Words on Music · Worte über Musik

Morton Feldman

in Middelburg

Words on Music

Lectures and Conversations

Volume 2

Worte über Musik

Vorträge und Gespräche

Band 2

edited by

herausgegeben von

Raoul Mörchen

MusikTexte

Edition MusikTexte 010
herausgegeben von Gisela Gronemeyer und Reinhard Oehlschlägel

Erste Auflage 2008

Postfach 19 01 55, 50498 Köln, www.musiktexte.de
Erstausgabe

Übersetzungen
Raoul Mörchen (Feldman)
Timothy Jones (Vorworte)

Umschlag
Gisela Gronemeyer unter Einbezug der letzten Seite von Feldmans Komposition „Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello“ von 1987 (Copyright 1987 Universal Edition London).

Photos
Michael Nieuwenhuizen (6, 236, 333, 381, 502, 628, 703, Umschlag)
Wim Riemens (440), Steven Sloman (394)

Druck
Steinmeier Nördlingen
Printed in Germany

Mit Unterstützung der Kunststiftung NRW und des Siemens Arts Program

ISBN 978-3-9803151-9-7

Contents / Inhalt

1987

Appendix/Anhang

"How do we know what we don't know?"

Lecture, 1 July 1987

Morton Feldman: I thought of playing what has become now a very short piece . . . Some months ago I was hit with a project by Samuel Beckett. He wrote a series of radio plays which a lot of composers have set in music. Phil Glass has done one, I hear, very beautifully.[1] Samuel Beckett asked me to do the thing and it was quite a problem because what you're doing is that you're working with a music lover . . . Although he certainly knows what he wants.

It's called *Words and Music* and Bob is music.[2] The whole idea—I'm not convinced that I really know the whole idea of the thing—is trying to get along between words and music and the various problems that they have together. There are certain things that he asked me to do which I never thought I'd be caught dead or alive with. For example, having the orchestra tune up and the whole idea of rapping a stand which I haven't heard since Radio City Music Hall, 1945. [Laughs.] He uses it metaphorically here and it was very right as a literary image brought into a musical [work] and, you know, no one is going to say that you shouldn't do it. And this was all the way down the line. He was actually writing the music. He would use words, Latin words we had to look up, to find the state of mind that he wanted Bob, or the music, to be in. Technically the only way that I could approach it and continue it and finish it, was to develop a point of view about its construction; and a point of view which went the other way, the continuity of actually reading and working together, words and music, words and music, reaching various states and things like that. I didn't do it that way. I just wrote certain sections without trying to make bridges or any kind of continuity. The only thing that I noticed about Beckett—and with other involvements I had with Beckett—is that as the piece goes towards the end, so to

1 Glass didn't write music for any of Beckett's radio plays but for some other works of his, for example *Play* (1965).

2 There are three characters in Beckett's 1963 play that Feldman composed music for in early 1987: Music alias Bob, Words alias Joe, and Croak.