

# Malcolm DEDMAN

## PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME ONE

PIANO SONATA NO. 2  
PIANO SONATA NO. 3  
FOUR KINDS OF LOVE  
REFORMATION

Nancy Lee Harper

# MALCOLM DEDMAN: PIANO MUSIC, VOLUME ONE

by Nancy Lee Harper

Born in London in 1948, Malcolm Dedman was initially self-taught, having started to compose when he was twelve. Although he later had formal violin and singing lessons, it was composition, arising out of improvising at the piano, that he was most interested in pursuing.

His first formal lessons in composition were with Patric Standford at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London, in 1973–74. He did not receive a formal musical qualification until 2005, when he passed with distinction his Masters Degree in Composing Concert Music at Thames Valley University, London – now the University of West London.

He considers his compositional style to be an individual one, benefitting from an in-depth understanding of twentieth-century trends, ranging from serialism to quasi-aleatoric techniques. He now adopts an individual ‘post-modern’ (or ‘meta-modern’) idiom, based on original modes, that is very personal in approach. Although his music owes much to the music of Messiaen and Bartók, it also integrates the influences of many other composers as well as music from different cultures. He believes in writing music that speaks directly to the audience, conveying a purposeful message, in a style that is appropriate to this century and without compromising musical quality. More information is available on his website, [www.malcolmdedman.com](http://www.malcolmdedman.com).

He has been writing music for piano solo since his teens, in the 1960s, the earliest works being a dramatic First Sonata and a set of variations. The works I have recorded here are from his more mature years. The Second Sonata, subtitled ‘In Search’, was composed in 1984. *Four Kinds of Love* was written in 2008, and *Reformation*, which opens the album, a year later. The Third Sonata, subtitled ‘To the Memory of an Angel’, was composed in 2021, only months after the passing of his wife, Dr Anja Morris-Paxton.

These four pieces also have either a direct or loose connection with the Bahá'í Faith, which Dedman embraced in 1986, as I had in 1969. The Bahá'í Faith, founded in 1844, is a world religion with millions of followers who embrace the continuity of religion in its various forms, whether Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam or other; it was founded by Bahá'u'lláh (1817–92) in Persia. We Bahá'ís believe that our faith is 'divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men.'<sup>1</sup> We work for world peace and justice, the elimination of prejudices, equality of men and women, and for the betterment of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Malcolm's music, while innovative, is always interesting and intrigues the ear. From the performer's point of view, it can be rhythmically challenging but also sonorously beautiful. I first met Malcolm in 2004, where we collaborated on a short-term summer project at the Bahá'í Arts Academy in the UK. I have maintained my admiration for his work. He is a fine craftsman of the music materials he chooses and offers a variety of styles that reveal his broad expertise. To my ears, the works in this recording also reveal influences from Debussy, Ravel and Ginastera.

<sup>1</sup> From Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, 'The World Religion: A Summary of its Aims, Teachings and History', letter written by Shoghi Effendi to the High Commissioner for Palestine, June 1933, available online at [https://bahai-library.com/writings/shoghi-effendi/uncompiled\\_letters/1930s/1933-06-XX%20The%20World%20Religion.html](https://bahai-library.com/writings/shoghi-effendi/uncompiled_letters/1930s/1933-06-XX%20The%20World%20Religion.html). Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (1897–1957) was the grandson and successor of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, appointed to the role of Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 until his death in 1957.

<sup>2</sup> More information can be found at [www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org).

## A NOTE ON THE WORKS IN THIS ALBUM

by Malcolm Dedman

*Reformation* (2009) [1] is in a single movement but divided into two distinct sections. The score is prefaced with the following quotation by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921), the eldest son of Bahá’u’lláh:

From every standpoint the world of humanity is undergoing a reformation. The laws of former governments and civilizations are in process of revision; scientific ideas and theories are developing and advancing to meet a new range of phenomena; invention and discovery are penetrating hitherto unknown fields, revealing new wonders and hidden secrets of the material universe; industries have vastly wider scope and production; everywhere the world of mankind is in the throes of evolutionary activity indicating the passing of the old conditions and advent of the new age of reformation. Old trees yield no fruitage; old ideas and methods are obsolete and worthless now. Old standards of ethics, moral codes and methods of living in the past will not suffice for the present age of advancement and progress.

This is the cycle of maturity and reformation in religion as well. Dogmatic imitations of ancestral beliefs are passing. They have been the axis around which religion revolved but now are no longer fruitful; on the contrary, in this day they have become the cause of human degradation and hindrance. Bigotry and dogmatic adherence to ancient beliefs have become the central and fundamental source of animosity among men, the obstacle to human progress, the cause of warfare and strife, the destroyer of peace, composure and welfare in the world.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Talk given on 17 November 1912 at Genealogical Hall, 252 West 58th Street, New York, reproduced in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 1922, available online at <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/promulgation-universal-peace/32#565043512>.

