), are enthusiastically acclaimed by both audience and critics. ‘Sometimes one wins when one thinks one has lost’, is Feldman’s laconic comment on this surprise.

### 1979

Feldman’s most extended orchestral composition, *Violin and Orchestra* of 1979, cannot be performed at the Warsaw Autumn music festival because the soloist, Paul Zukofsky, refuses to fly to Poland on the one-way ticket sent to him by the festival organizers. For this reason *Violin and Orchestra* is not performed until 1984, in Frankfurt under the direction of Cristobal Halffter, with Zukofsky as soloist.

### 1980

Feldman meets the pianist Aki Takahashi, who is a member of the Creative Associates of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts in the last year of its existence. On 24 February she gives a solo concert in the newly built Baird Recital Hall of the State University of New York at Buffalo. While *Triadic Memories* of 1981 is still dedicated jointly to Roger Woodward and Takahashi, all Feldman’s later piano works are created with Takahashi’s piano playing as a constant point of reference.

In the early 1980s Feldman must also have met the Italian painter Francesco Clemente through a common friend, the anthropologist and art collector Francesco Pellizzi. It was Pellizzi too who recommended to him Francis Yates’ treatise *The Art of Memory*, which is of decisive importance for his reflection on the function of musical forms. Clemente, who as co-founder of Transavanguardia, the Italian form of postmodernism, is on the crest of a wave of success, is the only visual artist with whom Feldman has close contact in the 1980s. In Clemente’s studio in SoHo, New York City, Feldman organizes several concerts, including the premiere on 20 November 1986 of his last piano piece, *Palais de Mari*, dedicated to Clemente and commissioned by Bunita Marcus, and performed by Marcus herself.

On 4 May, Feldman’s *String Quartet*, his first composition of one and a half hours’ duration, is premiered at the New York Drawing Center by the Columbia String Quartet. The headline of the review in the New York *Village Voice* is ‘Feldman draws blood’; the reviewer, Greg Sandow, draws a direct parallel between Feldman and Beckett and writes that he has ‘never heard music that better than Feldman’s evokes Beckett’s exhausting “chronicle of moribunds in their courses”’.

The painter Philip Guston dies on 7 June at Woodstock, New York, aged 67. Although Feldman and he were no longer speaking to each other during the last ten years of his life, Guston chooses his old friend to read the Kaddish at his grave. In the following year, Feldman ends a catalogue text for an exhibition of Guston's late work with the words: 'There is no attempt in these last paintings towards any aspect of reconciliation with his past concerns. It was a new life, in which his past *skills* helped him survive on the new ground he immigrated to. All it meant for Guston was to pack only what he needed and go in search for the country of his heart.'

### 1981

On the occasion of the Californian premiere of his *String Quartet* by the Kronos Quartet, Feldman gives a talk on 26 February at the California Institute of the Arts on 'Twelve Tone Technique in Varèse's *Déserts*', in which he very soon diverges from his actual topic and starts to speak about the latest developments in his own music. After the performance, which is celebrated with 'standing ovations', Feldman informs the 'young composers' there that they are dead and should be born again to acoustic instruments.

### 1982

On 13 March the composition *For John Cage*, lasting an hour and a half, is given its first performance by Paul Zukofsky and Aki Takahashi at a concert on the occasion of Cage's 70th birthday. In an interview, Feldman expresses annoyance that even at a marathon concert in honour of John Cage, whose name stands for the liberation of music, he is asked how long his piece lasts.

In the spring Feldman writes *Three Voices* for the singer Joan La Barbara, in which two voices are played on tape and the third is sung by the singer on stage. Here Feldman uses parts of the poem 'Wind' by Frank O'Hara, dedicated to him, which he set to music in its entirety in 1962 in *The O'Hara Songs*. He explains: 'One of my closest friends, the painter Philip Guston, had just died; Frank O'Hara had died several years before. I saw the piece with Joan in front and these two loudspeakers behind her. There is something kind of tombstone about the look of loudspeakers. I thought of the piece as an exchange of the live voice with the dead ones – a mixture of the living and the dead'.

On 17 April, two days after completing *Three Voices*, Feldman gives a talk in Toronto, in which for the first time he reports comprehensively on his development as a composer after *Neither*. In the second half of the year Feldman works on his *String Quartet (II)*, completing it on 27 January of the following year.

### 1983

In August Feldman takes part in a Contemporary Music Festival in South Africa, organized by Jacques de Vos Malan, a former student of Feldman's, among others.

On 19 November Cage and Feldman meet for a conversation which is recorded by Francesco Pellizzi and published in his journal *Res*.

On 4 December the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation stops the transmission of an important football match in order to be able to transmit the whole of the five-hour-long premiere of the *String Quartet (II)*, which it had commissioned.

#### 1984

In February Feldman gives a talk at the Theater am Turm in Frankfurt and a seminar under the title, proposed by Walter Zimmermann, 'The Future of Local Music'. In April, Zimmermann organizes a wide-ranging retrospective of Feldman's works in Cologne, where on 5 April, among other pieces, *Trio* for violin, cello and piano of 1980 finally receives its first performance.

On 26 July Feldman gives a major lecture at the Darmstadt International Summer Course for New Music, at the invitation of the radio station Hessischer Rundfunk, as an introduction to his *String Quartet (II)*, whose European premiere has taken place the evening before, performed by the Kronos Quartet. After the performance of *String Quartet (II)* in a version abridged to four hours, the 87-year-old Alfred Schlee, former director of Universal Edition, embraces Feldman saying: 'Splendid. It seemed to me to last for 25 minutes.'

