

Morton Feldman: The Johannesburg Masterclasses, July 1983

Session 4: Works by Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph

Transcribed by Dirk de Klerk

Voices heard: Morton Feldman (MF)
Barry Jordan (BJ)
David Kosviner (DK)
Peter Klatzow (PK)
Jacques de Vos Malan (JdVM)
Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph (JZ-R)
Unidentified Voices (UV)

MF: I almost sent the note to Peter. I said, "How about me being the prosecuting attorney, you being the defence counsel?" It might have worked out quite a bit because I have a lot to prosecute.

PK: You know, generally speaking, the victim has a chance of choosing his own defence.

MF: Not if they can't afford it.

No, but really, seriously, I have a marvellously gifted Korean woman composer - a 'female composer', as we say in the States. And she came to study with me and, being that half of me is still sexist, I looked at this gorgeous, gorgeous girl. And everything about her...upper middle class and quiet and I looked at her music and she was very, very good. So I said to her, "How deep do you want to get involved in composition," and she looked at me and she said, "Not too deep." [Laughter] And she was *so* promising but she was so wealthy that the whole trip to America and study at University was [...]. She didn't care that it cost ten thousand dollars a semester, or something like that. But of course, the family wanted a little support from the University - a ten dollar scholarship. Something to show that [...] was worthy of all this expense in an American University.

Well anyway, the only way I could get her to become serious was give her a big scholarship which polarised the department and she took off. Boy, was she terrific! I think we have to give Jeanne about a hundred thousand rand and see what happens.

My feeling Jeanne, I wrote down a series of notes. And I was going to ask you how deep shall we get into this discussion. I mean it's...am I *criticising*, shall I just make *off the cuff comments* or something?

I mean it's become...it's becoming somewhat embarrassing.

JZ-R: This particular piece was...

MF: I'm asking how deep should I go?

JZ-R: As deep as you like.

MF: OK, I will.

JZ-R: Can I just say something? We all have a certain level of integrity when we write a piece.

MF: We all understand that Jean. We all here have integrity.

JZ-R: No, what I mean is, what I mean is, this particular piece became also something for me that I should give the cellist, who hopefully would be for the cello prize...

MF: We understand, we understand that. We're all in the same boat. The question is, is the boat sinking?

JZ-R: OK.

PK: I think maybe Jeanne's point needs to be clarified to a certain extent. That a number of people were given commissions specifically for competition pieces. In other words, this is going to be used when a cellist needs to compete. In other words, the kind of a priori thing was that it had to be a virtuoso piece.

MF: Yes. Well, I wouldn't consider this a virtuoso piece.

UV: What is a virtuoso piece then?

PK: Well that, this is a different issue, our outlook on what is entailed in virtuosity I suppose is going to differ very widely.

MF: Well, for example, the double stops, I thought were surreal in terms of opting for that kind of, those particular kinds of double stops, when the cello actually could, even without distorting, could get

involved in much more interesting kind of double stop situations. And I find it more glaring in a more swinging contemporary session of a fourth movement with these overlapping ostinatos to suddenly then hear this kind of Bachian type of double stop.

I would say, off hand, without getting into a mess, or hurt feelings, that, if I am the prosecuting attorney, I would say that you're guilty of a lack of self criticism, essentially. I find a great disparity in the use of material. I find an... We all role play. We all role play with our material and the execution of this material. But I feel that your role playing of conventional usage of *both* the cello and piano is somewhat excessive in this role playing. Of course, again, what is virtuoso cello writing, or what's role playing, is another thing that I give to all of us, including myself.

The double stops bothered me a lot. I seem to have drawn a box over, around double stops.

JZ-R: Can I just say something about the material of the double stops? It's very hard to get away from atonality [...] but to get a sense of triadic writing in a different way, or in a new way. And what preoccupied me was something which I felt, a word which I just used myself called multi, multi-triadicism or multi-tonality. Trying to cover a spectrum of shifting tonalities within a framework of triadic writing.

MF: Yes, but it doesn't happen here in its continuity. They seem pretty conventional in its function, as you go from one to another. I don't mind that, I feel that pantonality is in. I use it all the time. You hear it in my music.

Which then goes to what I feel is a very, very serious element and why I feel the piece does not work. There is no orchestration whatsoever. The piano part is laid out as if it's coming from heaven, it is not orchestrated. The cello, to some degree, is not orchestrated.

By orchestrated I don't mean a glissando or something like it. So there is no, as far as I'm concerned, there is no orchestration in the piece whatsoever.

JZ-R: But do you mean orchestration, ensemble orchestration?

MF: No, orchestration for the individual instruments. What happens to an ensemble's luck.

I'm talking the actual concept of what the hell a piano is, even in this context. And what it could possibly do in terms of register, in terms of this, in terms of that.

So on the technical level I would feel most critical about that. So number one, it's the disparate range of material which I feel is, does not have an element of self criticism in its choice of material.

Next, it's the orchestration of this material. Of course the whole piece might sound better to me if it was orchestrated, because orchestrated then you have to make different kind of moves. You just can't turn on the tap and let it run. That's what happens, usually, when you can orchestrate.

Then we go into another kind of compositional device, again which we throw out, which I feel has been detrimental in the twentieth century regardless of the style. And that is polyphony. Polyphony to me has murdered more talent than any other device in twentieth century music. It's easy, it's facile and...um...cut it out.

Then the last thing which, again, I'm trying to find - something which I feel that we often get into, at least think about, or have a discussion. [...] It's the whole business of self-expression. Very interesting problem, self expression. But to what degree is there self expression in Bartok? On a scale of one to ten. [Silence] That's an interesting question. I've never asked that question before.

JZ-R: What is self expression?

MF: Well, I don't know, I don't know. Self expression is where you feel that is making the composition for you, could be. Just as serial music could make someone else's composition. And it's dry, and there's no self-expression.

Remember, remember, if your notes don't get you, the work will. I mean we're, we're working with very interesting... One of the most interesting things about music for me is that you are on a tightrope. Who was that about the polyphony in Glazunov, who was he talking to?

PK: Shostakovich.

MF: Yes, marvellous, tell that anecdote.

PK: There's an anecdote that's related in "Testimony." Glazunov, apparently, was looking at the score of a younger composer and he said, "This isn't polyphony, this is muchphony."

MF: [...] You see that's why I'm not interested in styles. I mean, I'm not really interested because it's the same thing like when I said earlier about offering my students the thousand dollars if they could find another motion that fugues left out. I'm interested in various realistic things in terms of application, and how then it is used as an element of repertoire. Perhaps tomorrow or the next day I'll get Peter to play his

Chamber Concerto which he played for me last night. I think it demonstrates something that many of us can learn from. I told him that it was very much like a Léger painting, when Léger uses the whole vocabulary of possible light structures, cubism, perspective, all the things like we have. Like, like intervals, or this, whatever, and it's a fantastic eclectic array of *devices*, not an eclectic array of *styles*.

Most composers have an eclectic array of styles when they want to become interesting. Léger doesn't. And that's what's fantastic about Stravinsky. That is, when it's vertical, when he breaks out into something that appears to be polyphonic but I still feel it's vertical on its belly. And it moves between one and the other and juxtaposes these various devices which in a sense can make them, metamorphose them, into one's own imagery or one's own artistry.