The first section expresses how people resist change, as described in the quotation, creating much turbulence. This turbulence and violence build to a frenzy, where the thematic material destroys itself. The final moment depicts the much-prophesied understanding that a world calamity is about to come. This calamity, however, is superseded by the second, calm section, signifying the rolling-up of all outdated beliefs, to be replaced by a new order of laws, politics, inventions, beliefs, etc., that humanity learns to accept. This section is in the form of a set of variations, there being a 'transitional' theme and a main theme, both loosely based on material from the first section. The final extended variation is a vision of the ultimate reformation – that of a 'Most Great Peace', as foretold by Bahá'u'lláh.

**Piano Sonata No. 2, 'In Search'**, was written in 1984, at a time when I started to search for my true spiritual beliefs. The three movements do not have titles but represent a spiritual search that cumulated in my discovery of the Bahá'í Faith and eventual acceptance of it. The dramatic first movement, marked *Vigoroso* [2], expresses the inner turmoil of not knowing which way to turn, especially in the face of so many troubles and conflicts in the world. In 'arch' form, the slow second movement, *Lamentoso* [3], is generally very lethargic in mood, but expresses a determination to search for answers. The third and final movement, *Spiritoso* [4], is a development of two main strands, one melodic and the other harmonic. It gradually unfolds from a quiet statement of the main thematic idea to an expression of joy at having found some answers.

This Sonata is dedicated to two composers whose music I have always admired, Béla Bartók and Olivier Messiaen.

**Four Kinds of Love** (2008) is a suite lasting around twenty minutes. The four movements are intended as a kind of meditation on the philosophy of the following topics: the love of mankind for mankind; the love of mankind for God; the love of God for mankind and the love of God for the identity of God (according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'a reflection of Himself in the mirror of His Creation'). The word 'God' is meant to engulf all possible meanings in religion and other spiritual writings, from the Creator to the Universal Divine, or whatever an individual thinks God is. The four movements are

reflections on a text of the same title by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, taken from one of His many talks and quoted in the book *Paris Talks*.<sup>2</sup>

The first movement, 'Love of Man for Man – Unity of Spirits' [5], is a simple melody over an *ostinato* in an irregular (7/8) time. The bluesy mood has a feeling of congeniality about it, and yet a profound feeling of unity can be felt. The second movement, 'Love of Man for God – Divine Spirit' [6], is an expression of the love mankind offers to the Divine Creator through faith. The music provides an atmosphere of utter stillness and solitude. The third movement, 'Love of God for Man – Inexhaustible Graces' [7], is an expression of the love which God has for mankind. This music is, on the surface, an extremely simple melody in D major, but contains rather poignant harmonies. The melody gives a feeling of waiting for a Divine Message. The final movement, 'Love of God towards the Self – God is Love' [8], attempts to express God's love towards the Self, the creation itself. Bell-like sounds and a modal melody are the basis of this movement. Through this Love all other love exists, and so brief reminders of the other three movements are stated towards the end. The music points towards an endless peace.

This piece is offered as a reflection of the realities of these categories of love, inadequate though it might be to express such an intention, with the aim that the listener can meditate on them and the original text by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to aid individual understanding.

My **Piano Sonata No. 3, 'To the Memory of an Angel'** (2021), is dedicated to my late wife, Dr Anja Morris-Paxton, who passed away on 10 November 2020 after a fight with cancer. Anja was a qualified nutritionist and researcher. She contributed articles to many journals on subjects dear to her heart and wrote two course books, one on lifestyle management and the other on nutrition. She loved music and life in general. She had a loving personality and had also embraced the Bahá'í faith. She will be sadly missed by all who knew her as she devoted her life to the service of helping others. It was an honour to have had sixteen years of marriage to her. Although this sonata is a very personal work,

<sup>2</sup> The title notwithstanding, the talk itself was given in London on 4 January 1913, and is available online at <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/paris-talks/7#954436394>.

reflecting on key features of Anja's life, these features can indeed apply to any person who, like her, lives a full and satisfying life.

