Elisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre: Performing Keyboard Suites at the Piano
Presented and written by Curtis Pavey
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Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre's rise in popularity in recent years parallels the fame she held in France during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A child prodigy, Jacquet de La Guerre was a noted keyboardist, vocalist, and composer of the Baroque period. Although her keyboard suites were written for the harpsichord, they are increasingly heard on the piano. Despite this, performers often struggle with many challenges of the French Baroque style. This lecture recital contextualized her two sets of harpsichord suites and offered pedagogical and performance practice tips to realize her compositions at the piano.

French musical life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries centered in Versailles, one of the crowning achievements of King Louis XIV's reign. A monarch for over seventy years, Louis' rule was marked by his efforts to centralize power along with numerous wars and investments in French education and culture. Louis was particularly interested in music and was a talented dancer, which led to a fertile environment for musical innovation.

Dance suites constitute a majority of French Baroque keyboard music. Although the traditional dance suite gradually fell out of style in the eighteenth century, seventeenth century composers such as Louis Couperin, Jacques Champion de Chambonnières, and Jean-Henri d'Anglebert wrote large numbers of dances. The music of Couperin and Chambonnières was collected in the Bauyn Manuscript. Their music is organized by key, allowing performers the freedom to choose select dances to build a suite. Generally, suites included an unmeasured prelude, followed by an assortment of allemandes, courantes, sarabandes, gigues, and others. The rhythmic structure of each dance is a priority, though French performers of the time also practiced *notes inégales*, a convention of playing subdivisions with unequal note lengths. Seventeenth-century French keyboard music is balanced and dignified yet also rich in ornamentation.

Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre (1665-1729) was born in Paris. Her father, Claude Jacquet, along with her brothers and sisters, were skilled keyboardists. Élisabeth, however, was a child prodigy and by the age of five was already performing for King Louis XIV in Versailles. She spent her childhood developing her talents as a keyboardist and vocalist until she married organist Marin de La Guerre on September 23, 1684. With her husband, she moved to Paris where she continued to perform and compose music. She spent the remainder of her life in Paris until her death in 1729. At a time when few women were able to attain a performing career in music, Jacquet de La Guerre also attained recognition for her compositions. Her output includes two sets of harpsichord pieces, trio sonatas, sonatas for violin and continuo, numerous cantatas, an opera (*tragédie en musique*), and more.

Her first set of harpsichord pieces published in 1687, is titled *Les Pièces de Claveßin de Mademoiselle de La Guerre [...] Premier Livre* and contains four suites in D minor, G minor, A minor, and F major. The suites contain similar movements, most beginning with an unmeasured prelude, and generally consisting of an allemande, two courantes, a sarabande, at least one gigue, a chaconne, a gavotte, and a menuet to conclude. The ordering of these dances in her suites is typical of seventeenth-century practices and Jacquet de La Guerre's compositions are well

conceived and comparable with any of her contemporaries. Jacquet de La Guerre published another set of harpsichord pieces in 1707 titled *Pièces de clavecin qui peuvent se jouer sur le violon*. This set, containing only two suites in D minor/major and G major, can be performed with the accompaniment of the violin. The violin doubles the melody line, which differs from her *Sonates pour le viollon et pour le clavecin* that include an independent violin part and continuo. La Guerre's dance suites are generally advanced works, though selections of her suites fall at the intermediate level. First editions are available at imslp.org.

Performance on the modern piano should take into account elements of performance practice specific to French Baroque style. At the turn of the eighteenth century, French harpsichords were commonly double-manual instruments with two choirs of eight-foot strings, a four-foot set, a buff stop, and a range from GG/BB-c3.[1] Single manual instruments were also common. These instruments were known for their beautiful sound and the many different registration possibilities. At the harpsichord, it is common practice to change the registration for each dance, or perhaps even on the repeats of a dance movement. Performers at the modern piano should feel free to explore a variety of colors at the piano to best convey the different character of each dance.

French dance music prioritizes precise rhythm, though French sources document the use of *notes inégales*, the practice of playing subdivisions with an unequal lilt. Typically used with eighths or sixteenth notes, *notes inégales* is similar to swinging eighths, and usually results in a light rhythmic inequality (typically long-short). The practice of *notes inégales* was intended to allow the melodic line to flow. Jacquet de La Guerre did not publish an ornament table with her suites, though her use of ornaments is typical of the time. Many, though not all, of her ornament symbols overlap with those of French composer Jean-Henri d'Anglebert, whose famous 1689 publication of *Pièces de Clavecin* contains a remarkable ornament table (see Figure 1 below). Performers of the time were expected to add additional ornaments on the repeats of sections.

Figure 1, Jean-Henri d'Anglebert, Ornament Table, *Pièces de Clavecin* (1689)

Although many of the dance types La Guerre uses in her suites are similar to those of Bach and other Baroque composers, some of the movements from her suites may be unfamiliar. The unmeasured prelude, which commonly begins French dance suites, is particularly challenging to interpret. These preludes, used to check the tuning of the instrument and adjust to the instrument and performance space, establish the tonal center of the suite. Unmeasured preludes of the seventeenth century do not contain barlines and sometimes include little to no rhythmic values. Note lengths are often determined by curved lines similar to slur markings, which tell a performer approximately how long to hold a note. La Guerre's unmeasured preludes include some rhythmic values, but leave much up to the performer. Analyzing the preludes by identifying broken chords, melodic lines, and ornamentation can help performers develop a hierarchy that separates structural notes from embellishment.

As La Guerre's music continues to increase in popularity, her music will become increasingly common at performances on the modern piano. By considering elements of French Baroque performance practice and the musical goals of Jacquet de La Guerre, modern performers can honor her legacy with tasteful interpretations of her works.

