

Tim Parkinson

Conversation with Matteo Fargion -

20th March 2000 - 1 (body of work - Morton Feldman)

body of work - Morton Feldman

TIM PARKINSON: If your music was a food, what would it be?

MATTEO FARGION: I think it would be a...um, a mixed antipasto. (laughing) Lots of- lots of, you know, cold cuts and some delicious pickles, vegetables, I dunno... you know, yeah, not very- not very weighty. Not a main- I haven't written a main course yet. What sort of music do I write? Um... I'm a little bit schizophrenic I think, stylistically, I dunno. When I look back at all this music that I've written it just seems to chop and change so much. Um. It's one thing I find irritating about- about myself- myself that there seems to be no continuity, um... I mean I suppose it's only stylistically that it's so, but I mean that I could write a sort of... well, yeah, I mean you know the pieces, like say those Da Noi pieces, the Jeremy James piece, they're very much like you know, written on tape and then- that kind of sparser, and then sort of pieces that exist like a chunk of time and there's no change in them, um, they're sort of layers composed individually then put together, and then um... pieces like that, and then pieces that are much more like concert pieces in inverted commas, more structured and more sectional and really thinking of music more linearly like that. There's that and then... I dunno, just... And then whenever I finish a piece, um, well usually I quite like it, and then... soon after I lose interest, and there's very few pieces I can think of that I- that I- really like I say yes I wanna do something like that again. But I'm a terrible editor, and er the idea of going back and changing a piece is er is... I've tried and a few times I think I've improved things. I think very often I've fucked it up. So it doesn't interest me because I think, it sounds like a cliché but I think every piece I think how the hell did I do that? And it's it's er... It is a complete mystery. Maybe that's the thing with having very little technique that I have. And there's no continuity, it's not like I follow a direction for a while and then say no I've changed my mind. They were the pieces- I do that, usually I say... cos I find it so hard to write music I say well I never want to write like that again, let's think of some- another way.

T: What do you- So you'd prefer to have a continuity?

M: Oh I'd love to, I'd love to be like these- I'm always envious of painters who do whole series, the idea that you could...

T: What about your- the opera? There were lots of opera satellites. You know... I mean... Like um... I dunno, the Opera Studies.

M: From the opera to the piano- Opera Studies? Um, yeah the Opera Studies were- I just decided- Stephen Clarke, this pianist, had commissioned me to write some kind of flashy virtuosic piano pieces, and I- because I spent a year, or six months anyway writing this opera, I just had all this material that I thought er let's use it again. But I didn't write it in the same way, it's more like, I

suppose I'm more thinking of techniques, I wrote this piece in this way, and then you'd say write the next one in this way but discover something else. Yeah, maybe it's actually more like ways of working rather than... than, er, what the actual piece sounds like in the end.

T: But you've kind of like had periods, in your work, way back, and then you were talking about a Feldman period that everybody has...

M: The Feldman period, that's true, yeah, it's important to have a Feldman period. I certainly had a Feldman period, probably from when I met Feldman er in er... Johannesburg of all places in nineteen eighty... four maybe, I can't remember, eighty three, eighty four? It took me a while to to accept him. The fact that Feldman really liked my songs, ok, then he must be ok. [6 songs] He really got them.

T: I wanted to get in that quote where Feldman said that you were a genius.

M: Sounds a bit pompous, but, you'll have to say that. I won't. Put it in your- No; that I "had an affinity to this world which borders on genius". Well he loved the songs. Very strange. I don't think he liked anything else I did, the few bits and pieces he heard afterward which were much more Feldmanesque funnily enough.

T: Which were- what did he hear? Two pianos?

