



NICHOLAS
SCOTT-BURT

24 PRELUDES FOR PIANO

DA-HEE KIM

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DISC 1

1.	Prelude 1 in C Major	3:10
2.	Prelude 2 in D Minor	2:44
3.	Prelude 3 in D-Flat Major	3:45
4.	Prelude 4 in E-Flat Minor	1:01
5.	Prelude 5 in D Major	2:29
6.	Prelude 6 in E Minor	3:39
7.	Prelude 7 in E-Flat Major	3:16
8.	Prelude 8 in F Minor	2:13
9.	Prelude 9 in E Major	3:05
10.	Prelude 10 in F-Sharp Minor	1:40
11.	Prelude 11 in F Major	2:23
12.	Prelude 12 in G Minor	4:27
13.	Prelude 13 in G-Flat Major	2:44
14.	Prelude 14 in G Sharp Minor	1:54
15.	Prelude 15 in G Major	3:39
16.	Prelude 16 in A Minor	3:21
17.	Prelude 17 in A-Flat Major	4:45
18.	Prelude 18 in B-Flat Minor	3:54

Total playing time 54:18

DISC 2

1.	Prelude 19 in A Major	2:34
2.	Prelude 20 in B Minor	2:59
3.	Prelude 21 in B-Flat Major	2:13
4.	Prelude 22 in C Minor	2:22
5.	Prelude 23 in B-Major	5:21
6.	Prelude 24 in C-Sharp Minor	16:16
7.	Minimalis I	13:20
8.	Love Song	6:24

Total playing time 51:33

Nicholas Scott-Burt – 24 Preludes for Piano the Composer's Perspective

Pre-history

I composed the *Preludes* between May 2019 and February 2020, following in the footsteps of J.S.Bach, Chopin and Shostakovich, who are probably the first composers to come to mind when we think about pieces in all 24 keys. Bach's *Wohltemperierte Clavier* (two books of Preludes and Fugues, 1722 and 1742) is widely held to be a demonstration of the capabilities of *Equal Temperament*, the tuning system based on equal frequency ratios (nearly) between all semitones within an octave – a complex logarithmic calculation! Its predecessor, *Mean Tone Temperament* favoured the Pythagorean purity of major and minor thirds, but at the expense of the fifths, which became a little pinched; with the result that the keys too far away from C major were inherently dissonant. Whether Bach actually used Equal Temperament as we now understand it is uncertain – but we do know that he tuned his own keyboard instruments according to his own procedures, to enable improvisation through the full range of major and minor key signatures. Even so, apart from these 48 Preludes and Fugues there are few pieces by Bach which stray beyond a key signature of three or four flats or sharps – and the 'fours' are few and far between.

Chopin's 24 *Preludes* Opus 28 were composed nearly a hundred years later in 1839. The full range of key signatures was well-established by then, and arguably Chopin's intention was to explore the inherent

expressive character of each of the individual major and minor tonalities. It is a subjective notion of course; but even if we are sceptical about each key having a different ‘feel’, we are nevertheless probably aware of composers’ tendencies to use D major for the ceremonial, C minor for the tragic, and so forth.

Like Bach, Shostakovich composed two sets of pieces: his *24 Preludes* of 1933, and his *24 Preludes and Fugues* of 1950-51. Developments in the styles and techniques of Western Art Music in the mid-twentieth century were of course many and varied: for several decades Schoenberg and his disciples had been constructing systems to dismantle conventional tonality, but conversely there was also a great wave of neo-classicism spreading across Europe and beyond – the process of interpreting traditional structures in a modernist musical language – and this is contextually where Shostakovich’s pieces stand. There is no real evidence that he was particularly interested in ‘key character’, but the changing nuances of idiomatic keyboard writing between ‘mostly white note’ and ‘mostly black note’ key signatures, and how they fit the physiology of the human hand, is certainly a feature – as it seems to have been in Bach’s work, and particularly in his Book 2.