I think the biggest problem is to isolate not the *parameters*, but the *devices* in the integration of the composition. Especially if one is not a formalist. And by a formalist I mean either John Cage or Boulez.
[Laughs]

OK, I'm going to turn it over now to Pete [Peter Klatzow] and then you talk. No sense defending, I'm not attacking you. I feel it's very interesting under the light, like hearing a tape and hearing the hair, and hearing that the performer isn't that good. I wouldn't give him first prize. He lost. What prize did he get? Did he get any of them?

JZ-R: That wasn't a competition, that was at home.

MF: I don't mean anything personally. One of the problems of this kind of situation - willy-nilly you are the fall guy - in which there are problems not only pertaining to you but I feel are symptomatic of us all. That's essentially what has to be done here.

I feel that the piece doesn't work and I feel that the piece doesn't work essentially only for one reason, the lack of self-criticism. Not because you cannot write a piece, or put a piece together. You accept too easily and readily what you write down.

PK: There's a very difficult issue I think that is involved here. And that is that it is extremely difficult to write a piece for a competition. And if you think that this piece doesn't succeed, then I can tell you also that Debussy does not succeed. The *Rhapsody* in fact is one of his poorer pieces and it happens to have survived because it's the only solo clarinet piece for orchestra, but I don't think anybody would put it in to the forefront of his compositions.

MF: I disagree. I think it's a nifty piece.

PK: All Debussy is nifty.

MF: I think it's a neat piece. You have to remember... Do you remember where the clarinet was put in the score?

PK: No. Isn't it above the strings?

MF: It is not the solo instrument in the score like a concerto. It's put in the clarinet section.

I think it's a neat, neat piece. However if we really want to become anti-American here, you could say that saxophone thing, that piece of crap he wrote for the American socialite Boston saxophone player, that's a rotten piece. But I disagree about the clarinet. OK.

PK: I still think that under all circumstances to write a piece for a competition, it's somehow, it's very much more difficult because you are accepting a number of conditions which, to a large extent, I think, are almost alien. Unless your natural flare in composition is to write virtuoso music.

UV: I don't know what this is. I'm sorry, may I ask you a question?

PKL: Yes, of course.

UV: What is virtuosity?

PK: Very difficult. Something that is going to make a display of the players' technique.

BJ: Do you mean one aspect of technique? Basic facility, nothing else?

PK: I don't mean nothing else. But there are lots of different tone colours that are involved in this piece.

MF: No, a piece for Kontarsky on the piano, Alois Kontarsky on the piano with Siegfried Palm on the cello. I wrote Siegfried Palm... He asked me to write him a cello concerto. Can you imagine writing a piece, just long lines, for Siegfried?

Actually, it's a very funny story. He held onto it for two years. And I heard nothing about it and I got a performance somewhere else in Hamburg and a publisher called me up, "What are we going to do about Siegfried?" I said, "Well, fuck Siegfried, give it to Hamburg." Siegfried found out and called up Hamburg direct and he says, "That's my piece, what are you doing, that's mine."

What is a difficult piece? This is not a difficult piece, I don't see this as a...the problems...I don't see any.

PK: The cellist found it difficult.

MF: Well, money could correct that. I mean I don't, I don't find anything difficult in the piece. I don't find it compositionally difficult. I don't feel that it's presenting any problems for me, musically. I feel that it's a kind of off-the-cuff piece.

I can't see one compositional idea in the piece, essentially.

PK: That's, that's a little hard I think.

MF: Well I said you are the prosecuting...I'm the prosecutor.

I mean, what's a compositional idea. I mean we can go on and on and on and on. I would say I don't find any composition.

I find a series of settings, one setting into another, essentially as a piece.

UV: That's right, I would agree.

MF: With a set-up in the beginning. Actually, two introductions in the beginning. But as the piece unfolds I don't really find the kind of...it runs too quick. I don't find the concentration that makes music stand still a bit. It's water colouring, it runs too quick. It doesn't have that kind of concentration where you don't know what's happening to time, which you would have in a piece, say, even by Brahms. Where time, to some degree, does stop.

Time here, I feel, is too... too runny, which keeps it away from being a composition.

Also, the only device is right hand, left hand. The cello is the right hand, the piano the left hand [...]. If I felt, for example, it was a kind of expression of a kind of elegant neo-classic, let's say a French piece by Jean Francaix, or something, then I would say, "Well, he shouldn't get involved too much with heavy compositional problems." Because it takes away from the excitement of that particular thing. Sometimes they wrote fantastic pieces where it just went on like that. I could think of many, by Poulenc and people. Just wonderful pieces that were fast, and not really made any kind of waves in terms of getting in deep, compositionally. I don't feel that this is, again, the selection of material for that kind of running-on style.

So I'm not saying that it couldn't exist. The thing is that you had to invent. You're sitting down at your typewriter, and you're making a story, and you have to invent a series of cast of characters, that, if not interesting, are provocative.

I don't find that in this piece.

Right, that's the last thing I'm going to say about it...Peter?

PK: Jeanne, do you want to say anything?

JZ-R: The beginning of the second movement on page 11 is probably where I try to confine myself to, not necessarily only a few pitches, but a few compositional ideas, which I don't think sound unlike certain things, or, not certain things - how shall I express it? - a concept, the type of concept that I have heard in Professor Feldman's music. A concept of working with timbre, working with sound on different levels and restricting yourself to one or two aspects of that sound. I thought this was a compositional process.

MF: Let's get into facts. We're in the second movement, did you say?

JZ-R: Yes.

MF: Yes, of course. You see, unfortunately, in its kind of... its historical references, I just see that as an introduction, a kind of stable introduction, when it starts to move on the second page.

JZ-R: Yes, I'm trying to synthesise what I had on the first page, on that page 11, to synthesise it.

MF: I would ask you this question. If you *believed* in this material on the first page, why couldn't you stick with it for twenty minutes?

UV: Professor Feldman, may I ask the question which I see not only in this score but in so many contemporary scores, which I always ask myself - why they do this in the fourth bar, that tie to the thirty-second note, you see? Why is it here...at that speed? Why not just write two half notes? Jeanne, could you explain that?

JZ-R: I'm sorry, I'm not sure what the question is?

UV: Fourth bar. There is half note tied to a thirty-second. What's the difference in...I didn't hear that, I never hear things like that. Maybe my ear isn't good enough...at this speed.

PK: You mean that it could have sounded the same not being tied?

UV: No, just two half notes.

MF: Well, I think I would answer. I think if the rhythm itself wasn't so rhapsodic and it was really...I think you would hear it better. The articulation would be better.

I think it's the rhapsodic element of this which really is a kind of ad-lib, a kind of style. I think it's a very good question in relation to an ad-lib style. Why get involved with those cracks? It's a good question.

JZ-R: Isn't it something to do with the tension of the player? If a player sees two minims, two half notes, there won't be the same kind of tension as the tension of slightly removed from the middle of the bar.

UV: I don't know. I never do that, because I can't see why. But in any case, I'm not a performer so it maybe the performers would [...] if there is anyone. Peter you play...