M: Well, he certainly heard that, they're not really Feldmanesque. Um. What can he have heard, it was in 1987 in Dartington. I followed him around a bit in Frankfurt, he was in Frankfurt and I went to that, and in Cologne, er, but I didn't study with him. I did want to study with Feldman and I went- I wrote to him in Buffalo and he, in fact he told me about Dartington, I'd just moved to England and he- I said- I was trying to work out what to do, to study with Kagel or with Feldman, it was clear in England I didn't want to study with anybody after Kevin, so those were my two choices, obviously Feldman... I was worried because the two students that I knew of his, Bunita and Barbara, were complete casualties of Feldman, and I think with his pupils they either try to do what he does and fall short, or else reject everything, and do something completely different, I can't think of any names, but I have met composers like that. Tom Johnson for instance. Yeah, nothing to do with Feldman, much too conceptual, um... Anyway, so I didn't- certainly didn't- I was very worried and maybe a bit scared of going to study with him... Dunno how the hell we got onto this. But I can imagine I think I would, I dunno how you would feel, but I think having- if I got to study with him I think it would have been so overpowering. I mean he's not one to say, you know, to look at little pieces, or- I think he would insist that you wrote music like him, in a way. Of course I could learn an enormous amount, but I think it would have been a real block. That's not what I need. Which doesn't- I think he was a great teacher, he was a great speaker, I mean, so inspiring on that level, I mean, certainly the most intelligent or um... I just feel that I've been- I have been in the presence of a genius.

Howard Skempton - waiting - walking

T: So then you studied with Howard Skempton?

M: Yeah. One could say studied, um.

T: Or you didn't study? What?

M: No we did- I did study, when I got when I arrived in London I knew Howard and very few other

people, um, Howard as an acquaintance I thought what the hell- I arrived here and I thought what the hell am I gonna do? I need some structure to my life. Um, and so having decided that I would stay in London I just called up Howard and who'd never taught before and he was terribly flattered that I want to study with him. Just because he liked me didn't think anybody would want to learn anything- So I used to go once a week to Lemington, or at that time Stratford first, and basically have lunch and um and um he'd usually apologise about the fact that he wasn't teaching me anything, although when it came to having lunch then I suppose he dropped his guard and er we had really nice conversations, um, and I carried that on for about a year I guess, I can't remember.

T: When was that? When did you move to London I mean what's the-

M: We arrived in London at the end of 1985, so I think this must have been 86, maybe part of 87 I can't remember. I hardly wrote anything at the time, um. I mean 86 was- But Howard was very much you know he's very much into the small, obviously the miniature thing and I think it didn't really suit me. And I was trying desperately to sort of- and he was being very practical, you know, a young composer, what should you write for and stuff. You know, I remember struggling over some clarinet piece for months. Solo clarinet. Every composer should write one. And I tried but I think because there was no concert um... And I had a little, you know, I was trying to assimilate how- what he was like, and he liked little notebooks like manuscript books, like sit on the bus and make a little sketch, a melodic line, maybe some rhythms, and use it like a sketch book, write a little melody every day, and I love the idea of that, that kind of very small scale, very- what we were saying earlier about what to do when you're not commissioned, in these periods, should it be something very non-ambitious like that, a little piano piece every day, or... very much kind of English experimentalist way of thinking, something incredibly modest that you can do every day before lunch, Satie I suppose, that's where it comes from...

T: Like the early Feldman pieces which seem so simple. For each one did it take him six months or did he just wait, you know like he used to do. Wait until the next one came along and write it down.

M: Who was it who recently said that, I think it might have been a playwright, I can't remember, probably sounds a bit- a little bit pompous but the idea that a composer, or I think he was saying actors should be like um what's it called, telegraph, um... stations or something. Er.

T: Receivers?

M: Yeah, telegraph- just sit and wait for it to start, messages to start coming in. I quite like that. The Feldman thing of waiting. Stick around the house and wait. And that certainly is the case for me, the endless pacing around the dining room table. I force myself to get out but I know that then that's because I'm gonna scream if I don't get out the house, but those- and I'm sure I've spoken to you in those periods on the phone about you know it could be this it could be that, and just completely stuck until one day it just breaks.