These are three seminal works which spread evenly across two centuries: there are of course other examples, notably by Rachmaninov and Scriabin; also by Stanford – and in our own lifetimes, Kapustin and Skempton.

The Scott-Burt Preludes

I had thought long and hard about a set of 24 Preludes for perhaps ten years before setting pen to paper, and quite *why* I did it *when* I did it, I don't recall! But I had always been interested in *key*, particularly in the way different tonalities (for a keyboard player) have a distinct *physical* feel under the fingers. Improvisation is often an integral part of my compositional process, particularly in piano and organ music, and I find that modulating and transposing frequently opens up possibilities for the material which otherwise might remain hidden. Structure is another fascination, and the way in which the overall architecture of a piece can influence its character. It occurred to me quite early on that the Preludes should be an integrated single work, a great 'symphony' for the piano in which the twenty-four pieces, as well as each existing in its own right as a miniature, combine to become four suites of six preludes each; and each suite, projecting its own discrete character, can be seen as equivalent to a 'movement' of the whole. Book 1 is neat and neo-classical; Book 2 more extravagant and romantic; Book 3 somewhat more introspective; and Book 4 bright and sunny, though with its darker moments.

In order to achieve such a cohesive sense of structural line throughout the work as a whole, the key scheme was really important. Bach, in both books of his *Wohltemperierte Clavier*, alternates majors and minors, going up in semitones: C major, C minor, C sharp major, C sharp minor etc. Chopin and Shostakovich alternate each major key with its relative minor, going around the 'circle of fifths': C major, A minor, G major, E minor etc. There are problems with both schemes, if the pieces are played as a sequence.

Rising by semitones means each key is only distantly related to the last one. Rising by fifths keeps the keys closely related, but makes the sequence of tonics less conjunct and more angular, and the sense of continuous structural line is possibly lost. My solution was to alternate the majors and minors, whilst also alternating rising tones with falling semitones: C major, D minor, D flat major, E flat minor etc. This way each minor key prelude is in the supertonic minor of the previous movement (closely related), and each major prelude shares a clear mediant relationship with the previous minor. The line of tonics is conjunct and seamless - the tonal transitions can be further smoothed when a movement ends on other than its tonic chord.

Musical language was another consideration, although it might be said that style and idiom choose the composer, not vice versa! Just as one would never try to compose a symphony without acknowledging one's forbears and their works which have led to the point where a new symphony is possible, so it was inevitable that all the music which has led to the point at which I wrote the Preludes would exert some influence on them. So you will hear, unsurprisingly, echoes of Bach, Chopin, Shostakovich: but also Handel and Purcell; you will hear Schumann, Liszt, Prokofiev, Bartok, Messiaen. And underlying it all, the presence (rarely overt, but never far below the surface) of jazz. All these colours combine to produce what I believe is a consistent and individual musical language: for I am convinced that if there exists a *music of the age* in the twenty-first century, then it embraces all music of the past – simply because, ever since the invention of recorded sound, the old music has never been allowed to slip away, but remains ever all around us and in our consciousness. The effect which any new music can exert on us is defined by its relationship with what is familiar, the music

we already know. A modern composer can choose to embrace this, or to reject it – but never to ignore it!

The Preludes: Book 1 – Preludes 1-6

Prelude 1 in C major: recalling Bach in its continuous neat groups of four semiquavers, though sometimes these slip into fives; the music touches on its most closely related keys to triangulate and confirm the C major tonality, as lyrical melodic phrases emerge from the delicate textures.

Prelude 2 in D minor: a passacaglia, or ground bass, but one in which the phrase lengths gradually reduce: 21 quavers (eighth notes), to 13, 8, 5, 3, 2, 1 – descending Fibonacci proportions.

