

**MONDAY
EVENING
CONCERTS**

**MORTON FELDMAN:
CRIPPLED SYMMETRY**

December 10, 2016 | 8:00 PM
LAXART

MONDAY EVENING CONCERTS **DECEMBER 10, 2016**

Morton Feldman (1926-1987) – *Crippled Symmetry* (1983) [~90']

Alice Teysier, flute and bass flute
Vicki Ray, piano and celesta
Jonathan Hepfer, vibraphone and glockenspiel

PROGRAM NOTE by Jonathan Hepfer

"Proust knew what it was all about. The whole lesson of Proust is not to look for experiences in the object, but within ourselves."
- Morton Feldman

I am not sure how other people conceive of important past moments in their lives, but mine come in snapshots simultaneously nebulous and vivid. In my first semester at SUNY Buffalo, I remember with perfect precision looking over my right shoulder at a two-story vitrine replete with iconic posters from new music festivals from the past few decades. The focal point of all of these intriguing posters was a print of R.B. Kitaj's "Fifties Grand Swank," in which the artist placed a charcoal portrait of a pensive looking man with thick glasses next to images of train station ceilings and photographically overexposed feet.

The man in the poster, I later discovered, was a composer named Morton Feldman.

Despite the fact that I didn't know who this was at the beginning of my studies, I - not knowing why - adopted this poster immediately as a sort of talisman, encouraging me to work hard, to absorb everything I could, and telling me when it was time to call it a day on during marathon practice sessions lasting until dawn.

Little by little, I uncovered the deep history of my surroundings in the music building at SUNY Buffalo. I found instruments in the percussion cabinets that had been chosen by John Cage. I learned that the five small circles coarsely outlined in pencil on a gong were the fingerprints of Iannis Xenakis, who had attempted to isolate specific overtones in 1976. And I discovered the immense legacy of Morton Feldman, who taught composition at SUNY Buffalo (after tricking Lukas Foss into hiring him) from 1973 until his death in 1987.

The subtitle to Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* is "how one becomes what one is." For me, discovering Feldman as a young man felt like discovering a cultural prism: In reading essays and interviews with him, I felt I would shine my light toward the composer, and that light would be refracted in every direction. Through Feldman, in the realm of painting, I discovered Pollock, Rothko, Guston, Sekula, De Kooning and Vermeer. In the realm of literature and philosophy, I discovered Stendhal, Kierkegaard, Kafka, O'Hara and Beckett. In the realm of music, I discovered Varèse, Webern, Scriabin, Takemitsu, Schubert and Josquin. In the realm of pop culture, he led me to study the elegance of Frank Sinatra and Fred Astaire. I see traces of his fingerprints on virtually everything I am interested in today.

* * *

Feldman's early works, like the percussion solo *King of Denmark*, were studies in indeterminate compositional language. His middle period, beginning with *Madame Press Died Today At Ninety* (1970), marked a newfound interest in concrete notation. Feldman's late period (beginning around 1978) is characterized by works of extended duration, ranging from thirty minutes to six hours. Throughout the composer's vast catalogue, the unifying themes are those of slowness and quietude, qualities John Cage first described as "heroic," and later as "erotic."

Crippled Symmetry (1983) for flutes, piano/celesta and percussion, belongs to Feldman's late period, but contains elements of the previous two. Clocking in at about ninety minutes, the individual instrumental parts are explicitly notated, but the coordination of the parts is left up to chance. Similar to the way a Calder mobile constantly arrives

at unpredicted new formations, and yet remains unmistakably Calder's, *Crippled Symmetry* unfolds differently with every performance, and yet at all times belongs distinctly to Feldman.

In photos of Feldman, one can clearly see that whenever the composer is beholding a work of art (whether a Rauschenberg painting, an ancient frieze or one of his beloved Middle Eastern carpets), he is not simply looking at the object in question, but rather examining it, his nose practically pressed against the thing he is studying. This may be attributable to an inquisitive mind, but it is also likely that it had something to do with Feldman's extreme myopia. Of the many different explanations for the way that *Crippled Symmetry* functions formally, I found one from percussionist Jan Williams compelling: Feldman's eyesight was ostensibly so bad that he wanted to be able to read and perform his own part at the piano and avoid coordinating cues visually with other members of the ensemble. Hence: three independent solos.

The title *Crippled Symmetry* makes reference to the patterning on 19th century nomadic, oriental carpets, particularly those of Turkey. Feldman was astonished by the feats of memory of the female rug-makers of this tradition, comparing the repertoire of designs these rug-makers would have carried around in their heads to "learning all the works of Chopin and the thirty-two Beethoven sonatas by rote." Feldman was captivated by the details of these rugs; what at first glance appears to be perfect symmetry, is later discovered to be subtle, masterful variations on a theme. When Feldman, who collected these carpets, would show them to friends, he would enthusiastically point out these details and say, "look at the move she made here!"

During the course of *Crippled Symmetry*, Feldman writes simple patterns which seem to repeat, but are in actuality always artfully expanding and contracting, giving the impression (as in his beloved rugs) of repetition, when in fact they are protean. This approach to repetition, to paraphrase Roland Barthes, inflects the same notes in ways that are forever changing, constantly endowing that which is repeated with new love.

* * *

In an interview with Walter Zimmermann in 1975, Feldman said, "for me, sound was the hero, and it still is. I feel that I'm subservient. I feel that I listen to my sounds, and I do what they tell me, not what I tell them. Because I owe my life to these sounds. Right? They gave me a life." Feldman's late works, and for me in particular *Crippled Symmetry*, always seem to me like love letters to the idea of sound. In the same interview, he states that "sound is perhaps dead...Maybe sound just dropped dead, or will drop dead with me, or will drop dead with Cage. Anyway, it was a marvelous period as long as it lasted. For the first time in history, sound was free."