With *For Philip Guston*, his only composition of 1984, Feldman's late work begins, characterized by a resumption of the tonal methods and multiplicity of forms of his previous compositions.

#### 1985

On 3 March Feldman meets La Monte Young for a conversation which is recorded by Francesco Pellizzi and once again published in his journal *Res*.

On 27 March Feldman, as former director of the New York Studio School, gives a talk there on 'Metaphor'.

In April, Feldman's collected writings are published under the title *Essays* in an edition produced by Walter Zimmermann, which includes excerpts from the Frankfurt seminar and a complete transcription of the Darmstadt lecture of 1984.

Presumably in this year, Feldman tries to persuade Beckett to write a second opera text, but Beckett declines at a meeting in Paris.

After attending the Festival Nieuwe Muziek for the first time in 1977, Feldman spends several days in Middelburg in 1985, 1986 and 1987, giving a great number of talks and seminars, which can be seen as his theoretical legacy. Feldman's last composition, *Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello*, is dedicated to the director of the Festival, Ad van't Veer.

During his free semester Feldman is artist in residence at the California Institute of the Arts.

#### 1986

On 21 and 22 February, on the occasion of Feldman's 60th birthday, the California Institute of the Arts puts on three concerts with music by Feldman and by composers to

whom he feels close. Feldman's own compositions performed at these concerts are *Four Songs to E.E. Cummings*, *First Principles*, *For Frank O'Hara* and *For Philip Guston*. The other composers are Cage, Varèse, Wolpe, the Japanese composer Jo Kondo, whom Feldman met in New York in 1977/78 and of whose music he thought very highly, and Feldman's students Bunita Marcus and Nils Vigeland.

A transcription of Feldman's first Middelburg lecture of 2 July 1985 is published in the Feldman issue of *Musik-Konzepte* in May 1986.

On 30 May *Coptic Light*, Feldman's last orchestral work, is performed for the first time by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under Gunther Schuller. Feldman is deeply shattered by the remark by the *New York Times* reviewer that he is 'the most boring composer in the history of music',<sup>3</sup> since he is forced to realize that even after his great successes in Europe he has no chance of recognition in American musical life.

During a further free semester, Feldman is artist in residence at the University of California, San Diego. Clearly Feldman applied for a chair at this university shortly before his death, finding life in Buffalo less and less satisfying after the cuts in the university budget during the 1980s. After Feldman's death, the English composer Brian Ferneyhough is appointed to this post.

In the summer, Feldman is again the guest of the Hessischer Rundfunk at the International Summer Course for New Music in Darmstadt, where he gives a talk on 24 July about the composition, first performed the evening before, *For Christian Wolff*, for flute, piano and celesta.

### 1987

Probably in the previous year Beckett, possibly as a result of Feldman's request for a second opera text, proposes him as composer for the music to his radio play *Words and Music*, which is to be revived as part of a Beckett festival by the New York radio station Voices International. Feldman enthusiastically accepts the commission, seeing it 'as a sort of tribute to Beckett'. The production takes place in March and April in New York as a combined enterprise by Voices International and the German station Westdeutscher Rundfunk. Immediately after *Samuel Beckett, Words and Music* Feldman writes his last dedicated piece, *For Samuel Beckett*, for chamber orchestra, which is premiered on 12 June in Amsterdam. On 10 March Feldman is interviewed on the radio by the producer of *Words and Music*, Everett Frost, about the way he has handled Beckett's text. He speaks on the same topic on 12 April at the Detroit Institute of Arts. From 17 to 22 March he is at the centre of the New Music Days at the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts in Canada.

In June, Feldman marries his student Barbara Monk. A few days later, in the course of an apparently innocuous operation on a stomach ulcer, he is diagnosed with cancer of the pancreas. He is treated with radiotherapy and chemotherapy, but insists on being present at the premiere of his last composition, *Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello*, on 4

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<sup>3</sup> Feldman's comment, made in a conversation with Iannis Xenakis in Middelburg on July 4, 1986, greatly exaggerates the criticism made in the review, which actually says: "*Coptic Light*, with its artfully smeared colors, its constrained rhythms and its formal predictability, was restful for the first 10 or 15 minutes, monotonous thereafter" (Tim Page, *The New York Times*, June 1, 1986). [Note supplied by Eric Grunin.]

July in Middelburg, and gives a final cycle of his Middelburg lectures on this occasion. When saying goodbye to Ad van't Veer, Feldman makes him promise to hold a further master-class in the autumn. Back in Buffalo, he undergoes further treatment, but this is unsuccessful because his condition has progressed too far. On 3 September Feldman dies in Buffalo at the age of 61.

Feldman was to have given a talk on 9 September in Los Angeles on the occasion of Cage's 75th birthday, which he wanted to call 'Practically Alive with John Cage'. Instead, Cage gives a commemorative speech in which he recalls that Feldman, when in hospital, said that they had had a good life and he had no regrets. Cage performs his *Scenario for M.F. (with numbers in celebration of his 60th birthday)*, which he had written the previous year for Feldman's 60th birthday.

The funeral ceremonies take place on the same day in New York. Bunita Marcus gives the main address. The commemorative edition of *MusikTexte* of December of the same year includes a transcription of the Middelburg lecture of 2 July 1987, one of the last talks to be given by Feldman.