Prelude 3 in D flat major: the keys in the ‘5, 6, and 7 o’clock’ positions at the bottom of the circle of fifths, hold some ambiguity, as they can all be alternatively notated in their enharmonic equivalents. Prelude 3 is written on three staves, each with a different key signature (D flat, F, and A) – echoing each other’s phrases with a high level of polytonality, though sometimes the harmony unexpectedly aligns. The key of D flat definitely wins in the end, though A major has the last word!

Prelude 4 in E flat minor: a furious toccata in this most terrifying of keys with a signature of 6 flats – consisting mostly of cluster chords, polyrhythms and tight syncopations; but relaxing in its final bars, and seamlessly linked to Prelude 5.

Prelude 5 in D major is as serene and ethereal as its predecessor is fast and furious. In a gentle 7 in a bar, but the syncopations often belying the true

position of its regular beats, the melodic and harmonic intervals are broad, rarely less than a seventh and sometimes more than 3 octaves.

Prelude 6 in E minor returns to a baroque model to balance Prelude 1, and sounds at first a little like a *Sarabande*, although the 4/4 time signature is at odds with the triple time phrase lengths at the beginning. Presenting its material as a fugal exposition, with cross rhythms and colours of jazz harmony, the fugue gives way to an extended episode leading to a final fantasia-like cadenza.

Book 2 – Preludes 7-12

Prelude 7 in E flat major: the rich chordal textures project a grandiose character – the key defined by the triads which underlie the dissonances. The metre is very unpredictable, so each chord change is more, or less, unexpected. The final sequence of chords leads strongly to a solid resolution on a chord of E flat major plus an added 4th.

Prelude 8 in F minor avoids triadic forms entirely, and defines its key at the outset through stating the minor third and the false relations between the major and minor 6ths and 7ths, those pitch relationships which typically define traditional minor tonalities. The time signature, a slow 3/4 throughout, subdivides its beats into quintuplets, and the form is a theme with two variations.

Prelude 9 in E major: a ‘chorale’ – the hymn-like phrases are harmonised in clusters which comprise usually six of the seven diatonic pitches in the key, and each of which is an inversion of the others. The tonality touches upon

the closely related keys before resolving into a sequence of chromatically coloured tonic-rooted cluster chords at the end.

Prelude 10 in F sharp minor: Chopin composed the so-called *Raindrop Prelude*, which was characterised by its repeating dominant A flat. Prelude 10 is a violent downpour, the repeating dominant now a C sharp – another toccata movement in a rapid 7/16. As a chordal theme emerges from the ‘raindrops’, the pace slackens towards the end, the 7/16s becoming 7/8s. When all comes to rest, the last of the rainwater spills suddenly to the ground in a chilly final flourish!

Prelude 11 in F major: three variations upon an unheard theme. In the first section we hear a sequence of dovetailed broken chord patterns, giving the three primary chords of four keys: F major, its dominant C major, its subdominant B flat major, and its relative minor, D. The second section presents the same chords, simplified as a left hand accompaniment, over which the right hand plays a nobly lyrical syncopated melody. The final section substitutes clusters for the original chords, each one containing all notes of the scale associated with its original triad.

Prelude 12 in G minor: a return to a baroque model, and also to some Fibonacci proportioning. Following the opening scalic cadenza, there begins a kind of *French Overture*, characterised by its dotted and double-dotted rhythms – but like the *Sarabande* in Prelude 6 it is soon taken over by cross-rhythms and cross-harmonies, arriving at an unresolved cadence in the dominant. Now begins the main body of the Prelude: continuous semiquavers (16th notes), and a bar of demisemiquavers (32nds) echoing the opening scale passage, arranged in Fibonacci phrases – each one

beginning the same, but lengthening on each reiteration. The first is a 'phrase' of one semiquaver, then 2, then 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55 – these are freely harmonised and subjected to counterpoint and imitation; then the sequence repeats, but as a mirror inversion with the semiquavers in the left hand, and taking the phrase length (by now it is multiple phrases) to 89, with an echo of the opening *French Overture*. A third sequence takes the phrase length to 144, which provides the resolution of all which has gone before – for 144 is represented at 12×12 , so gives 12 bars of $3/4$ time, in the style of a *Courante* – a further '144' gives a further 12 bars, those 24 bars now divided into three 8-bar sections, *alla danza*, to conclude the movement and the second book.

