

**MORTON FELDMAN**  
**(1926-1987)**  
***for Philip Guston (1984)***

DISC A (64:11)

❶ (19:22)    ❷ (27:04)    ❸ (17:45)

DISC B (24:44)

❶ (24:44)    ❷ (17:14)    ❸ (31:28)

DISC C (54:34)

❶ (23:09)    ❷ (17:41)    ❸ (13:43)

DISC D ❶ (56:12)

*Enhanced Track for Windows 95, 3.1; and Apple Macintosh Platforms*

members of the California EAR Unit

**Dorothy Stone, flutes**

**Arthur Jarvinen, percussion**

**Gloria Cheng Cochran, piano/celeste**

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Just in terms of duration, Morton Feldman's musical legacy is remarkably varied: wispy, two-minute pieces consisting of little more than orchestrated silence; one string quartet lasting 100 minutes, another lasting six hours, the four-hours-plus of *for Philip Guston*, the music at hand. Much of that legacy consists of works that seek to celebrate the closeness in spirit that Feldman derived from his personages in the arts he regarded as kindred spirits. These celebrations--*for Frank O'Hara, for John Cage, for Samuel Beckett*, etc. - aren't exactly stylistic paraphrases in the sense of, say, Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin*. What you can hear in them is, rather, Feldman's own process of self-exploration, seeking out from within his own unruly soul the areas of congruence with the namesakes of these pieces. Was Feldman himself in any way cognizant of the congruences others may find between this music and the art of his close friend Philip Guston, pre-eminent figure among the Abstract-Expressionist painters of the so-called "New York School"? Perhaps. Does it matter? Perhaps not. Unlike other bright lights that shared his constellation--the composers John Cage and Earle Brown most notably--Feldman demanded total control over the directions and dimensions of his work. The performers were chained to the score; it was the listener who, if willing, might be set free to absorb, to suggest possible connections.

The New York School held no classes, issued no syllabus, hired no faculty. Its very name was invented only in retrospect, a journalistic convenience to describe a way of regarding the arts (all the arts) that flourished in New York when, in the years following the end of World War II, the creative world

proclaimed 1) that it needed a fresh start and 2) that New York, relatively unscathed by the physical and psychological devastation recently visited upon the European centers, was where it should happen.

Another term, "abstract expressionism," served in a somewhat wobbly way to identify the earmarks of this new direction in the arts. True, some tacit agreement did bind its members--to accentuate the abstract and eliminate the figurative, in painting and in the other arts as well. The use of the term "expressionism" seemed somewhat more suspect; the screams and contortions of pre-First-World-War middle-European art, or the tortures visited upon Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, seemed a far cry from the cool abstractions of a de Kooning, a Rauschenberg or a Guston, members in high standing in this new movement. Actually, even the most casual observer would have found as many varieties of style under the "New York School" rubric as there were artists involved. What really identified its practitioners--and what drew into their company artists from disciplines other than painting--was the unifying desire for a breakaway from traditional esthetic principles, toward a greater freedom of individual, personal artistic expression, the license to define one's art on ones own terms. "Art is what artists do"; the defining cry served the outlook of the painters, of John Cage and Morton Feldman among musicians, of the dancer Merce Cunningham and their kindred spirits by the hundreds. It defined, as well, the remarkable linkages that formed across the traditional boundaries between the arts. The work at hand, Feldman's *for Philip Guston*, composed in 1984 (four years after Guston's death, three years before

Feldman's own), music formed as much out of silence as sound, is a case in point.

There's a Guston painting from 1954, on view at New York's Museum of Modern Art and reproduced in Robert Hughes' wonderful new *American Images*. It's called simply, in typical abstract-expressionist lingo, *Painting*. From afar, we see it as an irregular mass of crimson fog--"a palpitation of color," as Hughes describes it--coalescing from out of a bluish-greenish background, lacking definable shape, a random image. Come closer, however, and the fog reveals itself as a vast complex of living organisms, infinitesimally small, meticulously controlled brush-strokes crossing one another at carefully planned angles. At certain junctures, some of the bluish-greenish background comes through; at others, crimson microcosms form a more opaque entity. What seems from a distance a rhapsodic, close-woven, single blotch of color becomes on closer perception an intensely controlled, intricately crafted, organic whole.

