

## A NOTE ON THE NEWLY PUBLISHED PIANO PIECES

In addition to the complete solo piano pieces previously published by C. F. Peters, and here newly engraved, the present volume includes *Nature Pieces*, *Variations* and *Intermissions* 3 and 4, works published here for the first time.

*Nature Pieces* for piano combines musical elements of Feldman's youth with those that remain in the composer's mature musical language. The work, dated 1951, was premiered by David Tudor at Hunter College in New York City on January 18, 1952, as the accompaniment to Jean Erdman's dance *Changing Woman*. The program for the evening indicates the following three-part solo: I. Forest voice, Wind voice, Brook voice, Earth voice. II. Sea voice, Desert voice. III. Moon voice. The distribution of these segments among Feldman's accompanying five piano pieces (numbered I through V) remains uncertain. Only the third piece suggests a three-part division, while the others adhere to one character.

The soft arpeggios with wide intervals in No. I employ a limited number of notes, from which the repetition of central notes in different registers becomes apparent. Again and again, especially towards the end, Feldman establishes one and two-note models which he repeats with rhythmic shifts, generally separated by long general pauses. He uses this procedure also in No. III, although there with up to five-note models. The passage of long sustained tones in the middle section resumes the quiet chordal structure of No. II, likewise using major sevenths and minor ninths as the characteristic interval framework. In addition, both Nos. II and III abandon the dynamic uniformity of No. I, a feature which reappears, however, in the parallel piece No. IV, with its simple scale segments. Simple oscillating models are here repeated up to four times – a procedure typical of the mature Feldman. No. V, on the other hand, with its Webernesque leaping chords, is reminiscent of the youthful *Illusions* of 1948. Its total range is again a major seventh, here spread over three octaves, and its framework interval is constantly present in frequent appearances in the outer notes. The repetition of the entire piece finally brings about formal unity.

Also intended for a solo dance, *Variations* was composed in 1951 for Merce Cunningham. In this piano piece, Feldman's typical style of the early fifties appears for the first time. Dynamics are to be kept "as softly as possible"; sometimes extremely long general pauses give brief single sound events enough space to continue sounding; and the musical material is limited to a few aggregates containing characteristically soft dissonant intervals. These aggregates appear in various combinations and as different rhythmic models that are often repeated. In this way, time seems to stand still. In place of development, Feldman substitutes a changing atmosphere. And his extended pauses blur any feeling of a defined meter. The start of the sounds becomes unpredictable, even with rhythmically precise repetition (such as the four-note chord which sounds six times in the middle of the piece).

Feldman completed the score on March 24, 1951, in time for the guest appearance of Cunningham and Cage at the University of Washington in Seattle. It was there that the two, to whom the work is dedicated, first performed the dance (with the title *Variation* [sic]) with Feldman's music. That this piece was repeated only a few times was due to the enormous (actually unperformable) complexity of the choreography which had been constructed by chance operations. Cunningham commented as follows:

"... They were classic ballet steps, arranged in a chance order, and it was impossible, I couldn't do it. You're supposed to do without preparations four pirouettes, suddenly. ... There was one day when I was working in the studio when I found a way to do it, but I could never do it again, I just couldn't hold it. It was in three parts, an andante, an adagio, and an allegro; the first two were separate, and the second went from the adagio directly into the allegro. It wasn't terribly long, two or three minutes at the most, but it was just impossible to do."\*

For this reason the score disappeared into the archive of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and was probably, like the *Nature Pieces*, not performed again during the next half century.

Two short pieces from the piano cycle *Intermissions*, composed between 1950 and 1953, met a similar fate. When Feldman signed an exclusive contract with C. F. Peters in 1962, the firm published Numbers 1 and 2 as *Two Intermissions* (1950). *Intermission* 5 (1952) was also published and in the following year *Intermission* 6, but numbers 3 and 4 were not. These pieces were found in David Tudor's archive only after Feldman's death.

## IV

 $\text{♩} = 66$ 

The first system of music is in 3/8 time. The right hand begins with a quarter rest, followed by a half note G4, a quarter note A4, and a half note B4. The left hand plays a triplet of eighth notes (F3, E3, D3) marked with a '3' and a bracket, followed by a half note G3. The system concludes with a half note G4 in the right hand and a half note F3 in the left hand. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking is placed above the first measure of the left hand.

Pedals 1 and 3 are held throughout

The second system begins at measure 10. The right hand features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, including a half note B4 with a flat and a half note A4. The left hand provides a bass line with eighth and quarter notes, including a half note G3. The system ends with a half note B4 in the right hand and a half note G3 in the left hand.

The third system begins at measure 18. The right hand contains a complex melodic passage with many beamed eighth notes and a half note B4 with a flat. The left hand continues with a steady bass line of eighth and quarter notes, including a half note G3. The system concludes with a half note B4 in the right hand and a half note G3 in the left hand.

## Piano Piece (to Philip Guston)

Morton Feldman  
(1963)

Extremely soft. ♩ = 66 - 88

The musical score is written for piano and consists of four systems of staves. The first system has two staves, the second and third systems have three staves each, and the fourth system has two staves. The music is written in a complex, non-representational style with many accidentals and dynamic markings. The tempo is marked 'Extremely soft. ♩ = 66 - 88'. The key signature is not explicitly stated but appears to be B-flat major or D-flat major. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like '8va' and '8ba'.