

MATT DIBBLE: 24 PRELUDES AND FUGUES

FREDDY KEMPF, PIANO



DISC 1

1.	Prelude on D3	1:03
2.	Fugue on D3	1:30
3.	Prelude on Am3	1:53
4.	Fugue on Am3	1:23
5.	Prelude on E3	2:43
6.	Fugue on E3	2:10
7.	Prelude on Bm3	2:29
8.	Fugue on Bm3	1:56
9.	Prelude on F#3	2:39
10.	Fugue on F#3	1:39
11.	Prelude on C#m3	2:21
12.	Fugue on C#m3	2:17
13.	Prelude on Ab3	2:22
14.	Fugue on Ab3	2:00
15.	Prelude on Ebm3	1:35
16.	Fugue on Ebm3	1:58
17.	Prelude on Bb3 ('Alone - 5AM')	1:34
18.	Fugue on Bb3	1:56
19.	Prelude on Fm3	2:16
20.	Fugue on Fm3	1:43
21.	Prelude on C3	2:56
22.	Fugue on C3	2:09
23.	Prelude on Gm3	3:46
24.	Fugue on Gm3	2:30

Total playing time 51:00

DISC 2

1.	Prelude on Dm3	2:12
2.	Fugue on Dm3	2:08
3.	Prelude on A3	2:07
4.	Fugue on A3	2:57
5.	Prelude on Em3	2:18
6.	Fugue on Em3	2:43
7.	Prelude on B3	2:38
8.	Fugue on B3	1:43
9.	Prelude on F#m3	3:19
10.	Fugue on F#m3	2:03
11.	Prelude on D ^b 3	2:39
12.	Fugue on D ^b 3	2:36
13.	Prelude on G#m3 ('Samarkand')	1:49
14.	Fugue on G#m3	2:51
15.	Prelude on E ^b 3	3:13
16.	Fugue on E ^b 3	3:43
17.	Prelude on B ^b m3 (To J.S. Bach)	1:32
18.	Fugue on B ^b m3	3:22
19.	Prelude on F3	2:24
20.	Fugue on F3	2:32
21.	Prelude on Cm3	2:07
22.	Fugue on Cm3	2:25
23.	Prelude on G3	2:58
24.	Fugue on G3	1:45

Total playing time 60:16

MATT DIBBLE: 24 PRELUDES AND FUGUES

This double album presents the world-premiere recording of '24 Preludes and Fugues' – a very special collaboration between the renowned pianist Freddy Kempf, and the composer and multi-instrumental performer Matt Dibble. The two never met, due to Matt's tragic and untimely death in 2021, although the recording evidences a palpable artistic affinity. Matt was a prolific composer and virtuoso clarinetist, saxophonist, pianist and vocalist, working across genres and traditions ranging from classical, through jazz and free improvisation, to pop, klezmer and folk music. The music in this recording exhibits his learning in all these styles and more. It was one of Matt's last wishes that Freddy would record this music. Freddy has established himself globally as a pre-eminent interpreter, with a repertoire reaching across a broad stylistic range, making him a natural collaborator for Matt. At the conclusion of the recording sessions, Freddy commented on how personal and moving an experience it was getting to know someone he never met: 'I feel close to [Matt] because it really felt like the values that [he] paid attention to match some of my own.'

Only a handful of close friends knew of the 'Preludes and Fugues', which Matt began in 2015. There continued six years of very private composition, the set being finished within mere weeks of his passing. With its quasi-secrecy, the longevity of the project, and the incredible timing of its completion, the story behind this music feels like a romantic tragedy. Yet Matt, equally a stoic in life, is better honoured if we focus on his music than if we give ourselves to circumstantial emotion. In any case, Freddy's lucid and expressive interpretations of this beautiful, powerful music makes for highly charged listening; the recordings themselves lack nothing in pathos.

Why 'Preludes and Fugues'?

Why would a 21st-century musician choose so archaic a form? Matt mostly worked with non-notated music; if not improvised, then at least memorised. The non-written form heightens the social aspect of music: improvisers depend on, and 'play off', the others in the group; in fact, you could say that the music is itself a shared togetherness. For such a social musician, sitting down to write in such a studied idiom as this seems like the total opposite, requiring hours of concentrated solitude.

The pairing of preludes with fugues subtly implies a social dynamic, as well as an opposition contrast between open, quasi-improvisatory forms and preordained stricture. A prelude is a free-form structure, by definition 'played before' the fugue. Musically, it serves to introduce and explore the new key centre; socially, it readies listeners to hear the more studied form to come. By contrast, fugues follow tight rules: their contrapuntal voices enter, one by one, in a prescribed pattern of different keys, all playing the same melody at different times. As successive voices enter, they must all accompany one another harmoniously, continuing to use only the same few materials. This makes for a complex task for the composer: to control the prevailing tonal flow arising from a single, germinal melody.