The *Andante* first movement, 'Struggle' [9], is close to sonata form with a slow introduction, followed by a fast first subject and contrasting slow second subject. The development and recapitulation section are fused together, such that the division between the two sections is vague. The movement represents a struggle between these contrasting subjects. The second movement, 'Overcoming Difficulties', marked *Andantino, alla Scherzando* [10], is in  $\frac{6}{8}$  time. The first theme is a four-bar phrase that is treated in different ways. The tempo quickens into a second theme, after which these themes alternate. The third movement, 'Spiritual Guidance', marked *Lento e Passionato* [11], is slow and mainly chordal and meditative. A short motif at the introduction to the first movement is developed over the chords, as well as high, rapid scale-like figures which represent guidance from above. The chords are further developed, and the movement ends with further expansion of the introduction from the first movement. In the fourth and final movement, 'Fulfilment – Into the Light' [12], the main part is marked *Allegro* and the ending *Lento*. It starts with an accelerating scale-like passage. The main theme is a return to  $\frac{6}{8}$  time and the link with the second movement is not far away; hence it can be seen as a 'fulfilment' of that movement. Similarly, the second theme is a development of the second theme of the first movement. The first theme of this movement returns, after which a new theme is stated, mainly chordal, where the chords could be thought of as a fulfilment of the third movement. Just as the movement appears to be a rondo, the first theme of this movement fails to return; instead, a return only to the introductory scale-like passage of this movement leads to a fulfilment of the first main theme of the first movement. This theme is abruptly cut off, allowing the music to advance to the finale, a very slow section (*Lento*), entitled 'Into the Light' and based on the introduction to the first movement. I see the ending as conducting the soul peacefully into the next world.

Anja and I married in 2004 in England and in 2007, since she was from South Africa, we moved to Noupoort, a small town in the eastern Karoo region of South Africa, more or less equidistant between Cape Town and Durban. My musical style was largely

unaffected by the move, except for a few influences from African music in general. Moving to South Africa has given me much more time to devote to my music, although recently (2021) I moved to the city of Bloemfontein, meaning ‘fountain of flowers’, a place which combines the peace of the countryside with all the practical conveniences a city offers.

**Nancy Lee Harper** has been described as ‘an extraordinarily multi-talented American musician and scholar’ (Ray Picot, *Music & Vision*) and a ‘marvellous performing artist’ (Joseph Banowetz, *Piano Journal*). She has performed in 29 countries on four continents at such prestigious institutions as the Juilliard and Eastman Schools of Music, Liszt University in Budapest, Norwegian State Academy, China Conservatory and others, as well as at festivals around the world. She has several recordings to her credit, including a number of world premieres of Portuguese works, some of them dedicated to her. She is currently engaged in recording the complete solo piano works of the American composer Beryl Rubinstein (1898–1952). She is also a professional harpsichordist, having studied with Geraint Jones at the Royal Academy of Music in London as well as with other teachers. Her formation as a pianist followed the school of



Tobias Matthay (1858–1945) with his associate, Frank Mannheimer (1896–1972), and Matthay’s ‘adopted daughter’ Denise Lassimonne (1903–94), among others. She made her orchestral debut in the Schumann Piano Concerto at the age of fourteen, with the Shreveport Symphony, with the composer, conductor and pianist Rudolph Ganz (1877–1972) on the podium.

As a scholar, she has written hundreds of papers, and her books include studies of Manuel de Falla, Portuguese Piano Music, Baroque fingering and other topics. Her research into Ibero-Latin American music, music and medicine, music pedagogy and academic Bahá’í topics has been translated into six languages. She is a contributor to the *Piano Journal* of the European



Piano Teachers' Association (EPTA) and serves on the advisory boards of scientific journals in Brazil and Portugal.

Listed in *American Keyboard Artists* and *Marquis International Who's Who*, she was nominated for the Samii-Houseinpour 'Excellence in the Arts' Prize (Belgium, 2006). While Professor and Head of Piano at the Universidade de Aveiro (Portugal), she founded the 'Festival Internacional de Piano Celebrando Grandes Pianistas' and co-founded the Portuguese branch of EPTA. She is a life-time member of the American Liszt Society. Now retired from her formal positions, she lives in Canada near family.

*[www.nancyleecharper.com](http://www.nancyleecharper.com)*



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In loving memory of Dr Anja Morris-Paxton

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# MALCOLM DEDMAN Piano Music, Volume One

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1	<b>Reformation</b> (2009)	<b>11:12</b>
	<b>Piano Sonata No. 2, 'In Search'</b> (1984)	<b>16:24</b>
2	I <i>Vigoroso</i>	4:48
3	II <i>Lamentoso</i>	7:27
4	III <i>Spiritoso</i>	4:09
	<b>Four Kinds of Love</b> (2008)	<b>20:10</b>
5	I Love of Man for Man – Unity of Spirits	3:31
6	II Love of Man for God – Divine Spirit	7:05
7	III Love of God for Man – Inexhaustible Graces	4:17
8	IV Love of God towards the Self – God is Love	5:17
	<b>Piano Sonata No. 3, 'To the Memory of an Angel'</b> (2021)	<b>18:34</b>
9	I Struggle: <i>Andante</i>	5:53
10	II Overcoming Difficulties: <i>Andantino, alla Scherzando</i>	3:00
11	III Spiritual Guidance: <i>Lento e Passionato</i>	4:06
12	IV Fulfilment – Into the Light: <i>Allegro – Lento</i>	5:35

Nancy Lee Harper, piano

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FIRST RECORDINGS