T: I just so completely find that if I'm beating my head against a brick wall about something, sometimes walking out my door the minute I'm on the pavement I suddenly think that's what I'll do, and then of course the whole rest of my journey I think that's what I'll do, and then I'll come back and I do it, and then fail- square one...

M: It makes perfect sense. Fail again. It does make perfect sense, the whole thing of walking your way through a problem.

T: I'm a complete believer in walking.

M: Pacing round the dining room table, that's what I do. This is so rambling I can't believe it.

Kevin Volans - Chris Newman

T: I wanna talk about though still... I mean how- your music's changed though, cos although you talk about not having any continuity it's like you're not- well, don't you think? Well, do you think it's changed?

M: (pause) Well I hope it's got better but sometimes I'm not even sure of that. Um, I still listen to those very first John Lennon songs and think that have I really moved on that much? I mean they were really such a surprise, um, for me, I mean it's literally the first thing- about the second thing I wrote. I consider it the first because it was the first thing that Kevin- For about six months I did nothing when Kevin first arrived, whatever, in 1982, and he completely you know threw a world upside down and er he was giving me all these ideas, you know, well you've studied with him, all the exercises, write a piece with line only, write this, and I tried to do these exercises, I found them completely un- I generated nothing, and then one day I found this book of poems and wrote a song a day for six days and then turned up with them, so it was obviously a result of all this... and that's the way, I mean that's still the way I work, because it is that thing of- that period where it seems I've got nowhere, the deadline's looming, then suddenly I write these things and I think, ooh, what was that? Where the hell did that come from? So I suppose that's what I mean. Has my music changed? Possibly, it's slightly more sophisticated now, but er- maybe...

T: And you were friendly, well you still are, with Chris Newman. Is that any influence? You played with Janet Smith. Did you?

M: Yeah I've known Chris, well, again through Kevin since probably 1981 or 82, 82 when I first went to Cologne, um, in fact Chris Newman I think was the first piece of new music I ever heard, I mean that was um, from what Kevin turned up and what he played me when he came from Cologne in 1982 to teach us, he played Sad Secrets I think by Chris Newman, and some of Gerald's music, um, Sur le Pointes, those kind of pieces, the line piece and stuff, the Kagel students, and those for me still now I think are very um, probably Chris Newman a bit less now, he's gone too conceptual for me, but um, you know the real kind of linchpins for me, idols, and they always were, um, er, and with Chris, getting back to him, I think I was influenced at the time, er I think like Feldman his ideas were very inspiring, and I always find especially more recently that the music let's me down anyway, the ideas are more interesting than the music. Um, but I think his way of thinking about music is very healthy and very inspiring, you know, getting away from, you know what he always says about think about music figuratively in that sense of- and trying to portray music in what you're doing, in other words to talk about music in conventional terms, um ,and he always has some kind of brilliant method, more I suppose in a Cage way, of how from to detach himself, distance himself from the material. Yeah I think his material is often so boring, I mean the music is just too ugly for me. And it's interesting that he's very close to Feldman too, I mean he claims to be much closer to Feldman than Cage in fact, then when you hear his music and hear his complete lack of in a way lack of interest in orchestrating and all those things, and in material, what it is, you know the notes... Feldman is much more passionate about sound I think. And Chris Newman isn't for instance, and I think I am. I did play with Janet Smith, oh God, dates again, um, probably from, no no, it's, I can work it out, it's eighty- eighty-six, it was a couple a years when I used to go to Cologne a lot and Chris and I were very close And I suppose I was influenced by him then and I wrote my- those, the Hungarian Songbook, I guess was like my Sad Secrets, um, pieces were- I tried but I think I'm much too conventional in that sense, you know, I could never let go of the material, I could never you know like Chris "oh the material doesn't matter, it's how you put it together", that stuff, I'm

always much more involved in material... I think I'm good at finding material, it's just knowing what to do with it...

