

“On the True Art of Playing the Music of Morton Feldman”

A note by Siegfried Mauser excerpted from the liner notes accompanying his CD recording of Feldman piano music on the Kairos label (0012362KAI, 2003). A new translation is presented here.

C.P.E. Bach’s revolutionary treatise on musical education entitled *On the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* from 1752 (reprint Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1994) taught a new ideal of naturalness in keeping with the new aesthetic of “sentimentalism” in the Age of the Enlightenment. In this sense, “true” is always to be equated with “natural”. The search for a true interpretation of Feldman’s music, one which would be in keeping with its very nature, has repeatedly been the cause of considerable argument. Starting from the immediate New York environment, represented by performers such as Aki Takahashi, an approach that was as emotionally neutral, undemonstrative, and as restrained as possible was long considered imperative. In 1987, the year in which Feldman died, the author had the good fortune to work with him on the performance of *Palais de Mari* at the Darmstadt International Summer Course for New Music. This resulted in a completely surprising interpretative aesthetic. Feldman placed great emphasis on three points that the present interpretation seeks to implement: from a formal point of view, the clarity of period relationships was the most important factor. In other words, how the groups of sounds combine with empty measures to form different relationships of length and brevity, and thus produce a shifting scale of periods of slightly different lengths. A second factor was the emphasis on the quiet, delicate gestures at the beginning and end of phrases that differentiate each of the small forms within the periods. Finally, Feldman warmly welcomed my proposal to produce a constantly modified, highly differentiated sound, Schubert and Debussy coming to his mind as historical points of reference (“*Oh, how lovely, that sounds like...*”). This inevitably results in a discretely arranged image of the sound and form of the music, capable of offering a possible alternative to Feldman’s traditional, aesthetically reduced interpretation.