MF: Oh, I think she really - in defence here! - I would see its potential in relation that if Jeanne could use this in the faster sections. In other words, to *hear* that, the sub-division of the crotchet in the *faster* sections, all she would be attempting to do is try to get away from common practice rhythm. So let's not take this away from her, because I see it as a kind of potential of making the rhythms in her next pieces more interesting.

And you know, in a strict tempo, I mean you actually hear this, with ictus going is ... [Knocks 32nds on table]

PK: But in this case I think it is different because of the fact that there is actually a change of colour *on* the beat.

UV: Yes, that is true, I didn't see that.

PK: So in other words you're moving from one kind...I mean it's very subtle, but it is *in fact* a new note, it's not just a continuation of the old note.

UV: But I mean in anyway in many scores today you find this without these...

PK: Yes, I agree with you because this is a kind of overhang from integral serialism, where a note had a duration of thirteen minimal pulses and therefore it had to be thirteen because the preordained logic. And I think that a lot of young composers, in fact, studying earlier scores of Nono pick up this kind of rhythmic language without using it in the same kind of way or with the same kind of idealistic philosophical ideas behind it.

JZ-R: I take Professor Feldman's criticism of, "It was a good idea", or, "Could have been a good idea. Why didn't you take it for twenty minutes?"

That's just possibly my own problem, that I perhaps should have. It would have been maybe a good idea and a nice idea to take this and do it for twenty minutes.

MF: [...] What was very convincing in your piece was that the man believed in the material and you felt this conviction about the material. I might not have, you know, liked the material but I mean he's not writing music for me to like to the material, he's writing music for me to listen to something and ultimately ask only one question: "Do they believe in it or they *don't* believe in it?" And it's obvious, no matter how anybody writes, with certain type of professionalism, to *catch* that element of belief in one's material.

Now we get to another devil's advocate question that I would like to throw out: the difference between *material* and *ideas*. And if you have ideas first, what is its appropriate material? And if you have material where you don't know its potential or flexibility for ideas, then what are those ideas?

I don't have...I don't see you asking those questions.

PK: Can you perhaps illustrate by example? I think to make it clear, because that sounds quite abstract to me. And that's obviously very interesting as it stands, but would you like to name composers or works or whatever?

MF: Alright, maybe this afternoon if we get to it, I'll play a piece of mine which is not that long where I have material and I'm waiting for the idea. And it's a marvellous piece to demonstrate the idea, because the idea is not abstract. It's very, very clear. It's in a big piano piece of mine.

I don't usually...I myself hardly ever start off, essentially, with an *idea*. Because there's a bigger idea, and the bigger idea is: limiting myself to material. Well, I don't know if it's rigid or it's not rigid, and I have to push it around. I have to do something with my material and then, as I'm doing something with the material, all my ideas come and I'll demonstrate that this afternoon. A very good example of having the ideas come from the material rather than having ideas *a priori* and you find material. And some people find fantastic material, so I'm not anti-idea. Though I do feel the word *material* is a mystery, especially with young people. And I think I mentioned it before and I'll mention it again: that when I was growing up, one said, "What terrific material!" Now my students listen to a piece and they say, "What terrific ideas!" So something happened.

And I know it's abstract, but we are dealing with abstractions, are we not? On a scale of one to ten?

PK: Mm, there *are* abstractions; I think they're easily and more easily understood if they....

MF: Come with examples!

PK: If you come with a couple of examples. For example, what is good material and no ideas, and vice versa?

JZ-R: But surely material can't exist without ideas. I mean, can it really exist on its own, the material without ideas?

MF: Well, sometimes the material is such a great idea that you keep out of its way! [Laughs]

I mean Stravinsky is a perfect example. If he was playing poker, Stravinsky, he would play like this [Demonstrates], you see. "Close to the vest", as my Uncle Louis would say.

While *Schoenberg*, we *know*, if we look at the first measure, you see.

JZ-R: But that working with the material...and I'm just asking because I'm trying to find it out for myself.

MF: Yes.

JZ-R: When you have a basic material that you want to use, and that *working* with the material...and I'm not saying in any way *development* or anything like that, but purely in terms of the metamorphosis, or whatever you're doing with that material.

MF: All right, let me go on and even confound the abstraction. I would also like to throw out *another* one. And this is the one that concerns me now more than any of the others. This is the one that I'm thinking about all the time. The difference between...

I have a marvellous comedian friend. At the time he would say it, he'd make-believe that he had a heart attack and he would fall on the floor. He'll say, "The difference between..." and then he'd fall. [Laughter] You never know what it is!

...the difference between *vocabulary* and *language*. That's a nice one.

JZ-R: That one I can understand, I'm not so sure I can understand the other one.

MF: Is that abstract?

PK Very. [Laughter]

MF: I know my defence counsel here. [Laughter]

Are we going to play tennis this afternoon?

I know a friend that was fired from advertising. Fired! He got no future in this organisation. And as Danny was walking out, the boss said, "Hey, don't forget dinner tonight!"

Why is that abstract? Language. And you can play a game: who has it and who doesn't have it. Does Stockhausen have it? The piece you played, to me that's vocabulary. But then, Boulez, I feel, has language. So it's a game. Who has it and who doesn't have it? Does Brahms have it? Does he have language or vocabulary? Does Schoenberg have it?

UV: By vocabulary, do you mean, just words?

MF: I mean, *a demonstration*. But Brahms, too, could be a demonstration, he just liked the demonstration better. I mean it's fantastic, you're sitting out in the open air concert and you're lying down and you hear... [Sings and laughs] It's *fantastic*, no-one could demonstrate a D major chord as he could in that. To say whether it metamorphosises into ideas... Does Chopin, Liszt? Liszt is vocabulary, Chopin, language.

UV: I get the impression, not only in music, but also in Afrikaans poetry, or, I presume, in any poetry, there is difference between certain composers or poets sort of paging through the dictionary and putting words together, others writing language. Is that what you mean?

MF: Yes.

UV: Well I found this is a *little* dictionary, a very small one.

MF: That's what I meant by role playing rather than continually evolving and changing. Like, Liszt would set about also role playing, very conceptual. While Chopin it's always changing, it's always moving, always surprising, always finding.

I don't want to monopolise this.

PK: Why don't we throw it open at this stage?

JZ-R: Can I just ask something? When you used the word "abstract" just now, all the examples of composers you are giving are more or less the two contrasting types. The one *is* more abstract and the other one is more *descriptive*. And I find....

MF: I didn't use those... I don't know what that is. That's too abstract for me. [Laughs] "Descriptive and abstract."

I mean, in terms of the selection of material and how they handle it on a scale of one to ten. For example, if I wanted to explain what a beat is. If I would say [Knocks rhythmically on the table] "You are too orientated to a beat." I mean, how are you going to explain to a young composer, "You're too beat oriented."

I play Heifetz' recording of the Mendelssohn *Violin Concerto* but before it goes back into the recapitulation of the first movement, I mean, he's just playing all this *stuff*. You hear the first measure, you don't hear the beat. And, little by little, the down beat. And then the last down beat and *then he's into the tune!* It's fantastic. It's the only way to describe it. I can't talk about it in words. I have to play Heifetz playing Mendelssohn to tell them that they are doing this [Knocks evenly on table] all the time, you see.

