

Morton Feldman The Viola in My Life

Marek Konstantynowicz: viola; **Cikada Ensemble;** **Norwegian Radio Orchestra**
Christian Eggen, conductor

ECM 1798

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"My music is just like Webern. Only a little bit longer."
Morton Feldman (1926-1987)

Morton Feldman's music is distinguished by a resilient fragility. "The Viola in My Life" the first three parts of which were written for American violist Karen Phillips in 1970, marked a break in compositional method. After a long period of working with indeterminacy and graphic notation, Cage's most gifted disciple fixed every parameter of "The Viola in My Life" – notes, timing, duration, dynamics – and still the feeling conveyed is of an exquisite tenuousness, as if the viola is a visitor to Feldman's musical universe, where sounds seem to be discovered in the quiet moment of their playing: "My intention was to think of melody and motivic fragments – somewhat in the way Robert Rauschenberg uses photographs in his painting – and superimpose this on a static sound world more characteristic of my music."

'Painting with sounds' is central to Feldman's music; he was a composer at least as close to the abstract painters – especially Rothko, Kline, Guston and Pollock – as to musical contemporaries. Here instrumental colour is differentiated in each piece in the cycle. "The Viola in My Life I" is scored for solo viola, flute, violin, cello, piano and percussion. The second piece replaces piano with celesta to luminous effect, and adds clarinet. The third contracts to leave viola and piano in empty space and the fourth – written in response to a commission for the Venice Biennale of 1971 – reprises and refracts melodic fragments from the first three parts, and allows the viola to hover above delicate orchestration.

"The Viola in My Life" is the first ECM disc entirely devoted to the music of Morton Feldman (the early Feldman vocal work "Only", a setting of Rilke, was included on the Hilliard Ensemble's "A Hilliard Songbook" in 1996).

Fixed or indeterminate the laminal nature of Feldman's music has affinities with the language of improvisation, indeed it has strongly influenced 'new minimal' directions in improvised music, and it is optimally played by interpreters who have experience of both worlds, musicians who can both interpret and create. The members of the Oslo-based Cikada Ensemble (founded 1989) are exceptionally well-qualified. Polish born violist Marek Konstantynowicz, for instance, the soloist here, was active on Warsaw's free jazz scene before coming to Norway to join the Trondheim Symphony and participate in the founding of Cikada.

For ECM New Series Cikada members have recorded music of composers John Cage, Bruno Maderna, Kaija Saariaho and Bent Sørensen. On jazz/improvised albums on ECM Cikada players have worked, together or separately, with singer Annette Peacock, saxophonist Trygve Seim and the Source, bassist Arild Andersen, guitarist Terje Rypdal, folk violinist Mats Eden. They also recently collaborated with bass guitarist Steve Swallow in settings of the poetry of Robert Creeley for Watt/ECM.

Conductor Christian Eggen is renowned for his championing of contemporary music. He has worked closely with composers including Cage, Xenakis, Dillon, Lachenmann, Lutoslawski, Kurtág, Barrett, Tan Dun, Saariaho and Lindberg and is himself a writer of pieces for film and theatre, chamber music, orchestral works, electro-acoustic compositions and more. Conductor of the Cikada Ensemble since 1988, and artistic director of the Oslo Sinfonietta since 1993, he is the recipient of many awards. Later this year he will make his debut with the Orchestra Filarmonica della Scala at the Teatro alla Scala. He has conducted music of Terje Rypdal on ECM (“Undisonus”, “Q.E.D.”, “If Mountains Could Sing”) and played in Rypdal’s band as keyboardist (on “Skywards”).

The Norwegian Radio Orchestra, established 1946, is an institution well-respected across the idioms. Amongst its many other engagements the orchestra plays each year at the Nobel Peace Prize Concert.

CD booklet includes 28 page English-German booklet with liner notes by Paul Griffiths and Helmut Rohm, photos of Morton Feldman by Roberto Masotti, and facsimile pages from The Viola in My Life

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