

Yannick Mayaud (Music) – Basel, Switzerland, 2015

As part of the final year of my music degree, I have chosen to submit a notation portfolio as coursework. This project is comprised of three projects which are focussed on the work of the New York composer Morton Feldman, specifically his earlier graphic scores. These scores were among the first to challenge traditional staff notation in the ways that were to become ubiquitous with the so-called American experimentalists, and they betray a strong affinity with the work of the New York Abstract expressionist artists with whom Feldman was close. Having moved away from his graphic experimentation of the early 50s, these works are often overlooked but the thinking through which they were arrived at is interesting to explore to understand Feldman's entire oeuvre, not to mention the fact that the image of the 'grid' or 'graph' of his early works persists into his later staff-notated scores which have an emphasis on aesthetic presentation of notation.

In order to explore the purpose and intent of the graphic notation, it is necessary for me to study sources in Feldman's own hand as well as to examine some of his sketches in order to investigate the conception of these works and their pioneering notation. I am also interested in the compromises taken by publishers when creating digitally typeset editions that lose some of the aesthetic content clearly so important to Feldman's notation, and for this I must see Feldman's own unpublished manuscripts of specific works.

A large number of these personal manuscripts and sketchbooks are held in microfilm form in the Paul Sacher Institute in Basel, and one must go in person to examine these. Paul Sacher was a Swiss conductor and patron, commissioning works from many of the greatest twentieth-century composers. He amassed a private collection of manuscripts with his considerable personal wealth and this is now kept in the Institute in Basel, and kindly made available to consult.

My trip was mostly successful, as I was able to consult a number of manuscripts that interested me and transcribe them to further consider them during my work in Cambridge. Not everything I was hoping to see was there, but I should be able to obtain these elsewhere. The chance look at his sketchbooks was certainly invaluable, and provided an insight into his working process that should help me shed some light onto the purpose and intent of his graphic notation.