* * *

This concert is presented in Kim Fisher's solo exhibition *A Little Bit of But* (November 12, 2016 - January 7, 2017) which comprises the artist's largest installation to date and a new body of abstract and text-based paintings. This exhibition is made possible in part by a grant from the City of Los Angeles, Department of Cultural Affairs.

The Anatolian rugs provided as seating and décor are generously provided by Claremont Rug Company, a rug gallery devoted entirely to art-level Oriental rugs woven from approximately 1800 until 1925. The Blüthner piano and Concert Celesta are generously provided by Kasimoff-Blüthner Piano Company of Hollywood.

Special thanks to Jan David Winitz, Claremont Rug Company, and Kasimoff-Blüthner Rug Company.

BIOGRAPHIES

Flutist and soprano **ALICE TEYSSIER** brings “something new, something fresh, but also something uncommonly beautiful” (UT San Diego) to her performances. She has appeared as a soloist with the San Diego Symphony, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, Talea Ensemble, La Jolla Symphony, the Palimpsest Ensemble, the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) and is regularly featured on Los Angeles’ renowned Monday Evening Concerts series. A uniquely gifted advocate for new music, Alice has given residencies for composers and performers of new music at such universities as Harvard, Leeds, Huddersfield, Oberlin and SUNY- Buffalo. She has premiered dozens of works and appeared at the Ojai, Mostly Mozart, June in Buffalo, and Huddersfield Contemporary Music festivals. Born in Australia, Alice has lived in France, the United States and Germany and enjoys a rich and international performance schedule as a professional flutist as well as a singer. She has earned degrees from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, the Conservatoire de Strasbourg and is a Doctor of Musical Arts candidate at the University of California-San Diego. She lives in Brooklyn, NY, where she is a founding member of the multimedia performance collective The Atelier, a core member of the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), as well as co-director of the group’s social engagement series, OpenICE.

Described as “phenomenal and fearless,” Grammy-nominated pianist **VICKI RAY** is a leading interpreter of contemporary piano music. Known for thoughtful and innovative programming, which seeks to redefine the piano recital in the 21st century, Vicki’s concerts often include electronics, video, recitation and improvisation. As a founding member of Piano Spheres, an acclaimed series dedicated to exploring the less familiar realms of the solo piano repertoire, her playing has been hailed by the Los Angeles Times for “displaying that kind of musical thoroughness and technical panache that puts a composer’s thoughts directly before the listener.” Ms. Ray’s work as a collaborative artist has been extremely diverse and colorful. She was the keyboardist in the California E.A.R. Unit and Xtet. Her chamber music contributions to the vibrant musical life in greater Los Angeles include frequent performances on the Dilijan, Jacaranda and the Green Umbrella Series. She performs regularly on the venerable Monday Evening Concert series and was featured in Grisey’s *Vortex Temporum* on the 2006 celebration of the re-birth of the series. Vicki has been heard in major solo roles with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Master Chorale, the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, the German ensemble Compania, and the Blue Rider Ensemble of Toronto, with whom she made the first Canadian recording of *Pierrot Lunaire*. She is currently head of the piano department at the California Institute of the Arts, where she has been on the faculty since 1991. In 2010 she was awarded the first Hal Blaine Chair in Music Performance. For the past eight years she has served on the faculty at the Bang on a Can summer festival at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.

JONATHAN HEPFER is a percussionist, conductor, and concert curator specializing in avant-garde and experimental music. He began playing classical music at age 17 after discovering the work of John Cage while studying at SUNY Buffalo. Subsequently, Jonathan attended Oberlin Conservatory, UC – San Diego and the Musikhochschule Freiburg (with the support of a two-year DAAD fellowship), where he studied with Michael Rosen, Steven Schick and Bernhard Wulff, respectively. He has taken part in the US premieres of major works by Salvatore Sciarrino, György Kurtág, Rolf Riehm, Jo Kondo, Aldo Clementi, Klaus Lang, Ramon Lazkano, Francisco Guerrero, Thomas Meadowcroft, Simon Steen-Andersen and many others. Jonathan is a director of Echoi, a flexible chamber ensemble which he co-founded in 2006 with Alice Teyssier. He is also a member of the percussion ensemble red fish blue fish, and has collaborated as a soloist, chamber musician and conductor with ensembles such as Ensemble Mosaik, Ensemble SurPlus, asamisimasa, hand werk, the Formalist Quartet, PALIMPSEST, the Slee Sinfonietta, ICE and Signal. From 2011-13, he was a member of the Freiburg Percussion Ensemble, which regularly toured central Europe, as well as Vietnam, Indonesia, Mongolia and Ukraine. As a soloist, Jonathan has focused extensively on the works of the composers Pierluigi Billone, Walter Zimmermann, Iannis Xenakis, Brian Ferneyhough, Helmut Lachenmann, Giacinto Scelsi, Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, Georges Aperghis and Vinko Globokar. He has given solo performances at the Stone in New York, Harvard University, the Tonhalle Düsseldorf (Germany), the Odessa Philharmonic Theater (Ukraine), and the National History Museum in Ulan Bator (Mongolia). Jonathan has participated in academic residencies at Harvard, Oberlin, SUNY Buffalo, and the universities of Minnesota, Huddersfield and Leeds. He has contributed articles to *Percussive Notes* and *Die Musik von Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf*. Jonathan has also had the privilege of documenting the oral histories of the first generation of eminent European percussion soloists (namely, Christoph Caskel, Sylvio Gualda, Jean-Pierre Drouet, Gaston Sylvestre, Maurizio Ben-Omar). Of particular interest to Jonathan is the relationship of language and music. In Fall of 2015, he joined the faculty of CalArts and became Artistic Director of Monday Evening Concerts.

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