Book 3 – Preludes 13-18

Prelude 13 in G flat major/F sharp major: G flat and F sharp majors are the most ambiguous of the keys at the very bottom of the traditional circle, with six flats and six sharps respectively in their signatures. This prelude (actually the first to be written, and recycled from a student piece I wrote when I was twenty) begins in G flat, but changes its 'spelling' at bar 7 into the key of F sharp. The language is unashamedly Wagnerian in its chromaticism, and the ambiguity of notation is unavoidable: as to stick with either of the two keys in order to avoid the enharmonic change would take the chromatic modulations either into severe double flats or double sharps.

Prelude 14 in G sharp minor: a simple plaintive chordal theme, around which dances a busy haze of octatonic patterns – relentlessly attempting to surround the defiant melody.

Prelude 15 in G major: this follows a construction similar to *Minimalis I* (see below), but on a much smaller scale. A set of progressive micro-variations upon a two-chord theme (chords II-9 and V in G major – a 4/4 bar followed by a 3/8) Each iteration is a variation upon the last, with the music developing continuously and organically away from its starting place.

Prelude 16 in A minor: bearing the descriptor *Searching*, this is purely in the Aeolian mode, entirely on the white keys, and there are no bar lines nor time signature: the repeated chords in the left hand to be played with no differentiation of emphasis, and the only sense of metre to be drawn from the phrase lengths of the melodic right hand and the chord changes in the left. This is the simplest of the preludes, but being at the two-thirds point in the sequence of 24, its climax (similarly at the two-thirds point of the prelude) represents, possibly, the emotional apogee of the entire work.

Prelude 17 in A flat major: an exercise in mensuration canons – those in which the staggered superimposed melodies move at different tempi. We hear first the theme unaccompanied, then in canon at the fourth in a time ratio of 3:2; then again at the fourth, still 3:2, but in a different voicing; 4:3 at the fifth, 4:3 at the fourth; then simultaneously 4:3 at the octave an 1:1 at the fifth; finally 3:2 at the fifth. The strands of melody are freely harmonised and delicately textured, with some ambiguity of key when the differing pitches and their tonalities pull against each other.

Prelude 18 in B flat minor: the music verges on the atonal – the assigned key of B flat minor justified by the presence of every chromatic semitone except B flat, to create a yearning for that pitch. The texture is entirely monodic, only single notes sounding, or doublings at the octave – though

the score indicates a *misty haze of pedal* which provides the only sense of harmony within the natural resonances. The final resolution to B flat minor, making sense of all that comes before, is really only experienced in the first chord of Prelude 19 - the beginning of Book 4.

Book 4 – Preludes 19-24

Prelude 19 in A major: the opening chord, B flat minor with an added 2nd, resolves the suspended tonality of Prelude 18, slipping then via an enharmonically common mediant (D flat/C sharp) into the bright and elegant key of A major. The Prelude is a study in cross-divisions, 2 against 3, 3 against 4, 4 against 5 etc, incorporating further syncopation, and constant changing of metre. Harmonically the music moves far away from A major, to arrive at the B flat minor tonality with which it began, then resolving once again, via the same enharmonic mediant thread, to its A major conclusion.

Prelude 20 in B minor: a waltz, in three sections – the first, as expected, in 3/4 time; the second losing a quaver to form a variation in 5/8; and the third now gaining a quaver, redressing the balance in 7/8 time. Between the 5/8 and the 7/8 ‘waltzes’ is a short development of two secondary themes (an arpeggio, and a short phrase with its variation) which emerge along the way.