In other words, composition is an element of *performance* in relation to beats. To be sensitive to your beat as performance, and also in relation to the down beat in terms of a composition.

One of the problems also with this kind of rhythm is to get away from the down beat. Or the illusion that you're getting away from the down beat. Some people get away from the down beat by really going *after* it! There's a wonderful piece by Harrison Birtwistle called *Silbury Air*. I don't know if anyone knows it here? It's all down beat orientated, it's marvellous. Images on down beats, rather than getting away from it.

JZ-R: Do words like purity or...*unity*. Is that something that comes into what you are saying?

MF: Nope. Because unity doesn't work either. Let me pick up again on Harry Birtwistle.

OK. A lot of his big, big works are multi-layered. The sins of polyphony. And he had this marvellous woodwind writing. He could write like woodwinds like nobody else, especially clarinets, he was a clarinet player. Then under woodwinds, there's the brass. And it's very idiomatic, maybe a little too much French horn, but it's English. [Laughter] Then we have the percussion, he's so excited about the percussion he's kind of forgetting about everything else. And underneath is the strings and you know what Harry does is that, statistically, he gives each choir a certain degree of E-flats.

That's not unity!! You can only have unity if you are working vertically. There is no unity in polyphonic writing unless you are Schoenberg or Webern. And to what degree they were really *polyphonic* as opposed to *contrapuntal* I think is really up for grabs. Rather than René Leibowitz telling you how wonderful polyphony is going to be and free you of everything.

I don't feel you can have unity unless it's absolutely vertical. Even something like *Why Patterns?* which is going in their own time, was *conceived* vertically as a kind of harmonic, timbral, contrapuntal harmony.

Now if you want to get involved in it *that* way then you have to make a *fantastic* investigation that would take you forty years. It's what kind of verticalities do you get involved with *after* common practice harmony? It'll take about forty years to really make that vertical trip. Then you could have unity. Because you're making constellations that are wed to each other, even though they don't seem to have a formal situation.

JZ-R: Are you sort of dismissing polyphony because of the rhythmic interaction that bothers you?

MF: There is no rhythmic interaction.

PK: Independence then?

MF: The atonal rhythm of polyphony is to get away from rhythmic interaction. It's just to get involved with variation. In other words, not to have the unfortunate letter that Schoenberg sent out on his fiftieth birthday criticising Schubert for being rhythmically boring. I don't know if you are familiar with that. Read it. It's disgraceful. Because Schubert was also Viennese and Schoenberg wasn't accepted by his, by that [...] city.

Can making your whole life based on what they think of you within the Ringstrasse? It's incredible.

That's the problem of...It's to get *away*. It's also to get away into an atonal rhythm. That's what most of the century has been about. And it could be a very wonderful thing at times, wonderful.

Xenakis could do it sometimes fantastic. I think Xenakis is the best polyphonist around.

JZ-R: What would you say then about the way Ligeti uses the static polyphony, where you're not aware of any real rhythmic interactions, but you are aware of a music that is much more horizontal than vertical?

MF: Well, that's only because he's taken up with the old orchestration of nothing like unity, and having six horns play a chord. He just doesn't *mix*, Ligeti. His unity comes from that particular type of formula.

They found what works *best* in polyphony. They make contributions to polyphony. I'm not dismissing it, but I am saying that, as a device that people who are using without experience, it's disastrous. It's absolutely disastrous.

And again, I say, to what degree Schoenberg and Webern were really polyphonists is up for grabs. I certainly *only* think of Webern as a contrapuntal composer. [...]

Again, interesting article by Ligeti about the octaves in the *Cantata*. Very interesting article by Ligeti. Why Webern opted for octaves in these two measures in the *Cantata* as a kind of *contrapuntal* necessity, rather than anything else.

So essentially, Jeanne, all I'm really say is, is that there is a little too much reliance on an aspect of polyphony in your music. And all I'm really saying is that you should think a little more vertically. Or, like Webern or Bach, a simultaneity of both. A balance of both.

JZ-R: And is it also a question of confining one to a material that does not...that is self-limiting, and excluding everything else? And taking something that seems to work and working with that aspect?

MF: It is not excluding everything else, it's *including* everything that is appropriate to the material.

UV: Aren't we really talking about texture here? Isn't that a better word?

MF: Maybe we are really talking about the rate of change of this texture as it's commonly known.

OK, keep your polyphony, but have the rate of texture be more...you know...

JZ-R: Gradual.

MF: Yes. And the big secret of that, I think, compositionally, is registration. And this is glaringly lacking in this piece. If you had registration with no ideas, I'll shake your hand. Because that was one of the things that always impressed me - and always I was jealous as a young man in my sibling rivalry with Boulez - was his *miraculous* instinct for registration. Just get out that old *Flute Sonata*. It makes me upset every time I play it in the classroom. It is a miracle of *selection*, of knowing what, in his role, is fabulous *flute material*, what is fabulous *piano material*, exactly *where* it should be placed in the registration. When he's dissecting, he gets some kind of [...] group of notes and it comes out in the combination that is best if it just stays in one place for a little while.

You see, that's his con-job, like a magician you know. You know we see a magician, we don't care what the hell it is, whether it's flowers or rabbit, a diamond necklace, we are interested in the fact that he gets it out of *somewhere*. And that's Boulez. One of the best professional parlour tricks in the twentieth century [Laughter]. A marvellous way of putting him down: "Listen, you might not be a great composer but you are a great magician."

JdVM: Is that why you would speak of Boulez in terms of language rather than vocabulary?

MF: Yes.

JdVM: In a sense that it doesn't matter whether it's flowers or rabbits: it's what he does with it.

MF: You asked something very dangerous and I don't think we should discuss it. [Laughter] Because it could be [held against] my music. That is: what difference does it make what notes they play as long as they get the style and the tempo and the pacing? Which is not true. And it's probably not true for him either. But I don't feel that his work is as strong once he gave up the row just as kind of source material, just to have on the page. I think that as soon as he starts giving it up, I think he didn't do too well, just like I feel that John Cage's music suffered when he gave up the big rhythmic structures of where he just marked off time and then filled it. In other words, he had a marvellous sense of the scale of the piece, and knew just what to do in terms of these big rhythmic marks that he had. That was essentially the way he wrote all his music until recently.

What he did a priori was, he had a definition of form, which is probably what everybody else's definition of form is: the division of things into parts. And he'll make his structures either combinations of symmetry or asymmetry, like a lot of people do. And he would mark it off.

That was his pre-compositional material, so to speak. And then he would have these sign-posts and work within it, and he'll make the piece what he would feel appropriate. The length would be appropriate to the instrumentation, or whatever he was using. That was an intuitive decision. Sometimes it wasn't intuitive, he tossed a penny for it. And he started to do that, but he always left that parameter not to chance. [Laughs] He always left the rhythmic structure not to chance; only what you put *in* it.

OK.

PK: Is that for *Music of Changes* as well?

MF: Yes.

How else do you think they could go on forever? [Laughter] But at least he knew where he was you know, he knew where he was...

Well, I wouldn't want you for a defence lawyer.

PK: Am I still defending?

MF: No, I'll defend, now you prosecute.

PK: Why don't we come back to this question of what's a difficult piece, I think it was actually quite an interesting idea.