Dance

T: Let's talk about your writing for dance.

M: Writing for dance, it's what I've basically done since 89 since I did that course.

T: Is that where it began?

M: Kind of, um, in fact Jonathan Burrows commissioned me for the first time, I suppose that was my first commission ever really, proper paid commission, um, was to write a piece for him, 45 minutes, and I could have six instruments so this was really grown up, 1989 I think. It was done at The Place, it was I think it was the second piece Jonathan did away from the Royal Ballet but he was still in the Royal Ballet, called Dull Morning Cloudy Mild, it was from the diaries of his grandfather, he took those words out and I remember using the diaries to generate the material for the piece somehow, er, how did I do it? Um...

T: His grandfather's diaries?

M: Yeah, which were incredibly dull, I mean they were all- he was from the north of England, and every entry would be, would start with the weather, like "Dull morning, cloudy, mild" was one of them. For some reason Jonathan had given this as kind of source material among other things as a way to start. But he was very clear, we decided it should be three movements, you know, er, but at the time already what I liked working with him was that the fact that um... he... how did we write that piece? He- I think he started- I had these diaries so I went away to try to start writing some music that might be suitable, he did some work in silence and showed me about five minutes of it, um, and er and then I sort of checked what I was doing, found it was working then gave him the other ten minutes or something, that was the first movement. The second movement he- I wrote the music and he then sort of choreographed to it, and the third movement was the other way around, he waited for the- no, the other way around, I waited for- and so visually responded to what he was doing. And that was already a our first piece, and I enjoy working that way, I find that very inspiring.

T: Do you still work in that way?

M: With him?

T: Yeah. Or are things- I dunno, have methods changed?

M: It's changed a lot I mean we certainly feed off each other alot and I think artistically we're very close. We'd done all sorts of experiments and how music and dance connect um, I think for me the most successful was the- of really combining the two in a new way was possibly the- when I wrote the Hungarian Songbook, in a piece called Very from 93. And because we were both I mean really dissatisfied with sort of "write me some music and I'll dance to it" kind of way that a lot of choreographers go, and yet the Cage-Cunningham thing had been done and it's very much- that thing worked because of very much how they shared stylistically, and we thought there's no point doing that again or carrying on when our style was very different, so trying to find a way that was flexible but still maintain- still allow the music to have its identity. There are so many dance scores that are completely dependent on what the choreographer needs to patch up the kind of weak points,

you know "I need a section that sort of"- and they all start with sort of a kind of floaty bit and then get some rhythm here, so how long should that be, about six minutes, and then I need this, all seem to involve saxophones somehow...

T: Often still the case?

M: Absolutely. So, how to make a piece of music that's sort of concert hall, um, but it certainly doesn't necessarily make a good piece of dance. I decided it was one way of protecting myself from the sort of work of "like that but couldn't it be faster or slower", was to write a set of songs which I did, I think I wrote about 18 or 20, I can't remember, and then he was as he always does work in silence or in fact I think he worked with very different music, I think he worked with pop music or techno, and then we put the piece together, we assembled it. He also did the dance in little sections, modules, and I considered the songs to be like modules, and then, completely free to place- and I didn't mind which order they were in basically - to place them, to combine them, and of course there was a lot of silence, um, cos of silence between the songs, so when the songs came in it was kind of commenting on the dance, um, putting it in a different light. We would do things like do one song, it happened once I think in the piece, then there was a pause, then the same song would be repeated or something, then he carried on, or you'd see the same bit of dance with another bit of music, those kind of things. I think that was 93.

Stuttgart - some techniques, influences

T: You've written an opera.

