

**PORTLAND PIANO VIRTUAL EXTRAVAGANZA**  
**PROGRAM NOTES**  
by Elizabeth Joy Roe & Greg Anderson

In the time of COVID-19, our mission still rings true—in fact, it has never felt more urgent. We're fired up and more inspired than ever to make classical music a powerful and relevant force in society, even while isolated apart, cross-country. In association with Portland Piano International, we've created two online concert experiences to capture the in-the-moment essence of live performances. We asked ourselves, "How can we recreate all the things we love about live performances, but in a virtual world?" Crucial to our quest: a strong sense of community, the thrill of risk-taking, and a profound connection with the human condition. We are resolved to make these virtual events feel impactful, surprising, relevant to our times, highly interactive, and lovingly tailored to the city of Portland.

Thank you for taking this virtual expedition with us. Happy listening, viewing, and participating!

**Event No. 1: Saturday, August 15, 2020**

**JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH: FOUR SELECTIONS**

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) is universally considered the exemplar of the Baroque era, if not the ultimate composer for the ages. Through this set of scholarly, sacred, and secular works, we aim to present a concise yet fully dimensional portrait of Bach, showcasing the extraordinary range of his compositional output. We juxtapose original and reimagined versions of his music, reframing Bach's art in a modern context while underscoring its timeless vitality, profundity, and power. The reciprocity of duo pianism also unveils unexpected and intriguing dimensions—from the conversational and intimate to the adversarial and epic—within Bach's legendary compositions, a further reminder of the elastic yet unwavering authenticity of his creative voice.

**J. S. BACH "Contrapunctus IX: Double Fugue" from *The Art of Fugue*, BWV 1080 (3 min)**

*Music video*

The exciting and intrepid Contrapunctus IX from *The Art of Fugue* features a double fugue in which two subjects occur dependently and in invertible counterpoint at the 12th. This music video—the sole video predating the conception of these virtual events for Portland Piano International—was filmed and created in 2015 (in conjunction with the release of our all-Bach album, *The Art of Bach*). Considering our current Zoom-dominated reality, we have chosen to launch our online festival with this video because the aesthetic struck us as surprisingly prescient and pertinent: our original concept, centering on a grid-like format to represent the contrapuntal conversation between multiple voices, engendered a visual that should surely resonate with viewers of today's COVID-19 era. Moreover, this is dynamic, fire-starting music that dazzles on several levels—the cerebral, sonic, and pianistic—thanks to Bach's genius.

**J. S. BACH Five Canons on the First Eight Notes of the Goldberg Ground, BWV 1087 (3 min)**

*Music video premiere*

The lesser known *Canons from the Goldberg Ground* are based on the first eight bass notes of his titanic *Goldberg Variations*. In this music video, we perform five of the fourteen canons, each of which employs stunning contrapuntal gymnastics. For example, Canon No. 11 is something of a

puzzle: the cross can be found in a variety of guises, both musically and graphically within the notation itself, symbolizing the inscription Bach himself inserted: “Christ will crown those who carry His cross.” Our music video rendering—featuring Bach’s own manuscripts of this piece—visually illustrates the compositional and executational ingenuity of these variations, as well as the bassline’s omnipresent role.

**J.S. BACH Sonatina from *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit*, BWV 106 “Actus tragicus” (arr. Kurtág) (3 min)**  
*Music video premiere*

If his deeply devotional religious works are any indication, Bach seemed in direct communion with the divine, as heard in *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit* (“God’s time is the best time”). Twentieth-century Hungarian composer György Kurtág (b. 1926) created this simple yet poignant duet transcription of the opening movement to perform with his wife Márta. Significantly, the *primo* part is performed nearly entirely with overlapping arms, creating a visual representation of the cross for audience members.

We filmed this music video at the Sunset Center in Carmel-by-the-Sea, California, where we gave a recital for the Carmel Bach Festival. It is dedicated to the loving memory of Michael Hawley, an extraordinary friend, Renaissance man, and brilliant amateur pianist.