Preludes 21 in B flat major and Prelude 22 in C minor: these two movements sit together as a *Prelude and Fugue*: Prelude 21 is marked *Joyous*, and here my jazz leanings come more clearly to the surface in chordal and highly syncopated textures, and leading to long passages of

cascading chords in 4 against 3 patterns (dotted quavers against crotchets – dotted eighths against quarters). The intense fugue which is Prelude 22, essentially for three voices but with a few liberties taken, begins in octaves in the bass register, and follows the usual progress of baroque fugal exposition – short episodes between some of the entries, and longer ones between the main sections. Along the way the fugue subject undergoes various transformations, canonic writing, and stretto, becoming a mirror inversion of itself, which is finally played in canon with its original form; then ending on a chord which superimposes the triads of G, B flat, and D flat majors

Prelude 23 in B major: the tonally suspended ending of Prelude 22 gives some uncertainty to the opening tonality of Prelude 23, this becoming clear only with the placing of the tonic B at the end of the third bar. The rhythm is in a serene 11/8 throughout, each bar defined by a semibreve/whole note plus three quavers/eighths. The harmonic texture is widely spaced, beginning with superimposed major 7ths, at first only one pitch from each chord changing chromatically bar by bar to create a very slow and deeply expressive sense of harmonic progress: often tense and dissonant, and always seeking its resolution, which finally arrives in the five arpeggiated B major chords at the conclusion.

Prelude 24 in C sharp minor: a finale not only to Book 4, but more importantly to the work as a whole, and which revisits each of the previous 23 Preludes. Beginning with two *sforzandi* – richly voiced C sharp minor triads, from which emerge figurations drawn from Preludes 1 and 6, the introduction continues with the crashing chords of Prelude 3, heralding the main body of the movement – a *grand passacaglia* recalling the theme

of Prelude 2. Over its repeating pattern appears each of the remaining Preludes in turn, though not in order, and often disguised by changes from their originals in metre, tempo and dynamic. Periodically the key moves up by semitones – C sharp minor, to D minor, E flat minor, E minor. Following the reminiscence of the G major Prelude, the passacaglia seems to halt in the stillness of the suspended pedalled chords; but returning to C sharp minor, now builds inexorably towards its final climax in the impassioned reprise of Prelude 16. Fragments of Prelude 13 link this to the final section, where the music returns to Prelude 1, this time a semitone higher in C sharp major, slower at first, *gently unfolding*, reaching its conclusion as major turns back to minor, and the work ends with unison octaves, and then a single pitch C sharp – *lunga possibile, diminuendo a niente*.

Minimalis I and Love Song

Minimalis I

Composed in 2016, this began as a self-imposed experimental exercise in structuring. After the initial dissonant chord (bottom to top G-C-E-G-C-F) we hear a simple progression of three chords, which are then repeated with an embellishment, then again with a further embellishment – a form which I have dubbed *progressive micro-variation*, also used in *Prelude 15* (see above). Each reiteration of the motif is a variation of the last, out of

which develop new strands of melody and harmony, and these become an ever-changing source of the thematic material. Taking this as the fabric from which the music is constructed, a tightly organised and rigorously proportioned symphonic structure is built. At the given tempo of crotchet = 60 and played strictly metronomically (though I hope no-one would!) the piece lasts for precisely 12 minutes. But this tightness lends strength to the structure, which falls into five continuous sections: the opening sequence; then a slow and sustained meditation on the themes presented so far; next a highly rhythmic and texturally complex development leading to a furious cadenza; then a “coming together” of all previous thematic gestures in the poised and ordered form of a *Sarabande*; and finally the coda, which echoes the original micro-variations and returns through further development to the same dissonant but nevertheless resolutive chord which began the piece.