M: Yes that was when I had the opportunity to go to the Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart when I had this residency in um... 96 or 7, we'll have to check on these dates. Um, 97 I think it was, um... or-started with a year and became eighteen months, and it was a wonderful time because for once I didn't have to write for dance. It took me a long time to write anything, but I started with a set of songs, the Tosca Songs. Um, yeah that was me sort of- I suppose, I mean I even used the same singer, Beth Griffith, and I wrote especially for her, but it was the first time I could just do what I wanted and I thought well, I'm in a very strange place and feeling very weird so I better do what I thought I did best, write songs, um, at the time thinking would be an easy thing, I could do one a day, and what we were saying before, um, of course they did turn out to be one a day eventually, it took me about three months to get started, and I found the text- I decided I had given up on trying to find a text and I wanted to set in Italian, and so what I did was take the- my favourite opera Tosca- the first idea I had was to set the whole libretto for the second act, I would just set the whole thing, I mean as it was. But, then I thought there might be copyright problems, and anyway it was far too long- is this interesting?

T: Yeah go on, what the hell.

M: No, I just took all the words that Gloria Tosca sings that had the letter A in them, a very Georges Perec kind of way of- and I took all the- yeah, just went through the whole libretto and just took all the words that she sang with the letter A I wrote out, um, and- oh yeah, how did I decide which was the text for each song? The ten pages of the libretto, so when that page ran out, that was that song. Um, and so the first one has a lot of "Mario Mario Mario Mario ah ah ah..." kind of thing, some of it makes sense and parts of it don't. But I really liked them. My original idea was to take all the words that Mario sings with the letter E in them and then so on with the five characters, with the letter U and the letter O and then make a kind of opera. I still like that idea, but I'm not quite sure why.

T: But that's what I was gonna say though, I think you do have a way of working though, you know, in things like that and the whole- going back to whatever we were talking about Chris Newman, that kind of almost arbitrary choice making in order to just create an impetus to start work. What was the last thing you wrote?

M: Oh, the German Oratorio. That's- apart from that theatre music, yeah, the worst commission I've ever had but you know I managed in the end, but that was that setting however many, 13 or 14 German texts, um, as part of a play basically, I call it a musical, they call it an oratorio, but, it was incredibly hard because they um... it had to be for non-professional singers, actors basically. So I had- and they didn't want it to be ironic, and I didn't want it to be ironic either. The play is very much like a Brecht play and so the danger was to be like Kurt Weill or Eisler, for the music to be like that.

T: Wasn't it a Brecht play?

M: No, no it was kind of a rewrite, yeah, it was called "Das Kontingent" and it's, er, kind of an imitation of- or, they wouldn't say imitation they would say like a reworking of the same- of the style, so it had short scenes, rather didactic scenes, usually with a song at the end of each scene. Um. So how did I write that? I dunno, I think I wrote... I mean I always start with pitch, I think that's one thing, without pitch I have no idea, and I- How do I get the pitch? Um, um... well, various kind of methods to get me started, most of which then I end up not- kind of not using, I'm trying to think in this case, I think because it was German I decided I would get some- a book of folk songs, umm... It was the case I went to the library and thought what can I use as starting material, um, something to get me going which is what I usually need. Um, so I got, yeah I got a book of folk songs and er I chose a few, they're all rather dull on the page, that stuff sounds rather wonderful when it's sung by an old woman somewhere, but on the page is really boring, E minor... Anyway I wrote out a few of them and then used all those kinds of passed down techniques like um insert a note between each pitch and then if that still sounds too close to the original, insert two notes, er, change the accidentals, you know change the mode I suppose... So those are my starting points so I had like three or four pages of just dots on the page, yeah but melodic line, kind of melodic, not completely random kind of thing, but a line that I could play and then change, so I think that's very often for instance how Gerald Barry used to write music, starting with a line and then... Then these texts were coming and I just kind of wrote- first I wrote the melodic line alone to set the text to the line, and I did most of the songs like that, or at least half of them, and then as you well remember I got incredibly stuck cos I didn't know how to go on, how to... what should happen next, how to fill out these melodic lines. And the solution I found- I had to- yeah the actors needed this er to start learning something so I sent them at least five or six of the tunes and I knew that they couldn't change them cos they need to memorise them by rote. So then I had to fill them knowing that whatever I did that tune had to stay the same.