BJ: Peter has been on about this for years. One of the main reasons I wrote that piano piece was that Peter's been saying for six years, "Why don't you write a difficult piece?"

MF: Was that a difficult piece?

BJ: No, not in the end.

MF: What's a difficult piece? I once saw an Australian living in The Hague, Madge, Geoffrey Madge. I once saw him sight read Xenakis.

What's a difficult piece? [Laughter]

PK: We're not talking about freaks.

MF: Xenakis wrote a piece for the organisation I was director of for oboe and percussion. Nora Post and Jan Williams [played it] at the first rehearsal, it was fantastic. Percussion part on three staves.

What's a difficult piece? I don't think there's such a thing as a difficult piece.

You know what a difficult piece is? If you don't know how to write for the instrument. That's a difficult piece.

Or the bandage you have to put on to make it sound good you know. All the ways you have to correct the lack of instrumental experience of the performer, that's a difficult piece. But if it's idiomatic and it's for the instrument, like Xenakis' cello piece which I saw Palm do once, I would say that's a difficult piece; cello piece, but it's still idiomatic.

The fact that one... What's a difficult piece? There's a marvellous - OK this will create another parameter to the whole idea of what you would think is virtuosity. I'm very embarrassed, what the hell's his name, lives in Perugia, fantastic bass player.

DK: Grillo. Franklin Grillo?

MF: Franklin yeah. [Fernando Grillo]

We were together in a hotel room in Holland and he wanted me to write a piece for him. Solo bass piece. And he starts showing me, you know, the way a lot of these performers they start showing what they could do, you know. They all sound like Stockhausen. An unnotated Stockhausen. And I said to him... I stopped him and I said, "Look, I know you're fantastic, but, you know, as a composer, I'm interested in what I could do." So I said, "Let's have a little schnapps and let me write some images."

I was a bass player in my youth, that was my second instrument. So I wasn't... but I looked at his instrument and I saw the high bridge and I saw this elegant, fantastic bass you know. And I saw he was using a French bow and the high bridge, so I started to write just one measure double stops in harmonics.

The guy looked at it, he went *under* the instrument, concentrated, played it. Fantastic. A freak. A genius on the instrument. If we had, if I wrote a piece that lasted one second of Grillo, just doing that one gesture. "OK." He went for the piece, he concentrates, plays it, this is pow, you know. It would be considered a difficult piece in its analysis of the fact that other bass players couldn't get anywhere near it.

So that whole business of it's a difficult piece, that kind of thing, or just the whole idea. I find just for a performer to play a tone of mine on the cello without sounding like a synagogue is somewhat difficult to do. [Laughter] Or for a soprano to sing without wobbling is difficult, so there's all you know.

PK: What about the Berio *Sequenzas* considered in this context then?

MF: Well, students play it, so how difficult could it be?

PK: The students are so good nowadays.

MF: I never heard a student play the harp *Sequenza* however.

UV: Now it's a short story I used in a programme note recently, it's not my own story. András Schiff told this when he was here. A pianist. He said what is difficult... I asked him, "What is virtuosity?" He said that he finds the first chord of the fourth Beethoven concerto more difficult than the rest of the piece.

BJ: I mean that's surely the thing nowadays. I mean, shared facility is so widespread that anything that requires control more than just amazing digital precision is actually much more difficult like, like [...]

MF: Just to begin, just to begin a piece?

BJ: Yeah sure. Just the concentration of just.... Yeah that chord. That's why *your* music is so hard. It's insane!

PK: I think rhythmic issues are often very much more difficult than anything that may be required of the fingers. In other words, I think that it's the intellectual finesse required in measuring durations which quite often poses an almost insuperable difficulty for a lot of very traditional players.

BJ: Sure, but in a sense that's not kind of intellectual, it doesn't come under the category of virtuosity any more.

MF: Yes, I do think it does. I think that that requires a different kind of virtuosity but it is, nevertheless. I mean, let's consider the word out of the context of the Czerny *Etudes*.

BJ: Yeah sure.

MF: Well, I think it's kind of learned characteristics. For example, the very, very nice violin player that played my old violin piece. Never had experience with contemporary music. After he would play something, he would put the arm down, and have a nervous breakdown; bring it up... And I said to him, "Why don't you just keep the goddamn bow there!" The thing that really helped was that I said, "Alright. Now don't take offence." I said to him, "You are the first desk man, that you have the reflex of a first desk man in an orchestra. Think of reflex." And he got it. And when it was all finished and he got the notes, I said to him, "Now don't think of the audience, think of only one person." And he said, "Who's that?" and I said, "Heifetz." And he went out there, and he was kind of like a little junior Heifetz.

So all these learned things in terms of training people. Little simple things, what to do, take a lot of difficulty. I think the lot of difficulty is that they don't have performance *models*. It's essentially the big problem, which might not be a bad project for this... I don't know if you have workshops or ensembles in how to play the music, or if it's too expensive. There's a model: the Swedish Radio School actually would have their most talented kids in *residence* there, and they would have big quartets come in to show them how to play the Ligeti string quartet, or whatever. That kind of training.

In America the Concorde and the Julliard string quartet had junior string quartets that they trained in terms of their repertoire, both contemporary and... So that's an important aspect. It would be very fruitful.

PK: We're just not getting a lot of money here.

Well, have we finished with Jeanne? I feel we're not really finished with Jeanne.

BJ: You know, if I can just make one observation, I've just come to terms, really going back to competitions and things and the difficulty of writing for competitions. I was just having a discussion with a cellist friend of mine who was playing for the SASOL bursary, and he figures that, because of the fact that people are more impressed with your digital abilities than anything else, that if the competition is open to any instrumentalist, the violinist will win it hands down. Because it is simply the repertoire that shows off the notes and...

MF: This business is remote to me. I know it's big in England. The whole idea of writing pieces for a competition is absolutely remote to me.

I'll tell you for example. I wrote a piece for Paul Zukofsky and it was a big violin competition. Paul Zukofsky chose the repertoire already written and anybody entering that competition had to play the Cage's *Six Pieces* for violin and piano, which you should hear, it's one of the great gorgeous masterpieces of the twentieth century. So he had to play that, my *Spring of Chosroes*, some Bach and other things. In other words the repertoire was given that they already had to learn, he didn't ask anybody to write something for competition. I think that's much better. Much better. But this piece... this role playing of what virtuosity is that makes a piece like Penderecki's *Capriccio* for violin and orchestra a piece of junk, a piece of junk, because he's writing... he has this ideal violin and orchestra, nineteenth century idea. We all do it, we all role play. Very very dangerous, very dangerous to already, a priori, say, "Oh this is a flute and this is what a flute can do." Ridiculous. I'm trying to think of an example to confound you, give me another ten minutes. You say that you are the authority, well then stop writing it. Composers unite, all you have to lose is your commissions! [Laughter]

[...]

I have a very interesting problem now: I can't control my pieces. But I certainly can control the premieres. If a piece is reasonable, like the piece I'm going to play, hopefully play this afternoon, *Piano*, which is 30 minutes.