Love Song

Also composed in 2016, this is my 21st Century take on the tradition of the piano “Love Song” – recalling Romantic works by such composers as Mendelssohn, Schubert, Schumann, Liszt et al, Some of these were transcriptions of *lieder*, others in the form of *Songs Without Words*, some simply sonata movements which may or may not have intended an extra-musical programme, but which lend themselves to such an interpretation. My *Love Song* was composed blindly, with no intended recipient (I have written real *singable* love songs for that purpose!) – and it seems to express a tender, yet fragile, mix of emotions...

A gentle rising theme in B major begins the piece, and leads us through some expressive melodic phrases, 3 against 4 rhythms, a few unexpectedly dissonant chords, perhaps suggesting that this love is not fully requited; and arriving at a refrain - a repeated motif in 5/8 – *I love you, I love you, I love you...* The melody of the second *Più Mosso* section is taken from my youthful setting (1984) of Baudelaire's *Hymne*:

*À la très-chère, à la très-belle, Qui remplit mon coeur de clarté,
À l'ange, à l'idole immortelle, Salut en immortalité!*

*To the dearest, to the most beautiful, who fills my heart with brightness,
To the angel, to the immortal idol, I greet you in immortality!*

Nicholas Scott-Burt

Nicholas Scott-Burt, composer

Born in Bristol in 1962, Nicholas played the piano by ear, composed, and improvised from a very early age. Whilst still at primary school in Reading, he wrote and produced three “operas”, performed by him and a few bemused classmates in the school hall. The work he was eventually happy to call his *Opus 1* was an organ sonata, written in 1980 when he was 17 years old.

He studied music at the University of Bristol, where his teachers included Raymond Warren, Derek Bourgeois, Adrian Beaumont and Robert Saxton – *“making me a second generation pupil of Tippett, Howells, Nadia Boulanger and Luciano Berio – quite an eclectic mix!”* – gaining Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees, and 20 years later returning for a PhD.

He was a school Director of Music in his early career, since when he has been variously a church musician, choral and orchestral conductor, organist, accompanist, jazz pianist, teacher and examiner. His music ranges from pop songs to symphonic scores, much choral and church music, a violin concerto, a chamber concerto for flute and harp, and a *Sinfonietta: The Western Cape*, composed in 2024 for the Cape Town and Stellenbosch Youth Orchestras.

Of his musical style, he says: *“There are three main primary colours, but myriad shades between them. They are neo-classicism (new wine in old bottles), postmodernism (old wine in new bottles), and jazz (never mind the bottles, just drink the wine).”*



Da-Hee Kim, piano

An award-winning Korean pianist, Da-Hee Kim has performed at leading venues and festivals in South Korea, Europe, UK and Algeria including Salle Colonne and Salle Cortot in Paris, Arsenal de Metz, Steinway Hall in London, Drapers' Hall in Coventry, Festival Culturel International de Musiquie Symphonique in Algiers and the July Festival in Seoul.

A passionate chamber musician, she appears regularly with her brother, violinist Da-Min Kim, as Duo Ainos. Their acclaimed album *Tradition chez les modernes* was praised by critics and broadcast by KBS in South Korea, and the Duo was awarded 2nd prize at the Concours International de Musique de Chambre de Lyon.

Having graduated with distinction Sunhwa Arts School under the tutelage of DaeJin Kim, she moved to France with her family. Da-Hee entered the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris the following year and earned degrees in piano, accompaniment, and applied music theory. She further refined her artistry in Munich under the guidance of the legendary pianist, Elisso Virsaladze before completing her Doctor of Musical Arts degree in piano performance at Peabody Conservatory in the U.S. A prize winner at international competitions including Montecatini, Valletta, Sète, and A. Roussel in Sofia, she continues to be recognised for her expressive playing and nuanced palette of tone colours.

Alongside her concert career, Da-Hee has taught at conservatoires and schools in France and the UK, and currently works as a pianist at Elmhurst Ballet School in association with Birmingham Royal Ballet.





L-R: Engineer Jonathan Scott, composer Nicholas Scott-Burt and pianist Da-Hee Kim
St George's Concert Hall

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