T: I suppose I'm putting you in a group with a whole bunch of other people, but it's just a really very typical way of working, which is completely un-Feldmaney.

M: Much more to do with Gerald and Chris and Tom Johnson, I mean, Tom would stop there, I think you know with the tunes, whereas- all those things are very- obviously these people are- If anything I suppose my music is more like- it's everything I've learnt from- and I love about all their music like thrown into a pot and hopefully what comes out is a bit of me too but that's the only way I can do it, I mean there's no point in trying to avoid it, I mean those are my influences. It's very hard. I remember Feldman talking about that at Darmstadt about the whole thing that people nowadays are- insist on the first thing is how can I be different so I can corner some corner of the market, some bit of the market, you know, "oh yeah he's the one that does, you know, er, one note piece"- He's the so-and-so, and that's- and I do get fed up with the- I know that it's Kevin that said

that that style is a red herring and I do actually really firmly believe that. It's just a language, I mean, when I was in Germany in Stuttgart I got- one night I got attacked by a composer who was a student of Wolfgang Rihm who heard this piece I wrote for two violins, which was a slight piece, five minute piece, violin- somebody asked me to do it and I wrote it in a day and it was a cute piece, but anyway, he let rip and he basically accused me of- what was the... it was kind of- I was being immoral for writing in what he called A minor, um, that I had a duty as a composer to- to what? it was very hard to get him to say what he meant, but basically this was too easy. He said you use hocketing techniques, and that's just nothing you know, what is the- and that old thing, the whole Darmstadt thing, what is the problem in your piece, like what is the problem, what's the dialectic. In Germany I was certainly always attacked for that kind of thing. And he was- it is a problem, and I think it is a problem in this country too, you immediately get dismissed as oh, you're part of the experimental thing, and you're not mainstream because you're not writing rather gestural atonal - if you can even be bothered to be that - music. Wishy-washy rhetorical music. Possibly well orchestrated, for effect, and you know unless you're part of that you're marginalised, I dunno how we got onto that, suddenly bitch about establishment.

cultural identity - background

T: My- the point of me asking all that was er because you know, your music is very you, and a question I wanted to ask was um... you know... like stupidly general question , but what nationality is your music? What are you? What do you consider yourself?

M: Well, I'm completely Italian supposedly, but I left Italy when I was twelve and er ever since then as I get older I have- I feel this kind of romantic pull towards Italy but- I haven't been to Italy for quite a long time now but- my children have Italian names but they don't speak Italian, I speak Italian fluently but with an English accent, and um this whole thing of identity is very interesting because I- you know, I lived in South Africa for ten- ten years, I think, eleven years, um, but I certainly don't consider myself South African although my formative years were there from thirteen fourteen right through school, teenage years, university, and then I left South Africa because it was very clear it was such an awful time in South Africa, um, state of emergency and all that, so my decision was- my choice was either I get a gun and join the revolution or I leave because what the hell am I doing writing so-called Western art music while Soweto was burning, and although my wife is South African, it was harder for her to leave, um, you know for me there was no choice I had to- I had to get out. Sometimes I'm very- I do miss the beauty of the country, yeah , the heat, the beautiful sunshine. I've never had really much contact with... So my identity isn't there so I suppose I'm more English than anything else but I- to be honest I kind of fight that because that- there's a kind of bitterness in London, a cynicism, um, I've certainly taken on board, I think.

T: What, you mean generally?

M: Well in London especially.

T: Amongst composers or musicians?

M: Generally, I think English people are very cynical. And insecure, that's the other thing.

T: Do you think they're insecure?