The reason I wrote it for Roger Woodward is that I know that he would memorise it. [...] The Japanese pianist Aki Takahashi memorises, and I advise you that it makes a fantastic impression. It's like having a printed score that kind of reassures the establishment that the publisher wants to make an investment on you or something. Your career will be different if you get a musician that... In other words, all you need, the formula is simple: write what you believe, get somebody who believes it to play it by memory.

[...] I could never learn a piece and get it pretty perfect as a young pianist if I was always looking at the music and playing it. I had to memorise it [...] Composers don't do that. They don't memorise their material. The memorisation of the material also then. And I'm talking about everything, whether it's a note or this, memorise it. Get it in your head, and that will give you ideas that you'd never think of if you were just writing it. When I work on a piece, I memorise the material.

For example, the opening flute line in the flute and orchestra piece [*Flute and Orchestra (1978)*]. That convoluted line between major seconds and minor seconds and that kind of pacing. It was a hunk of time. I measured it, because, not only was it the potential of the intervallic possibilities of the world of the piece, but it was also that hunk of time - a new proportion for me. Rather than something that goes and ends. And then you say, "Well, let's go onto the next section." So I think that's the best advice I can give you, is to memorise this material, then you could hear possibilities for *colour*.

For example, there's one page here we start off with two notes in the arco. It's lugubrious.

JZ-R: mm

MF: Those were pizzicato notes, you see. So you're not listening. You are involved with the notes. If you were really listening and memorising that material, or half memorise it, you would know that those were pizzicatos. A marvellous opportunity is to kind of catch your deficiencies and maybe...

A very humorous thing: Do you know the burst of the three oboes in the piano and orchestra piece I played you last night? I'll tell you how they came there, because they are out of nothing. *Inmitten drin* I have these three high oboes. I'm looking at the piece, I'm looking at the piece, and I said to myself, "Oh my God, the piece has a woodwind deficiency!" I forgot about the woodwinds. I don't know how I forgot about the woodwinds. I was into string chords, remember all those [...] involved here. I forgot about the woodwinds. What am I going to do? Am I going to go back and put in woodwinds? But it didn't need any woodwinds, but at least I caught it. And then, it plays a chord in here in this unlikely register - three oboes and a piccolo - and you don't want to hear a woodwind for the rest of your life! [Laughter] I gave myself a shot, a vitamin A, B, C and D, all together and then stumbled back to the table.

Now if you memorise your material and you know your material, you will catch those things, you would catch. You would say, where are the *pizzicatos*? Unless you thought that it was an avant-garde device for a South African jury that if you put in a *pizzicato* they'll think it's a gimmick. [...]

JZ-R: I think there's almost also kind of an inverted anxiety because, at the same time as not wanting to be gimmicky, you are not quite sure what *is* gimmicky in the end. And I think one thing you said very close to the beginning of the Festival was that you got a student and you said, write a piece without *glissandos* and *pizzicatos* and this and that and the other. Just don't give me all the devices but give me the music.

MF: Well, that's because that's all he knew was *pizzicato* and *ponticelli*, and, all he knew was the Webern *Bagatelles*. He didn't know anything. And I took away *pizzicato* from that guy and he didn't have an idea in his head. [Laughter]

However if you took away a scale from Mozart, he wouldn't have had an idea in his head either.

[Music is played]

MF: Was this a commission?

UV: Yes.

MF: OK. [Laughs]

It's terrifically successful and maybe that's what I feel is the problem. Remember if your lawsuit doesn't get you, the world does. Very successful but I have some formal comments about it. And it really has to do, for example, with applying old ways of building up a sonic world.

I would say the piece is essentially an A B A B piece. Even though the B changes all the time, because what the B is, is a certain articulation of material that is not necessarily textural. That A is textural. And that B I would call more *motivic* or more *isolated* or *emerging out of*, so that's why I feel it's essentially an A B A B piece.

Formally, I feel that you are building your texture very much probably what your earlier music was like. That is, from the ground up. And I think you had marvellous opportunities to stop in the middle, or whatever, you know. In other words we had the weight of the ground. Even though it's not formal harmony or anything, you're still in a kind of historical symbolic sense. I always have the feeling of the bottom, and you know.

So the whole problem, that of texture. I also feel that it's again too goal oriented and just if the music is goal oriented rhythmically, it is very, very difficult to get away from the beat and syncopation. And always breaking your neck to figure how you're going to make it interesting.

In *your* sense, how to make it interesting would be the design. And I think you should explore other possibilities of design, rather than that which is linear and working that way to a point.

And now we get to the crucial problem. It's that outside of the tune which is very effective, but creates problems. Or that all your B material, the bassoon solo, the emerging trombones, create problems. Because, what I feel for *my* ear, the problems that it creates is the whole concept of *background* and - I was going to say *foreplay* - but *foreground*. And I feel that's in my ears, the whole idea of background and foreground.

And so you get a sense of terraced dynamics and all those things that go involved with background and foreground.

UV: Do you mean there's too much foreground or...

MF: I mean that I don't want to designate texture as a category of texture.

Sometimes, there are pieces, especially when you are writing a piece, for example, a clarinet quintet which I am writing, or a concerto of some kind, when there is some kind of hierarchical thing going on up there.

The big problem for me is, how to keep it flat, or how do I not make it *that* hierarchical.

You cannot help but make it... You've got the clarinet going with the string quartet, how could it *not* be hierarchical?

I almost refused a commission. It was a commission, here are the dangers of commission. It was not within the way I hear sounds. Clarinet and string quartet. But then I decided to go with it. That's all. Just decided to go with it. And I decided [to go with it] by not giving the clarinet what might be considered significant material. It was the only way I got around it. Elegant material, beautiful material, perhaps material very much like the Debussy *Clarinet Rhapsody*, but without the runs. [Laughter]

Essentially, on a kind of philosophical level, I have no criticism of the piece. But on a philosophical level and on a technical level, to what degree can we still rely... For example, you're not relying on the usual conversation, right? But we have to rely on *something*. I think that what is writing this piece is background and foreground. It's helping you. This gives this a push, this gives this a push. It's another kind of conversation in this dialogue, and the question, the *frage*, that I ask here, is, "To what degree - *again* - can we still write background and foreground music?"

One of the most fantastic things, interesting things in twentieth century painting was the emergence of '*out-of-perspective*'. Now, background and foreground is all perspective, to a great degree. But the history of twentieth century painting, suggested in Cézanne, and articulated magnificently in Matisse's *Red Studio*, which was the first great masterpiece, and perhaps the greatest masterpiece, where you had this fantastic thing that shook up *every* artist. *No* artist could... It affected even cubism, his arch-rival in the other part of town. He created this fantastic painting that was flat. And it became a prototype of how to do it flat. We already know how to do it with perspective. Which leads to a lot of questions.

Lord Mountbatten of all people, Lord Mountbatten - I saw this documentary, and he says, he's talking about science and everything, and he says that the minute something is known it's obsolete. Being that we don't have that many alternatives in music, it can only make a metamorphosis. Counterpoint can have another function, melody can have another function, harmony can have another function. We have to

some degree made metamorphoses of exactly the same thing, symbolically as we've been using throughout history. That's why I don't like my students to invent symbols for *pizzicato*. I say, "We already have symbols for *pizzicato*: p-i-z-z. It's enough." [...]

