

## **Morton Feldman: Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country (1964)**

*Remarks made by Charlie Morrow at the premiere of this piece which Feldman made for him. The premiere took place on 19 January 2018, at Kallio New Music Days 2018, Helsinki, Finland. The transcript is published here by kind permission of Charlie Morrow. A video of the premiere can be found here: <https://youtu.be/VtREmgYQrC8>*

Good evening. I apologise that I can't speak Finnish very well, but I wanted to tell you the story about this piece. This is the world premiere, and the circumstances of the piece are very special. In the 60s, I was a trumpet soloist, and I am a composer and I was totally unknown as a composer, but I was a first class trumpet player so I could commission works by very good New York composers. And I put together a recital of music for trumpet and ensemble with my friend Ed Murray, conductor. And very good people wrote pieces. I think one of the best pieces that was done was Philip Corner's piece. We also played Milton Babbitt's *All Set*. And it all led up to a concert in Carnegie Hall, which some people have said is the last moment when the uptown and downtown composers, as we got to be known, were all together. So this was the beginning of the split, but actually it was the last together, because the academic scene and the kind of conceptual scene just separated after that. So what was very interesting for me was that in putting that together I asked Morton Feldman to make a piece for me. And you may know Feldman's work, he was part of a trio of Cage's disciples, the three guys, Feldman, Christian Wolff and Earle Brown. And they really did hang out together. I remember after the Avant Garde Festival, the three of them sitting together with Cage having beers in Carnegie Tavern. And, at that time, Morton Feldman was active with Cage but he was not that public a figure. He worked full-time as a clothing tailor in his very successful family business. So I asked him if I could come to his house to talk about writing a piece for me. He invited me and he sat in there in the room with his wife, and he asked me, "Well what can you do? Show me some of your techniques". And I played him all sorts of things on my trumpet. And he said, "Well, I have a piece for you", and so he came up with this piece. And he taught it to me sitting in a chair like this, which is why I've got the chair here since I rehearsed it before. The chair would be interesting because he sat there and he literally talked me through the whole piece because it

didn't have a score<sup>1</sup>. But then the strangest thing happened before we could perform it in public. I got a call from him and he says, "My wife has decided that this piece is not in my style". So I never got to do the performance. And it sat there unperformed, and I thought finally in my conversations with Juho Laitinen, "Hey, there's something we could do that would be very special, kind of clearing an old debt!" So, I'll show you what we did. I think it's particularly interesting because the text content of this, which is, "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country", can never be more urgent than in my country. Although Finland is now my country too, and I think that things are a little better here. A concept for the piece was to hear the sound coming from a radio, a monaural radio, and that the sound of the trumpet would be the sound of the ether, the sound of the static, the sound of, I guess, just the noise...

[The piece was then performed]

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<sup>1</sup> August 2019: Charlie Morrow has created a score incorporating Feldman's sketch and instructions so that others can play the piece:

<https://www.cnvill.net/mf-now-is-the-time-score.pdf>