M: No the sort of apologising English thing, the shy English youth as Chris Newman used to call it, "I'm sorry I'm just writing this little thing, you know, it's shit really" for instance, or, "sorry, sorry" you know everybody's apologising the whole time, the music's for instance, artistically a lot of the

work is so apologetic, it's neither here nor there, it's not- anyway that's just a very general slagging off. There's parts of me that- I feel my God the whole Italian roots are just disintegrating you know and I'm passionate as you know about food and all those things, you know, that's my identity in a way, and I feel it slipping from me and I suppose my attempts of- for instance, setting in Italian and stuff are- and I read in Italian, force myself even though it's harder for me to read than English, was to keep some sense of myself, and my dream I suppose is to go back to Italy and live there because I think, the times that I've been I think I do change within a week or two become- I start to think in Italian for instance, and of course that's gonna make me a different person, you're suddenly thinking in a different language. I mean a lot of the music I love, I mean , I love Verdi and Puccini and Monteverdi.

T: But you don't have any big flowing lines, in that way...

M: No, but I have a bitter sweetness of Puccini, I think, my music is generally bitter-sweet like Puccini. Um, and I find that I put on a piece of Puccini and I immediately get tears in my eyes, it's- I suppose I'm very sentimental. Not that Puccini is always sentimental. If I had to think of music that I really- that really really moves me in that very obvious way it is opera nineteenth century early twentieth century, which is so weird when you think of my music which seems so dry and so impassionate for me a lot of the time, wooden.

T: I was gonna say, do you stick any emotion in your music? Does that have any place whatsoever?

M: I don't stick any in, I think there's a sadness to my music that comes across, I mean, it's rather empty and sad (laughs) even if it's kind of jolly... I mean, not all, but... there's a- no, not nostalgia- I mean, I don't want to be sad. It does sound kind of emptiness, but I kind of like that. Recently, I have to confess, I went to the National Sound Archive and listened to- with one of the worst hangovers I've ever had I listened to four hours on the headphones in Janet's office of a selection of Italian folk music from very weird bagpipes to a lot of screaming er you know- well not screaming but wailing er village ladies, and none of it I felt particularly good or interesting or exciting in any way, I mean I thought I might- but I was very sentimental listening to it. It's just that I think it's not very interesting music to plunder in any way. Although I'm also reminded of the Feldman thing that just because you come from somewhere doesn't mean you're interesting. Interesting point again to do with cornering the market, oh yeah I'm writing like South African music, or... but this whole question of roots and possibly the idea that if I became more Italian I might be able to develop my own language more.

T: I was gonna ask you what were you writing before um-

M: University? Um, well my background is I think I had some piano lessons, I know I had some piano lessons as a child but my parents never pushed it even though I think my father's sister was a concert pianist, she died young, um, but it's not- there was certainly no- I was put at the piano and didn't enjoy it. So they let me stop and it was only when I was thirteen or fourteen living in a small village in Yorkshire looking at one of those catalogues you used to get in those days you know that had everything in them, whatever they're called, like mail order things, and looking at a drum set, and saying can I- I remember sitting on the stairs sulking because they wouldn't buy me a drum set and that- I must have been younger, I must have been twelve, and then they persuaded me that a guitar would be a better idea I think cos they were terrified of the noise for obvious reasons, so I bought a guitar and I taught myself, and then soon started with a band and we used to do cover versions of the Beatles and stuff but I never- I wrote one song then, I remember... But I had no idea what a composer was- you know, my father used to play classical music but I never- I hated it, and right up till then I had bands right through school, South Africa, carried on played the bass guitar, and did one concept album with a drummer friend of mine, um, terrible I'm sure, when I wrote one

or two songs, and then started getting interested in jazz, um, but when I went to university I'd hardly heard of Beethoven, and it was only because it was in South Africa and kind of small- not a very big department that they accepted me, basically with almost zero knowledge of classical music, so I was a fast learner, I had to work very hard at the beginning.