

Variation 1, mostly staccato, introduces 2-note diads. Variation 2, marked *zart* (*dolce*) features repeated notes and three-note chords. Variation 3 has faster moving notes and is entirely based on palindromes like the first movement. Variation 4 is highly syncopated and climactic. Variation 5, marked *wieder ruhig* (quiet again) is hushed and Feldmanesque.

Palais de Mari, commissioned by Bunita Marcus, is Feldman's last work for solo piano. In it, he creates a magical atmosphere with great economy of means. Repetition and recurrence function as both memory signposts and formal tools. Feldman encouraged people to look at fine oriental carpets close up, so they could appreciate a hidden world of detail and beauty; in late works like this he leads the listener to an awareness of details and beauty in sound that would be lost if experienced on a smaller scale, or with a less leisurely unfolding.

In his great poem about music, *Syringa*, John Ashbery writes of "the way music passes, emblematic of life." The works presented here are by three composers who felt the way music passes very differently from one another, ranging from Webern's measured progression to Wolpe's high-energy extremes, to Feldman's spacious unfolding. There are striking contrasts in tempo, rhythm, use of repetition, and the rate at which musical material is introduced. By placing these works in conversation the contrasts can be savored, and more importantly, the deep musical bonds connecting them can clearly emerge.

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Aleck Karis has performed recitals, chamber music, and concertos across the United States, Europe and South America. As the pianist of *Speculum Musicae* he has participated in over a hundred premieres and performed at major American and European festivals. His appearances with orchestra have ranged from concertos by Mozart, Beethoven and Chopin to those of Stravinsky, Messiaen and Carter. His four previous solo discs on Bridge Records include music by Chopin, Carter and Schumann (Bridge 9001), Mozart (Bridge 9011), Stravinsky (Bridge 9051) and Cage (Bridge 9081). His two discs on Roméo Records are *Music of Philip Glass*, and *Late Chopin*. He has studied with William Daghlian, Artur Balsam and Beveridge Webster. He is currently a professor of music at the University of California, San Diego, and Associate Dean of the Division of Arts and Humanities.

Wolpe, Feldman, Webern Aleck Karis, piano

<i>Form</i> (1959)	Stefan Wolpe
<i>Piano</i> (1977)	Morton Feldman
<i>Form IV: Broken Sequences</i> (1969)	Stefan Wolpe
<i>Variations, Opus 27</i> (1936) Sehr mässig Sehr schnell Ruhig fließend	Anton Webern
<i>Palais de Mari</i> (1986)	Morton Feldman

Notes by Aleck Karis

In 1950, Morton Feldman met John Cage after a performance of Webern's *Symphony*. Feldman walked up to Cage and said, "Wasn't that beautiful?" Mutual admiration for Webern was at the beginning of a life-long friendship between the two men. At that time Feldman had been studying with the composer Stefan Wolpe for five years. In a 1962 essay he wrote: "...at eighteen I found myself with Stefan Wolpe. But all we did was argue about music, and I felt I was learning nothing." However, later in life Feldman acknowledged Wolpe's influence: "To have known Stefan Wolpe well [one] would have benefited greatly in equating the music to the man. His vitality alone was exceptional. After 35 years I still feel the sparks of his personal electricity when remembering my first lesson with him. Along with his incredible vitality - it never seemed to subside - was a delicacy of manner which is also very much in his music - those abbreviated benign shapes of his that suddenly appear and leave off with a smile." Feldman's description of the "delicacy of manner" and "abbreviated benign shapes" in Wolpe's music could also apply to his own music and that of Webern, with whom Wolpe studied from 1933-34. Beyond the teacher-student succession these three masters shared a deeper kinship. They created sound worlds, austere yet sensuous, of uncompromising originality and freshness of vision. They heard everything so acutely, informed but never inhibited by the past, with such impeccable craftsmanship, that in their music words like "dissonant" and "discordant" become irrelevant.

Form, from 1959, is an important link to Wolpe's leaner, more angular late style. Its mercurial, sometimes explosive energy covers a lot of ground in three and a half minutes. It is tightly constructed, unfolding from the opening 6 note cell, yet feels improvisatory. Wolpe uses Webern's 12-tone techniques, but like Feldman limits the number of pitches in circulation, riffing on constellations of 4, 5 or 6 pitches. This piece brings to mind Elliott Carter's memorable description of Wolpe and his music: "Comet-like radiance, conviction, fervent intensity, penetrating thought on many levels of seriousness and humor, combined with breathtaking adventurousness and originality".

Piano (1977), though not long by late Feldman standards, still unfolds at a pace which enables the listener to savor the blending and decay of the piano tones. Like *Form*, its structure follows no previously established mold. Feldman explores minute variations in the durations of sounds and of silences, as does Wolpe, though using his own notational methods. The pedal is employed in distinctive ways, ranging from none at the beginning to long sustained passages at the end. The middle pedal is relied on considerably, especially in the coda, in which one 8-note chord rings throughout.

There are two striking formal features to this work. The first is the arrival of five very loud chords (marked triple-forte) after twelve and a half minutes of entirely soft music. The 7-bar line of music containing these chords recurs twice in the piece (though the final, fifteenth chord is left pianissimo). The other unusual feature of *Piano* is the addition, on five occasions in the piece, of two or four additional staves, essentially turning *Piano* into *Pianos*. I have chosen to prerecord these sections, using the technique Feldman suggested for *Three Voices* (1982), which enable a soprano to perform three parts at once. By doing so I can preserve the integrity and subtlety of the pedaling, durations and silences so carefully notated in the score. As in all of Feldman's late music, fragments of varying length are repeated in various ways, and these two- and three-piano passages feature second or third hearings of entire seven-bar lines. Most unusual is the three-piano section at 9:04 featuring the return of the second, third and fourth lines of the piece played simultaneously, followed in a somewhat canonical treatment by lines three, four and five, then new material accompanied by lines four and five.

Form IV: Broken Sequences is a late work, written in 1969 and dedicated to the pianist Robert Miller. The flow of the music is more continuous than in *Form*, despite the many interruptions and broken sequences of the title. Tonal references are not avoided so assiduously as in the earlier piece. Wolpe knew Charlie Parker and taught a number of jazz musicians, and both *Form* and *Form IV* bring to mind the spirit of bebop. Each piece features sudden changes between three different tempi, as well as a certain exuberant abandon.

Anton Webern's *Variations for piano*, from 1936, has been much studied and taught, including by Wolpe. Conventional in its forms, it is utterly original in every other way. The sublime first movement consists entirely of palindromes of varying lengths. These Janus-like phrases often have repeated notes in the middle. The form is also a palindrome: ABA, with the middle section moving twice as fast. The second movement is a playful scherzo in binary form, with each half repeated as in Bach. Each hand plays a tone row and the hands, and rows, consistently mirror each other. Voices cross as they playfully dance around a central note, A. The third movement is in classical variation form. The theme consists of thirty-six (mostly single) notes in three statements of the row on which the whole piece is based, in retrograde, retrograde inversion, and its original form.