**J. S. BACH “Allegro” from Concerto in A minor for Four Harpsichords, BWV 1065 (4 min)**  
*Music video premiere*

Bach is known for making transcriptions of his own compositions, but he also arranged the compositions of other composers, including Antonio Vivaldi. This Concerto for Four Harpsichords (or pianos, in our modern-day version) is based on Vivaldi’s Concerto for four violins, from his Opus 3 *L’estro armónico* series of concertos for string instruments in various combinations, noted by Vivaldi scholar Michael Talbot as “perhaps the most influential collection of instrumental music to appear during the whole of the eighteenth century.” Bach adapted five concertos from this set in 1713-14 during his tenure in Weimar as court organist; nearly 20 years later he created this concerto—his sixth, final, and most ambitious adaptation of Vivaldi’s Op. 3 concerti. Bach reimagined Vivaldi’s composition in significant ways: not only did he change the instrumentation from four violins to four harpsichords, he altered the key from B minor to A minor, added his own distinctive keyboard-friendly flourishes of extra notes and chords, filled out the harmonies, and endowed the solo parts with greater complexity and clarity. One can imagine Bach’s excitement at having four independent harpsichord parts to play with; even further, one can envision a potential performance of this work being a family affair considering his musically talented progeny!

Just as Bach must have relished the possibilities of writing for four keyboards, we have discovered a similar measure of freedom and expansion through the capabilities of technology. Despite being isolated apart since March, we unearthed the opportunity to tackle projects we could never execute in a live concert setting. In this case, we perform the first movement of Bach’s virtuosic concerto by each taking on two keyboard parts (Greg on Keyboards 1 & 4, Elizabeth on Keyboards 2 & 3) and combining them in a music video of diametric interplay.

J. S. BACH / FERRUCCIO BUSONI *Ich ruf zu dir Herr Jesu Christ, BWV 639* (3 min)

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF *Prelude in D major, Op. 23 No. 4* (4 min)

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN *Prelude in D minor, Op. 28 No. 24* (3 min)

*Solo works for piano performed live by Elizabeth Joy Roe*

Preludes are an integral part of the piano repertoire. Originally and technically introductory pieces that precede larger works, they have evolved into stand-alone pieces in their own right, undertaken by composers as heterogenous as Messiaen, Ginastera, and Kapustin. Though usually miniature in size, preludes can contain and evoke entire universes, moods, and states of being. Elizabeth performs gems from the prelude repertoire by three of the most masterful composer-pianists of all time: Busoni, Rachmaninoff, and Chopin.

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J. S. Bach's *Ich ruf zu dir* was originally composed for organ and transcribed for solo piano by the formidable pianist-composer Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924). He left behind a legacy of sterling transcriptions, most notably of Bach's music. Busoni looked to Bach himself as a source of inspiration: "From [Bach] I learnt to recognize the truth that Good and Great Universal Music remains the same through whatever medium it is sounded. But also the second truth, that different mediums each have a different language (their own) in which this music again sounds somewhat differently." Along these lines, this Chorale Prelude achieves a more personal feel in Busoni's transcription for piano; the original's profound sorrow and poignant dissonances are emphasized by the piano's dynamic range and timbral nuances.

The late Mike Hawley (the dedicatee of our *Gottes Zeit* video at the beginning of today's program) deeply loved Bach's music; he shared a beautiful treatise on this prelude in an email to us years ago, including the following excerpt:

"When Bach was just a little boy, aged 9, his mom died. And the next year, just 10, his dad died. So Bach grew up with his oldest brother. He became a star organist in his teens (but he seems to have excelled at playing all the instruments for which he composed), and he married the beautiful Maria Barbara, a cousin, at age 22. In February of 1713 they were blessed with twins (their third and fourth children), little Johann Christoph and Maria Sophia, but alas, both babies died: Johann Christoph died the day he was born, and Maria Sophia survived barely three weeks. Johann and Maria were just 28. The young couple must have been devastated. I have not been able to pin a precise date on this chorale, but it is dated by many as having been written that year. Was it connected to the loss of the twins? Who knows. In 1720, Bach took a business trip and when he returned home, he was stunned to find he was a widower: while he was away, his beloved Maria Barbara was buried on July 7th; she may have died on the 6th. He had four children to look after (the youngest was two; three of the seven she had born had already died, including the twins). Maria Barbara was just 36. That was the year Bach wrote the intensely emotional *chromatic fantasy and fugue*. The cantata on "ich ruf zu Dir" may date from around then. But it was not performed until 1732, on the fourth Sunday after Trinity. The performance date, which Bach wrote into the score, was July 6th. That was "the" Sunday in the Liturgical year to which "ich ruf zu Dir" was assigned — and was it the first time during Bach's cantata years that July 6th fell on a Sunday after her death? Coincidence? Farfetched? It's hard to say. But special pieces happen for special reasons.

"At the end of the autograph manuscript, as with many of his works, Bach wrote the initials 'S.D.G.': *soli Deo gloria*, to God alone the glory, a reminder of the devotion that is at the heart of his music."

Here is the text to the hymn:

*I call on thee, Lord Jesus Christ,  
I have none other help but thee.  
My heart is never set at rest  
till thy sweet words have comforted me.  
And steadfast faith grant me therefore,  
to hold by thy word evermore,  
above all things,  
never resisting,  
but to increase in faith more and more.*

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Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943), arguably the last in line of the Romantic tradition and one of history's greatest pianist-composers, left behind an oeuvre that continues to permeate the piano recital landscape. The breathtaking virtuosity and emotional immediacy of his playing—captured by a plethora of recordings, essential for any stereophile—shine through his compositions for piano; his sets of Preludes, Opp. 23 and 32, reveal his penchant for creating fleeting yet unforgettable musical moments of power and poetry. The **D major Prelude from Opus 23** is dreamy and tender, evoking the sound-world and sensibility of his spiritual predecessor Chopin. The swaying triplet figuration of the accompaniment underlies a *bel canto* melodic line, which then gets layered above by an ethereal descant in rhythmic diminution of the bass accompaniment. The Prelude hovers between light and shadow, with chiaroscuro-like shifts between major and minor, until it builds to one of Rachmaninoff's signature climaxes before expiring to its idyllic D major pastures.

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The iconic set of 24 Preludes by Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) influenced not only Rachmaninoff but quite possibly most composers who followed in his footsteps, particularly Debussy and Scriabin. For good reason: these preludes are potent glimpses into the interior life of Chopin and even vignettes of the universal human psyche. The 24<sup>th</sup> and final **Prelude in D minor** is a devastating dive into the abyss; Chopin was grappling with personal struggles and one can feel his emotional turmoil in the churning bass accompaniment and ferocious right-hand cascades of notes, descending like torrents of rain or lava. D minor is famously the key of fate, and the closing tolling Ds seem to summon the gongs of hell or the final judgment of God, as if darkness and suffering cannot be escaped nor resolved here on Earth. No matter the narrative and in just a few minutes, this piece paints a visceral, fervent portrait of Chopin's soul: the sensitive poet who rages against the dying of the light.

**AMY BEACH "Dreaming" from *Four Sketches*, Op. 15, No. 3** (6 min)

**COLE PORTER / GREG ANDERSON "So In Love" from *Kiss Me, Kate*** (4 min)

*Solo works for piano performed live by Greg Anderson*

Amy Beach (1867-1944) was a trailblazer in the history of American classical music; she holds the distinction as the first female composer to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra, and she

earned acclaim during her lifetime for her prolific compositional output. **"Dreaming"** is an exquisite piece for solo piano, reminiscent of Schubert's G-flat major Impromptu, D. 899. The accompaniment undulates with breathtaking, unexpected harmonic progressions, reminiscent of the ever-shifting nature of dreams. As you listen, we invite you to practice Point No. 18 from our Music Listening Manifesto (<https://www.andersonroe.com/listening-manifesto>): *Drift. Allow the music to guide your listening. Explore aimlessly.*