But we try to reinvent background and foreground, our perspective. Of course any *art* student today, at least in America, can make a flat painting in two minutes without even being talented. It took forty-five years of just struggling - whether it's Léger, or Picasso or the abstract expressionists like Pollock - just to give you this thing where it has the *feeling* of depth without the methodology of arriving at depth. Maybe through saturation of the paint, maybe by not sizing the canvas and just having seepage going to give *something*, or like Hans Hoffman take a forty dollar tube of red and just chuck!

I was with a painter once, we saw a Hoffman show. He says, "You know, this show cost high above forty thousand dollars." He says, "You know what paint that is, that's Winsor & Newton paint he's putting on raw, that's fifteen dollars a tube!" But it was a way of making his work successful, because he created this feeling that you're looking at a picture and it's not falling off the canvas onto the floor and dirtying it. Which is what a lot of abstract paintings look like. They look as if... "Hold it up otherwise it's just a mess going to run onto the floor!" [Laughter]

This is not a criticism, because, I mean, what else are you going to do if you have A and B, what else are you going to do? I mean Stravinsky, what are you going to do? You're going to criticise Stravinsky because he has fabulous patterns in his A, like in the *Symphony of Winds*? You're going to criticise him because each pattern after another is fabulous? You can't. I mean I can't criticise you either for this. But it's a big, big problem.

We cannot eliminate. If I have a piano, it's like the fat of chicken soup coming to the top, there's nothing I can do. I've got the orchestration, there's nothing I can do. It's going to come out and you're going to hear this D-flat oscillating on the surface. There is nothing I can do, but what I can do is make a consummate chord where the D-flat at least is on top, rather than burying it. And rather than getting background and foreground, it's a little tilted. And I do that a lot with my violin and piano things. I kind of tilt it a little bit. It's not head-on like this, it's a little tilted. Even in terms of its... The note I take for the solo instrument that emerges out of the chord, however I do it. OK so that's another discussion about background and foreground.

Then another aspect here is: what is the nature of the material you use when it gets *away* from the tune? I always felt that when I do that, I'm very, very careful to feel that I'm under pressure to have either an element of contrast, or something that sounds...that sounds in a way I don't really want it to go. I didn't see any formal reason for the introduction of, say, that very elegant bassoon.

I mean it is elegant, a marvellous transition. I can understand the transitions if you have a trombone holding over and then you go into a section. But the whole via injecting material within the context of the piece is...another aspect of material. Should we look for it? The whole idea of maybe understanding one's piece is that maybe the piece in a sense doesn't have, should *not* have material. That we should have this conjuring act of these textures and everything. And in a formal way it works, the A B A B but I think in a kind of artistic way, it then becomes a little bit contrived in terms of, "Now we have our A," and then I expect, and I say to myself, "What is he going to do in his B?" So it becomes a formula.

And one of the problems of our formulas, when they start to articulate themselves, is that, no matter how good the material is, it doesn't work. Because that element of selection is really up for grabs. And we learn from Debussy and other composers that sometimes the B should be *really* startlingly different, you see. And here I felt there was still homogenous. And so, even though it was a different kind of language, it had the homogeneity of the textured situation. So I thought it was too close. But I know you thought about these things, and you wanted that homogeneity. But essentially, there's something I really say to even you: this whole idea of background and foreground.

PK: I think it's a very interesting problem because I think that to a certain extent you are playing a kind of trick with your listener if you're talking about a flat surface. Because I think that, even with the black paintings, you are going to get a listener who will *find* a foreground. And then everything, automatically, does become background. And I don't think that however hard you try to create a piece that is absolutely flat, there is a kind of shimmering surface, the listener is going to fix onto something no matter how small it is and therefore you have the situation.

MF: But how about when it's all mixed up like in Debussy's *Jeux*?

PK: Oh, it's full of foreground and background.

MF: I know, but there is a kind of running away from it in terms of the skirting element of it.

PK: Well, there's a kind of interesting moving in and out of a flat surface which I think is a very interesting situation which I do find in this piece. I must be honest, I think the A B is too simple a form of analysis. I think it's more than just the A B. For example, one of the things fascinates me...

MF: They were symbolic Bs.

PK: Yes, I know but what I find really fascinating about the piece is that it's actually... it seems to be a lot of different forms at the same time. For example, the way that it opens up with a very stark contrast between the two different types of material and he takes it pum, pum, pum-pum, and gradually works it towards the direction of the other material, so that by the time that it comes and the strings are strumming it, it has become figuration if you like. It's become part of the, the more obviously twentieth century material in the piece, this kind of weaving together. You see the problem is I think that in this situation, all of us are going to interpret all of our pieces in the way that *we* work. In other words, "I like that formula, I'm happy. I found it in your piece." And I would be very sorry to hear you say that you didn't intend it, but I would tell you that it was there in any case. But you see I would like to go back to this question of background and foreground because I think that it's a very important issue.

UV: Can I say something?

PK: Of course.

UV: What interests me, listening to it, is that I've got this material going which sounds very much... No, I can't make up my mind whether it is background or foreground. It has got a sort of double personality. And then suddenly I have this very punctuate type of chord thrown in and then I still carry on with the material. But it's because of that punctuation somehow the dimension changes. It doesn't sound like exactly the same thing and yet it is.

PK: I think the masterpiece in that form actually would have to be created electronically in a way.

There's a marvellous piece by a Dutch composer if I'm right called Jaap Fink called *Scream*, do you know the piece?

UV: Yes, I know it. He's not a composer though.

PK: What is he?

UV: He doesn't call himself that, he's a technician.

PK: Alright, then he's a very good technician. It's marvellous piece of absolute...

MF: Maybe background and foreground now should be left for technicians! [Laughter]

UV: No, he's a technician at the Utrecht Institute of Sonology. He's not there as a composer.

MF: Look, I'm not trying to get rid of *anything*. I'm trying to - essentially for the younger people here - is to say that everything is fine, but you have to make a... You have to do it, but you have to make a leap [...]. For example, instead of doing it in a historical way, learn from someone like Boris Pasternak. Read *Safe Conduct*, Boris Pasternak's marvellous autobiography, where he talks about his own attitude towards art and his whole steepage in the Russian language and the English language, especially. He did one of the few fantastic translations of Shakespeare in the Russian language. But anyway, he has a marvellous passage where he says, "I love the sense of historical symbolism." *Historical* symbolism, rather than actually using symbolically, in a new language, the same old thing.

So what is this business of historical symbolism? When I talked about Pollock having the unending line of Michelangelo, that's historical symbolism. Maybe there's a new way we could use background and foreground. In other words, we are not going to give it up, we are going to have it. Ligeti writes a field: everything is fine, everything is wonderful, nothing is wrong, except you hear an English horn coming out, it kills it.

PK: I don't know if it kills it.

MF: It kills it because...he *kills* it, he *surrendered*, he *surrendered*. If music doesn't finish you off, your taste will. His taste, "Ah! An English horn here." He didn't have the strength of character to say, "No I'm not going to put an English horn here, it's too effective." And it really then relegates everything else to *texture*. Because, until you heard the English horn playing a sustained sound, which was melody symbolically, the texture was accompaniment. And it *reduced* it.

I didn't like it. I was sore when I read it, and I'm going to tell him when I see him. Even though that was an old score, I'm going to say, "Take it out! And you might have a chance." No, his taste! An English horn here!

