

READING BETWEEN THE LINES

Thursday 29 Feb 2024, 1:05pm

St. Mary-le-Bow Church, Cheapside, London, EC2V 6AU

Peter De Souza - Piano | peterdesouza.co.uk

Welcome to Reading Between The Lines, a recital in which I explore an imaginative interpretation of music from the Baroque (c.1600-1750) and Romantic (c.1810-1910) periods. At the heart of these eras, despite many stylistic contrasts, lies a shared tradition of improvisation and individual expression, which musicians communicated through prevalent un-notated conventions, often ignored by modern musicians who just focus on playing the notes printed on the page.



We are fortunate to have both written sources from Baroque musicians and early recordings by Romantic pianists that document these un-notated performance practices, which inform my interpretations beyond the notation into sound worlds lost to the passage of time.

Unmeasured Prelude in D Major (4')

Louis Couperin (1626 - 1661)

French Suite No.5 in G Major, BWV 816 (18')

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 - 1750)

*i. Allemande ii. Courante iii. Sarabande
iv. Gavotte v. Bourrée vi. Loure vii. Gigue*

The most curious of genres commences our journey into the Baroque. Louis Couperin was an influential Parisian musician who invented the unmeasured prelude for harpsichord, which is a unique and rarely performed type of composition. It demands a significant level of interpretation as the composer provides the notes to be played, but the durations and rhythms are left for the performer to decide. The free form of this introductory prelude takes us on an intricate and surprising harmonic journey, offering us a glimpse into the creative mind and compositional skill of Couperin.

Bach's 5th French Suite is a stunning collection of 7 Baroque dances written between c.1722-1723, composed for keyboard instrument (harpsichord or clavichord). It was customary in the 18th century for keyboardists to embellish the composer's notation with improvisatory musical ornaments (e.g. adding notes or altering rhythms) to enhance the expressive character of the piece.

The suite begins with a graceful *Allemande* of Renaissance German origin, followed by an Italian-style *Courante*, characterised by hopping and jumping choreography over flowing melodies. The *Sarabande* ensues, a slow court dance occupying the heart of the suite. Next, a *Gavotte*, the folk dance of French alpine residents and a *Bourrée*, a concert dance of the French court from which the *pas de bourrée*, a quick gliding step used in ballet, is derived. The *Loure* is a rare Parisian ballroom dance of noble beauty, made distinctive by its symmetrical choreography. A spritely *Gigue*, combining the rustic, foot-stomping English jig and the sophisticated fugal French style (displaced interweaving voices chasing one another) concludes the suite in a dazzling curtain call.

Intermezzo in A Major, Op. 118, No. 2 (6')

Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897)

Rhapsody in B Minor, Op.79, No.1 (10')

Brahms was a great creator of impassioned compositions that were Romantic in nature, thanks to their complex harmony and dramaticism, yet Classical in structure, often employing antiquated forms. Brahms lived an isolated life, filled with a tragic love for his close friend, Clara Schumann, the revered pianist/composer who was married to Robert Schumann. This love triangle influenced many prized works of the Romantic era, including the Intermezzo in today's recital.

We can explore Brahms' music in more dimensions than his peers and predecessors as he was one of the first composers to record himself playing his own music. His vast use of un-notated dislocation, arpeggiation, rhythmic alteration and tempo changes suggests that playing the notes alone omits expected expressive features that can only be realised by reading between the lines.

The Intermezzo is a highly emotional work from 1893 dedicated to Clara Schumann (died in 1896) which portrays Brahms' pensive longing for a life of romance he was unable to have with her. The score is full of descriptive instructions such as *dolce* [sweetly] and *espressivo* [expressively] that give the pianist clues to the soundscape Brahms desired, achieved by exploiting the piano's touch sensitivity, in addition to techniques discussed above that can be heard in early recordings.

Dismissed by Brahms as 'worthless trash', the Rhapsodies of Op.79 are popular contributors to the canon of Western classical music. The Rhapsody in B Minor employs the pianist like an ancient Greek rhapsode, who would recite the heroic tales of epic poetry which explore the full spectrum of human emotion under the restraint of dactylic hexameter. Similarly, Brahms writes an epic musical journey that swiftly transitions through a multitude of intense feelings to be played with a free, improvised sensation, bound by the structural requirements of Beethovenian sonata form.

Biography

Peter is a London-based pianist, organist, clarinettist and Javanese gamelan player (Indonesian classical music) with performance experience across the UK & Indonesia, including the Royal Festival Hall, Royal Albert Hall, Cadogan Hall, Birmingham Symphony Hall, The Glasshouse (prev. Sage Gateshead) & the International Gamelan Festival in Java.



A passion of Peter's is to introduce classical music to younger generations, which he pursues as a member of the London Philharmonic Orchestra's New Generation Board. In addition, he is an experienced organist, performs piano/clarinet recitals and plays gamelan at the UK Indonesian Embassy. He is also an ultramarathon runner and works as an investment analyst at Man Group.

Peter obtained a First-Class Honours degree in Music from King's College London in 2020 (specialising in 18th-century music & dance, keyboard music from Bach to Beethoven, clarinet performance (with the Royal Academy of Music) and composition) and was awarded the Adam Prize in 2019 for receiving the highest marks in the Faculty of Music. Peter also holds diplomas for piano and clarinet performance from the Royal Schools of Music and Trinity College London.