Greg composed this arrangement of **"So In Love"** by Cole Porter (1891-1964) for pianist Jenny Lin's Broadway-themed album *Get Happy* on the Steinway Label. (Jenny gave Greg free choice from the vast theatrical songbook, so he chose his all-time favorite Broadway tune.) "So In Love" is an unrequited love song characterized by intense yearning: the melody is a constant series of ascending intervals, and in each verse it ascends higher and higher, striving and suffering in delicious agony (as demonstrated by the lyrics):

*So in love with you am I  
In love with the night mysterious  
The night when you first were there  
In love with my joy delirious  
When I knew that you could care  
So taunt me, and hurt me  
Deceive me, desert me  
I'm yours, till I die.....  
So in love.... So in love....  
So in love with you, my love... am I....*

To musically amplify this constant longing, Greg's arrangement repeatedly stacks the melody in canons, extending the reach of the ascending intervals. Much of the accompaniment sounds almost digitized or computerized, as if to portray the detached, disinterested recipient of the singer's love. This *secco*, desiccated accompaniment over the lush melody is made possible by piano's *sostenuto* (i.e. middle) pedal.

**ASTOR PIAZZOLLA / ANDERSON & ROE *Primavera Porteña* (6 min)**  
*Music video premiere*

What do tango dancing and piano duo performance have in common? Racing heartbeats, intense eye contact, physical friction, a charged chemistry, and an element of danger...

In transcribing the irresistible melodies of Astor Piazzolla (1933-1990) for four hands at one piano, we aimed to emulate the physical choreography of tango dancers, the sonic textures of a tango band, and, most importantly, the emotional spirit of the tango. We incorporate extended piano techniques as a metaphor for the tango's forays into forbidden territory. Four-hand playing already hints at an intrinsic eroticism, but in our tango arrangements we dare to raise the heat and intensity to another level: we boldly invade one another's personal space, while also exploring regions of the piano that typically remain unseen. The effect is at once sensual, visceral, and highly dramatic.

Certainly, the tango remains one of the most passionate and intimate forms of dance; it inspires a surrendering of the mundane to a realm of heightened awareness and experience. Piazzolla's spicy *Primavera Porteña* (which literally means "spring season") conjures up the bold energy of springtime. The piece opens with a dizzying fugue, then proceeds with the menace of a conflicted love affair. To capture the seductive and complex spirit of this tango, we created a cinematic, James Bond-inspired music video that highlights the "fancy footwork" of our constantly crossing—and dancing!—hands and arms.

Let *Primavera Porteña* take you on a riveting ride: feel free to lose yourself to the music's pounding aggression, luxuriate in a haze of mystery, and finally get carried away to the precipice of desire.

### **GERD KÜHR Corona Meditation (10 min)**

*Live performance + music video premiere*

Written in April 2020 by Austrian composer Gerd Kühr (b. 1952) in response to the pandemic, this reflective, aleatoric work is designed to be performed by any number of pianists. For today's performance, the two of us are playing the piece live in conjunction with pre-recorded performances by dozens of pianists.

Kühr, a prize-winning composer, conductor, and professor at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz, has composed a multitude of works for opera, orchestra, chamber music, choir, and cinema. He has worked with such esteemed artists and organizations as Ensemble Modern, Oliver Knussen, and the Styriarte Festival (which commissioned the *Corona Meditation*). His music is often introspective and explores the musical parameters of time. "Composing means less inventing than finding ... discovering what is already there."

Here is the work's concept, adapted from Gerd Kühr's own commentary on his composition:

We are experiencing a time of large-scale societal reflection, and the piece explores the reverberations of this unique historic moment. The music's calm, steady pulse, not coordinated by a metronome, ensures that the simultaneous playing of numerous pianos, in principle unlimited in number, cannot be carried out with precision. This blurring, along with the gradual tonal accumulation, creates an effect of expansion similar to the expansion of the cosmos.