Added to the demands of the form itself, there is the weight of 'Preludes and Fugues' as a historical tradition. Johann Sebastian Bach's *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* (*The Well-Tempered Clavier*, 1722) is the originating, iconic work, comprising 24 prelude/fugue pairs, one for each major and minor key centre within the chromatic scale. Later, he added a second book – hence the nickname 'the 48'. Later composers followed Bach's lead, pairing preludes or other free forms with fugues, though few wrote full sets. Dmitri Shostakovich's

is arguably the most notable example of fidelity to Bach, although he structures things differently. His 24 major/minor pairs follow the circle of fifths, such that they flow into one another more holistically than those in Bach's two cycles, where successive pairs are a dissonant semitone apart.

Matt, tradition and 'prelude and fugue'

As an artist, Matt had a strong sense of his relation to tradition. It is wrong to cast him as a reactionary or even a traditionalist, however. His professed musical heroes and idols were progressives, each in their own context: Wagner, Prince, Beck, the jazz trumpeters Miles Davis and Kenny Wheeler. So what does Matt bring to the prelude and fugue tradition? 300 years on, the musical language is freer than the Bach model – unsurprisingly, his fugues do not follow the rules imposed on 18th-century counterpoint. They are freer in conception, as denoted by his titles, for example 'Prelude and Fugue on C#m3'. 'C#m' is a jazz chord symbol, not, officially, the name of a key, and the preposition 'on' implies C# minor as a reference point for the musical drama, rather than its final resting point. Similarly, the suffix '3' does not seem to denote any one thing or 'rule', yet many (though not all) of the melodies emphasise the interval of a third – a musical preoccupation which, like preludes and fugues, Matt revisited from time to time in various contexts.

The order of the pairs was important to Matt. Starting on middle D rather than C, they move around the circle of fifths, alternating major/minor (D major-A minor-E major-B minor, and so on). After coming full circle, the key centres swap to the alternate mode (D minor-A major-E minor-B major). Perhaps the most important part of the conception is that the final pitch of each fugue matches the first of the following prelude, almost throughout. Thus, the cycle is joined in a single line from beginning to end, even to the extent that the final

fugue can flow straight back into the start of the first prelude. The implication is that wherever you start to listen, you are dipping in 'in the middle' – the opening prelude itself seems to begin mid-flow.

'Prelude and Fugue' seems to have been a place where Matt brought together and integrated various parts of his musical lexicon, in a way that ostensibly, he did not attempt in other forms. His relationship with the idiom goes back at least as far as 2002, when he wrote a big band jazz suite encompassing fugue for his student dissertation. Three years later, his 'Scottish Suite' (2005) for multi-tracked basset clarinet and piano included a prelude/fugue pair as a single movement, the prelude essentially being a personalised quotation of the first one in *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, with the addition of an improvising overdubbed basset clarinet; the fugue constructed in the Bach tradition.

Matt's other piano music

The piano music between 2005 and 2014 explores other forms: Four Pieces (2006), three written-out Piano Improvisations (2011), four Sonatas (2008; 2011; and two in 2014), and at least one Etude (date unknown). Thereafter, three *Piano* albums sit alongside these preludes and fugues. *Piano 1* and *2* (2016; 2018) feature solo improvisations alongside jazz originals, as well as Matt's own performances of the Preludes and Fugues on D3, and Gm3. There is genuine overlap between those albums and this one: a strong imitation of Bachian counterpoint in 'Improvisation 2' (*Piano 1*); 'Free 2' (*Piano 2*) is an improvised draft of the radiantly beautiful 'Prelude on F#3'; the Preludes on C#m3 and Db3 respectively derive from Parts 1 and 3 of *Piano 3*.

These cross-fertilisations demonstrate the contribution of Matt's improvisatory roots to the 'Preludes and Fugues'. Much of the music is rhythmically free,

often with collegial, suggestive markings ('as if humming – an echo of a memory'; 'Slow (but not *that* slow)'). In the sessions Freddy commented that as a performer, there were times the music seemed to invite improvisation. Alongside respectful nods to the classical-music prelude and fugue tradition, interpreted broadly (Bach, Debussy, Shostakovich), there are references to jazz (Keith Jarrett, Bill Evans, others) amidst the many other styles.

The 'Preludes and Fugues' occupy an extreme, quiet position in Matt's work: composed in solitude over six years, this is his most intimate and personal writing (of the few subtitles, one is 'Alone – 5AM.'). They bring together many different styles and techniques, and just as there is a comprehensiveness to having music in every key, so this is a thoroughgoing exploration and excavation of a musical persona, lexicon and language. The work, interpreted so beautifully by Freddy on this double album, marks a culmination point in Matt's output. By contrast, the immediately preceding piano release, *Piano 3*, marks a point of departure, comprising three open-form improvised tracks that point in radically new directions, featuring overdubbed layers and electroacoustic studio techniques, and encompassing styles such as minimalism, pointillistic textures, and sounds made inside the piano. Tragically, we will never see that new line followed through to its conclusion, but this double album offers a stunning view of an artist in mid-flight, soaring high.