We can, with justification, recoil at the old art-appreciation game of matching music with the visual arts, establishing exact correspondences between, say, a Michelangelo and a Monteverdi, between the play of light in a Monet landscape and the harmonic fogs of Debussy. Sometimes, however, the correspondences begin to make sense, as they do here. On first hearing Morton Feldman's vast "audible canvas" also seems like some kind of subtly colored fog, a vast emptiness bounded by wisps of sound and, more important,



by even more substantial wisps of silence. Three musicians sit at their instruments, communicating at what a first-time listener might initially hear (through the inchoate space of some hugely extended, blurred continuum) as random, each of them contributing an isolated plink on the vibes, a plonk on the piano, a tweet from the flute as the spirit moves them. Can there be rhyme or reason in the four hours of this near-silence, the listener might well ask, or is it just another large dose of Feldman's well-known--to use his own word--chutzpah?

Not at all; examine the score--104 oversized pages--and you'll see this same obsessive exactitude as in the Guston painting. No two measures bear the same time signature. A single note, a cluster of notes sounded simultaneously, a run of two or three notes--positively garrulous, in this context--or a silence: every element of this work has been as meticulously set into its time frame over the work's full trajectory as it would be in a 90-second Bach polyphony. Take, for example, the final 15 bars of the work; on paper they run like this: 7/4, 6/4, 5/4, 9/8, 11/8, 13/8, a silent measure of 2/2, 5/4, 5/4, 6/4, another silent measure of 2/2, 13/8, 9/8, 11/8, a final silent 2/2. Four hours and some minutes have gone by; neither Feldman nor his performers have relaxed their hold on the exact proportions of the gigantic continuum in which this music has maintained its unerring orbit. More to the point, they have also not relaxed their hold on those fortunate listeners willing to lend their ears and their souls to the hypnotic vastness that is the unfolding of this music.

Too long? "I see it," said Feldman in a pre-concert talk at the premiere of the work at CalArts, "as a talk by two people, telling their story continuously with notes or with images, in a style fluctuating from one to the other. This is only possible in a long work. Besides, I need at least 45 minutes of a work before even I can begin to know what it is about."

I remember my first hearing, in an afternoon in June, 1993 at a Los Angeles art gallery not far from the County Museum and the adjacent La Brea Tar Pits. The room was huge and airless, and there was an echo there like in some ancient cathedral. The chairs in that room had been rough-hewn out of huge rock slabs; a few common folding chairs had been brought in for the posteriorly disadvantaged. There were about 30 people at the start, and about ten at the end, all of us on the rock seats. Those of us who remained agreed, in conversation after the spell of the occasion had dissipated, that for the duration of the work we hadn't moved a muscle.

Like Feldman himself, this is music built out of contradictions. It's not easy to equate the burly, lovable slob, in his slept-in-looking clothing--"I'm the only guy in the world," he claimed, "who can wear Brooks Brothers and nobody notices"--the head weighed down with a year's supply of Vitalis, the Bronx accent you could walk on, with the extraordinary and ecstatic delicacy of his artistic expression. This is music of an outward immobility and inward irresistible propulsion, random and yet purposeful. Its structuring is intricate and precise; the four notes at the start--actually, four notes plus a silence--

control the entire process. But it's not music you analyze, on paper for a final exam, as you might a Bach fugue. You give yourself to it or you don't.