Which goes again, this whole business of taste. One's taste about history, one's taste about what music should be. How could we live without it I suppose.

My feeling is, that you can't get away from it. A lot of pieces of mine that come off *all taste*, where I thought I got rid of it. One of the affectations of the painting of the...like a Pollock, you will notice that the early paintings of those abstract painters did not have their name on it. They didn't have their name on. they had their name on the back, with an arrow: how to hang it! After they became known, the name, then, went on the front! Where to put the name was a big thing. De Kooning would use it as part of the painting: "*De Kooning*." Oh, you know, he'll wind up the painting with his name. Pollock would put it always in the same place, always bled out, always in the right-hand corner, he would give his name a lot of space.

Philip Guston would put a "PG" as part of the, say, a pink rose thing that would melt into peachy, and it would....So it became very important.

But the point that I really want to make is, at the beginning they all thought they were making anonymous art. But each one became superstars in America.

In fact, I was teaching another artist's kid. She was about seven years old. She lived down the block from where I lived, and I was teaching her piano about an hour a week. Helen Tworikov, a darling girl. She came into the house for the first time... She's seven years old. She turns to a big black painting I own by Robert Rauschenberg, and she says, "Well, you know, we've got one of those too." She said, "That's a very interesting period of Bob Rauschenberg." Seven, eight years old, she's an art historian! [Laughter] She lived in it.

So the point that I really want to make is, that all our characteristics are going to come. Our penchant for polyphony is going to come out. Our penchant for our harmony is going to come out. Our penchant for instrumentation is going to come out, anyway. The thing is don't make a necessity of our gifts or a virtue of our necessities to begin with.

I always feel I am never aggressive about my music because I know it's the only kind of music that I could write. So no sense acting as if it's out of necessity and I can't make a virtue out of it. And we all have that on a scale of one to ten.

So I don't ask for too many demands of anybody except trying to make the historical symbolically. I think that we're already eighty years into the flat surface. And to understand that there's no return, really, in doing it in the old way. The only way we can do it. In fact I think it's one of the most interesting problems left in music: how to handle the background and foreground in an interesting way.

We don't have any problems collectively, we only have problems individually. In the collective sense, in the consensus sense, I think we *have* to go along. We've got to go along whether we like it or not, otherwise in a symbolic sense we are writing Léhar waltzes, and we don't know it. Which *is* an argument, it's a fantastic argument. It's an unending argument, you see. And the old argument essentially is: to what degree the music of the past is something akin to iconography - and it has a religious connotation, a moral connotation - rather than thinking of it as my closest friend.

A fabulous painter that just died [Philip Guston]. We had an appointment to go down to Chinatown. He was painting. I didn't want to bother him. I sat in the corner. I sat in the corner for about two hours and waited. And finally - he knew I was there - he let me in. And we didn't say anything, and I just walked in, and he was working. And he finished up his work for two hours, and when it was all finished, he says, "You know Morton," he said, "it's just coloured dirt," he says. "I'm getting excited about coloured dirt, that's all the hell it is! I'm thinking about Rembrandt, I'm thinking about this one, but it's coloured dirt!" He was very upset. He over-ate that night. [Laughter]

The whole idea of what he's making is made from *coloured dirt*, and he's giving it spiritual, and historical, and the holy catechism about it. Interfering with his coloured dirt. The dirt was fighting all these phantoms, you see.

Yet, that was his burden, and that was the subject of his art. His burden is the symbolic history of the renaissance of Piero [della Francesca]. And yet, it's made with coloured dirt.

A very interesting man, because he articulated the problem for me musically, as well. Like, you know a kid writes a ninth chord and that's it. You don't have to do anything with a ninth chord, huh? You've got your ninth chord, instant Gershwin...eh? [Laughter] Instant Gershwin. I got all the girls, when I was in high school, with concertos just full of ninth chords. Do you want to hear the tune? [Laughter]

JdVM: You talk about background and foreground in terms of hierarchy. Isn't that one of the problems?

MF: That's another country and another meaning. That's already a problem because then I'm inflicting. I don't want to inflict. Everything now I am saying, has to do with what I feel is not an *unreasonable* thing to say.

But as far as hierarchy is concerned, I don't buy it. And if it does exist, it's changing all the time. I mean, to me, hierarchy, in the most banal and simplistic terms, would be: a very bad student of mine comes in. She's writing a lousy song, and the hierarchy is the melody, and she makes *nothing* of the accompaniment.

I give a whole seminar on just melody and accompaniment which - they are orchestration seminars - where the accompaniment... For example, of the way Schubert would have... [Sings] against the melody of the *Unfinished Symphony*. *Where* he put the accompaniment. Having made an image, willy-nilly, whether consciously or not. How sensitive it was. Just *where* he put the pizzicato line against the melody. He took it out of the world of accompaniment, and if anything, it glamorised and glorified one of the most beautiful sections ever written. A simple section of just a melody and accompaniment. *On a par*, you know. I never know what to listen to. I'm listening to two things at one time.

[...]

UV: What about hierarchy?

MF: It's a dangerous thing, it's a dangerous thing. I think it's a terrific compositional aid of setting everything up and then maybe forgetting about it.

PK: If you call a piece *Piano and Orchestra*, aren't you establishing a kind of hierarchy, even just in the mind of the listener before he's heard a note? In other words the first thing he's going to listen to is the piano.

MF: Yes, but it's knocked down as soon as you open the score, because there's another piano in the orchestra.

PK: Well, you have already been given a focus by the title. And is it knocked down?

MF: Well, in terms of sound it's knocked down.

PK: No the first thing you hear is the piano.

MF: And then you hear the piano and you're not sure which piano it is.

PK: You're still listening to pianos, it doesn't matter if it's one piano or two pianos, you're still hearing piano versus orchestra.

MF: Ah, but at least I don't call it *Piano Concerto*. [Laughter]

You know, I mean, all it is, it's a kind of, I mean the music is very... The attitude of my instruments is very much the attitude of big movies in the 50's. Like [Jean-Paul] Belmondo, the anti-hero you know, and kind of people like that. So I've written many wonderful pieces, *String Quartet and Orchestra*, *Cello and Orchestra*, *Oboe and Orchestra*. *Tuba and Orchestra* I don't think I could handle, that's already a hierarchy.

DK: A lower-archy.

MF: Touché. Can I write that down?

I don't know how we can escape it. I wish you could tell me how we could escape it, one way or another. If your title doesn't get you, your piece will. I think it probably gets you, it's like a theme and variation in this conflict, what will get you.

Well, it's very very interesting. Look, you grow up with something. There's peer pressure, there's peer pressure. Look at the instrumentation on my 60's pieces. Vibraphone. Although I never used the vib with them all. John Cage couldn't understand how, with all my taste, I could ever use a vibraphone. John said there are two things he hated most of all, the vibraphone and the dominant seventh chord. I once asked him to a concert and we're standing in the wings together and I said, "Well John what do you think about my vibraphone?" He said, "Was that a vibraphone? I thought it was a celesta."

I mean, if they pick up a score say two thousand years from now, they'll know exactly its ten year or fifteen year period if they look at the score and it says, "Vibraphone."