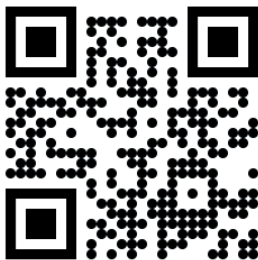
In closing, I cite the performance marking over the final fugue of the set, which somehow encapsulates Matt the composer and musician, known to his many friends and colleagues: 'Defiantly, almost aggressively, positive and energetic.'

Jon Hargreaves, March 2024

Visit:

<https://linktr.ee/mattdibble>

or scan the QR code below for more information about Matt Dibble, his music and associated musical groups, including Frederick Bernas's beautiful films of Freddy Kempf playing the Preludes and Fugues, and his short documentary about Matt.



MATT DIBBLE

Matt Dibble, the youngest of four brothers, was born on New Year's Eve 1980 in London, where he lived until, at the age of 40, he died unexpectedly, a rare victim of the AstraZeneca covid vaccine. His was a life filled with music. An accomplished multi-instrumentalist, specializing in the clarinet, piano, and saxophone, he studied music at the University of York and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. A student of famed clarinet players, Alan Hacker and Tony Coe, Matt embraced different genres, from classical to jazz to pop.

In his professional life, Matt – who relished playing live with fellow musicians – was a founding member of the experimental jazz/classical/rock collective, DOLLYman, as well as the pop band Super db. He also joined Fabio Zambelli, the Italian jazz guitarist, to create three jazz and free improvisation albums for clarinet and guitar.

Away from the stage, Matt was a caring and popular teacher at the BRIT School amongst other well-known institutions. But most of his time was filled with composing: writing and recording pieces for himself as well as his many collaborators, whether they played classical or pop, or something in between.

The most personal and deeply felt of his compositions was this collection of preludes and fugues. Unusually for Matt, he kept the project secret through its six years of creation, and finished it only weeks before his passing. Its meaning to him is difficult to overstate. In some of his final moments, Matt made certain that his loved ones knew where the music could be found, and even shared his dream that someone of the calibre of Freddy Kempf might one day play it. He didn't live to see that dream fulfilled, but fulfilled it was, thanks to the

generosity, persistence, and faith of close friends. And the music has even found life beyond this recording. It is now part of the Trinity College London official exam music selection. Matt would have delighted in the compliment, and – with his typical self-deprecating humor – sympathized with any student who faced such a challenge.

Matt Dibble left this world in May 2021, but his immense talent, skill, warmth, and kindness remain, for his family and many friends, undimmed.



Matt Dibble © Jo Hone

FREDDY KEMPF, PIANO

Freddy Kempf is one of today's most successful pianists performing to sell-out audiences all over the world. Exceptionally gifted with an unusually broad repertoire, Freddy has built a unique reputation as an explosive and physical performer who is not afraid to take risks as well as a serious, sensitive and profoundly musical artist.

Born in London in 1977, Freddy made his concerto debut with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the age of 8 and further came to national prominence in 1992 when he won the BBC Young Musician of the Year Competition. In 1998, his award of third, rather than first, prize in the Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition in Moscow provoked protests from the audience and an outcry in the Russian press, which proclaimed him "the hero of the competition".

Freddy has collaborated with conductors such as Järvi, Dutoit, Sawallisch, Sanderling, Chailly, Ashkenazy, Petrenko, Oramo, Davis, Belohlavek, Temirkanov, Altinoglu, and Dausgaard, and has worked with some of the world's most prestigious ensembles including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, La Scala Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, NHK Symphony, St. Petersburg Philharmonic, the Tonhalle Orchester and the Dresden Philharmonic. A committed recitalist, Freddy has appeared in many of the world's most important concert halls including the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire, the Berlin Konzerthaus, Milan's Sala Verdi, the Concertgebouw, London's Barbican, Manchester's Bridgewater Hall, the Sydney Opera House and Tokyo's Suntory Hall.

Highlights of Freddy's soloist career include his 2018 debut at the BBC Proms

and an extensive Asian tour including performances at the Seoul Arts Centre, PyeongChang Music Festival, and Singapore's Esplanade Concert Hall. Freddy has also featured as a touring soloist with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic and others, and has played/directed a tour of Beethoven's 3rd and 5th piano concertos with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

A prolific recording artist, Freddy's albums include both the BIS Records' 2019 release of Prokofiev sonatas and the 2015 release of Freddy's Tchaikovsky recital which received great critical acclaim. His 2010 recording of Prokofiev's Piano Concertos Nos. 2 & 3 with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and Andrew Litton was nominated for the Gramophone Concerto Award. This partnership was followed by the 2012 recording of Gershwin's works for piano and orchestra, described in the press as "beautiful, stylish, light, and elegant... magnificent".

Freddy is based in Germany with his family and is a keyboard professor at Munich City Music School.

CREDITS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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