--Alan Rich

*Alan Rich is music critic for The LA Weekly and author of **American Pioneers, Ives to Cage** (Phaidon Press, 1995).*

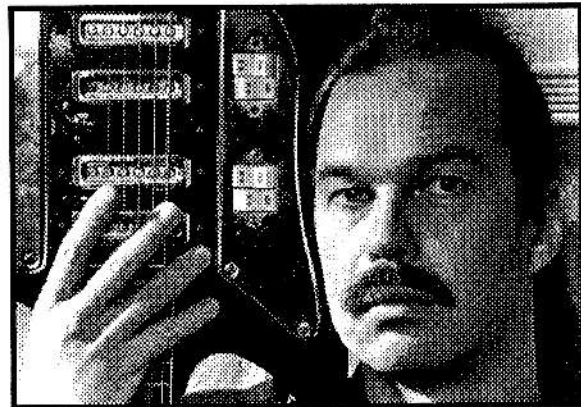


Morton Feldman January 10, 1987



Founded in March, 1981, **THE CALIFORNIA EAR UNIT** is recognized today as one of America's finest contemporary chamber ensembles. The Unit has performed at numerous major venues including Tanglewood, Brussels, Aspen, Kiev, Paris, London, the Kennedy Center, Cologne, New York, Boston, Minneapolis, San Francisco, Santa Fe, Amsterdam, and Reykjavik. The EAR Unit has also been featured in documentaries for the BBC and Japanese television and many of their concerts have been broadcast by American and National Public Radio, WGBH's *Art of the States* program, Danish Radio, and the International Rostrum of Composers. Recent California EAR Unit recordings on compact disc feature composer Virko Baley's *Dreamtime* (Cambria), composer and EAR Unit member Arthur Jarvinen's *Edible Black Ink* (O.O. Disc), Wadada Leo Smith's *Tao-Njia* (Tzadik), and Louis Andriessen's *Zilver* (New Albion).

**DOROTHY STONE**, flutist, composer and conductor, is a founding member of the California EAR Unit, ensemble in residence at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, as well as the Southwest Chamber Music Society. She has performed as soloist throughout the United States and Europe, and has recorded for Crystal, New Albion, Cambria, Newport Classics, O.O. Disc, Tzadik, Nonesuch Records, and the Voyager label in CD-ROM format. Her solo album on New World Records, entitled *None But the Lonely Flute*, includes works by Milton Babbitt, Stephen L. Mosko, John Cage, Morton Feldman, and Kathryn Alexander. Ms. Stone has been awarded prizes by the International League of Women Composers, the Freeman Composition Contest, and by the Ars Electronica Festival.



**ARTHUR JARVINEN**, composer and new music performer, is a founding member of the California EAR Unit, the percussion trio the Antenna Repairmen, and the ensemble Some Over History. *Edible Black Ink*, the first CD of Jarvinen's music was recently released on O.O. Discs. *Ghatam*, a 55-minute collaborative work by the Antenna Repairmen and sculptor Stephen Freedman, is composed for unique handmade ceramic instruments, and is featured on an M.A Recording. Mr. Jarvinen's commissions include the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, the Fromm Foundation at Harvard University, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. He has received an NEA composer fellowship, a California Arts Council fellowship, and the 1997 Ohio University Achievement in Music award.





**GLORIA CHENG-COCHRAN** has appeared as a soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic New Music Group, Ojai Festival, Aspen Festival, Festival der Kunste Bad Gleichenberg (Austria), Opus Novum (Honolulu), Getty Center for the Humanities, Composers Inc. (San Francisco), and Composer-to Composer Festival (Telluride). In 1992, Ms. Cheng-Cochran won the performer competition of the League of Composers/ISCM. Her first solo recording, with piano works by Olivier Messiaen was released by Koch International Classics. Her next disc will feature music by John Adams and Terry Riley. Ms. Cheng-Cochran holds an economics degree from Stanford University, and graduate degrees in music from UCLA and USC. Her major teachers were Isabelle Sant'Ambrogio, Aube Tzerko and John Perry.

**Producer: Dorothy Stone**

**Engineers: Joseph Kucera (Warren Studios, University of California, San Diego)  
Mark Waldrep (Pacific Coast Sound Works)**

**Editors: Bob Michaels (Pacific Coast Sound Works)  
Tom Erbe (California Institute of the Arts)**

**Mastering: Tom Erbe**

**Photographs of Morton Feldman: Betty Freeman**

**Enhanced Track Director: Akira Rabelais**

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