The Corona crisis is a time for making music at home. The format of this piece and its suitability for all abilities takes this into account. Moreover, difference in timing, piano tuning and sound quality are explicitly desired effects. In this way, the work in an accurate reflection of the currently flourishing streaming culture.

According to Kühr: "Music is a message against poverty in imagination." Let your imagination roam freely amid the echoes of this timely musical creation.

### **SERGEI RACHMANINOFF / ERIC CARMEN / ANDERSON & ROE *Adagio sostenuto* from Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18 — mashed-up with "All by Myself" (9 min)**

*Music video + world premiere of a brand-new Anderson & Roe mashup*

*All by myself / Don't wanna be / All by myself / Anymore ...*

In indefinite social isolation and separated from each other by nearly 3,000 miles ... we couldn't have said (or sung) it better! So goes the chorus of the 1975 hit song by Eric Carmen (b. 1949), then famously covered by powerhouse pop diva Céline Dion two decades later.

Greg initially undertook an arrangement of this song as a fun way of musically collaborating with his husband Carl, an emergency physician, pandemic frontline responder, and gifted singer. During the early days of quarantine, Greg (at the piano) and Carl (on vocals) would read through the music of Bach, Vivaldi, Gershwin, and others. When they came upon "All By Myself," Greg started accompanying Carl as if it were the piece upon which the song is based (the second movement, *Adagio sostenuto*, from Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 2 in C minor). The arrangement organically expanded into a two-piano work, which receives its world premiere tonight.

This two-piano mashup/arrangement remains mostly loyal to Rachmaninoff's original. Carmen, a fan of Rachmaninoff's lush music, stated: "I was listening to my favorite music which was Rachmaninoff. 'All By Myself' incorporated a melody from his 2nd piano concerto as the verse..." The *Adagio sostenuto* is timeless in its appeal and has struck an emotional chord with generation after generation; most memorably it was prominently featured decades earlier in David Lean's 1945 film *Brief Encounter* (incidentally one of Elizabeth's favorite movies).

We hope this mash-up resonates with you during this age of anxiety. Beyond the obvious relevancy of the title and lyrics, the recognizable nature of this song coupled with the sweeping romanticism of Rachmaninoff's textures may nourish our shared craving for familiarity and comfort. Please feel free to sing along with our performance; singing together is not only one of the most joyful acts of community, but music like this invites a much-needed collective catharsis. (Also, we all need to tap into our inner diva once in a while!)

### **VINCE GUARALDI / ANDERSON & ROE Linus and Lucy (3 min)**

*Live duo performance + world premiere*

As an encore of sorts, this call-and-response arrangement was composed with bandwidth latency in mind, enabling the two of us to perform the piece live from our respective homes on opposite coasts. We are both lifelong *Peanuts* fans who have always adored its classic theme song, composed by American jazz pianist Vince Guaraldi (1928-1976). It was one of the first pieces that we tried to play by ear as kids, and all these years later it remains one of the most requested tunes at parties!

The jazzy spirit of the original makes it ideal fodder for a dueling-piano-style arrangement. The reactive nature of our arrangement also evokes the individual and relational characteristics of Linus and Lucy: their opposing traits (Lucy is a bossy know-it-all while her younger brother Linus is gentle and preternaturally sage) and their often-contentious sibling dynamic. Our arrangement also calls to mind the colorful playfulness that characterized Charles M. Schulz's beloved comic strips and animated cartoons, including Snoopy's adventures, Charlie Brown's mishaps, Schroeder's Beethoven-worship, and the constant children's games, rituals, and celebrations.

Finally, musical winks are sprinkled throughout this arrangement in the form of affectionate quotations: listen for nods to the music of Brahms and Gershwin, among others. Best of all, this piece makes us want to dance our hearts out like the *Peanuts* gang. 😊 Thank you for joining our party and see you tomorrow!

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