Endnotes

[1] Mark Kroll, "History and Construction of the Harpsichord," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Harpsichord*, edited by Mark Kroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 18.

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How to Choose and Use Sight-Reading Apps to Enhance Student Learning Experience
Presented by Irem Ozay and Anna Beth Rucker
Written by Anna Beth Rucker
Sunday, June 11, 2023

The session, "How to Choose and Use Sight-Reading Apps to Enhance Student Learning Experience," presented by Irem Ozay and Anna Beth Rucker, provided an informative discussion of using sight-reading apps within music lessons. The presentation included context on why using sight-reading apps are advantageous, a review of six popular sight-reading apps, and ideas for implementation of apps within a music studio.

Context: The Why

Why practice sight reading?
The presenters discussed various findings of an in-depth literature review on sight reading, including that sight reading is self-generating, it leads to broader knowledge of music literature, and it makes learning new pieces easier.

What makes a better or more efficient sight reader?
The presenters offered four main indicators for what constitutes a more efficient sight reader: (1) the ability to engage in music reading over music "spelling," (2) the ability to read and/or look ahead while playing, (3) the ability to focus on improving specific sight-reading techniques (such as chunking, theory, or intervals), and (4) the ability to hear sound before playing (aural imaging and audiation).

Why use apps to practice sight reading?
The presenters gave the following list of sight-reading app benefits:
- Guidance on what and how to sight read
- Immediate feedback
- Progress tracking
- Encouraging consistent practice
- Extensive repertoire selection
- Built-in metronome and accompaniment
- Hands-together playing required
- Community building
- Apps and tech are the future

App Overviews: The What

The next part of the presentation contained an overview of six applications.

ABRSM Sight Reading Trainer
TECH: Score study quizzes and unaided score.
COLLABORATION: Teachers do not assign lessons, receive progress updates, or have ability to send feedback. The app was designed to be used with the ABRSM method.

OVERVIEW: The lessons in this app are all short to keep students attention, but the graphic design is not especially kid-friendly. It could be used without ABRSM books, but the teacher and/or student would need to carefully choose the correct grade. The presenters recommended this app for teaching a student how to scan a piece before sight reading.

Piano Adventures Sight Reading Coach
TECH: This app listens polyphonically to student playing and gives instant and detailed feedback (without MIDI).
COLLABORATION: Strong student-teacher involvement throughout the week. Teacher assigns examples, receives the recordings and reports, and can send feedback directly to the student.
OVERVIEW: It would be easiest to use this app with the Faber method, but it could be used with others. It utilizes sophisticated technology, but has a limited repertoire. It could be used with children or adults. The presenters recommended this app for teachers who want to be involved with their students' sight-reading journey throughout the week.

Piano Maestro by Joy Tunes
TECH: This app feeds measures or lines at a time, has a play bar that moves across the music, gives instant feedback, and is game-like.
COLLABORATION: The Studio + Home plan gives the teacher and all their students full access. Teachers can assign and assess homework and see playing reports.
OVERVIEW: The presenters indicated this is a "fun" app to encourage students to practice sight reading. It includes many method books in the library, as well as seasonal pieces. The presenters recommended this app for young students who need motivation in lesson or practice time.

Piano Marvel
TECH: This app uses the Standard Assessment of Sight Reading (SASR) to grade. It gives participants thirty seconds to scan the music, then provides a tempo countdown, highlights mistakes as the example is played, and provides a score once the exercise is over. The app decides the next piece to give participants based on their previous score. It is the most academic of the six apps.
COLLABORATION: The teacher has an account to review reports, and student accounts can link to the teacher account. Teachers can organize songs, videos, and lessons into folders to show students what to practice.
OVERVIEW: This app utilizes algorithms and smart tech. It is flexible on levels and repertoire, and is motivating for students to track progress. It requires specific equipment, so it is not as versatile as other apps. The presenters recommended this app for expanding a student's sight-reading skills over multiple genres and levels and objectively tracking sight-reading capabilities over time.

Read Ahead Piano Sight Reading App with Disappearing Music
TECH: This app is based on research in the cognition of reading music at the Johns Hopkins University Peabody Conservatory. It features disappearing measures to encourage reading ahead, and trophy cases track individuals' progress. Each level has thirty-six days of practice material which include a warm up that prepares for the sight-reading examples, three examples with disappearing measures, and a fixed score with no computer-aided guidance.

COLLABORATION: There is no teacher connection. The teacher can set goals in the lesson if the student has the device with them.
OVERVIEW: This app could be used for children or adults, and helps form good habits for approaching sight reading. The presenters recommended this app for encouraging students to look ahead, both before playing and during playing.

Sight Reading Factory (Desktop Version)
TECH: This app composes excerpts on demand according to pre-set settings. The musical score is static, but does have a moving red line to help students keep up with the metronome beat.
COLLABORATION: The teacher purchases student accounts and distributes codes, and can organize students into classes or create specific assignments. Teachers must assess recordings individually.
OVERVIEW: This app is device accessible, could be used for children or adults, and would work well for playing exams in group classes. The presenters recommended this app for teachers with large studios, public/music schools, or collegiate programs.

The presenters provided an App Matrix (Table 1) to assist educators in deciding which app would be most suitable for their students, based on cost, level, device requirements, repertoire selection, and the presenters usage recommendations.

Implementation: The How

The presenters offered suggestions on how to approach implementing a sight-reading app into the studio, including choosing an app, downloading and trying it out, determining how to use it in your studio, deciding how to manage the costs, and creating a plan for communicating with parents and students.

They also offered ideas for how to use apps in individual or group lessons, including while students wait for lessons, as a lesson warm up, as a reward during the lesson, as part of the student's assignment sheet, through the week via in-app communication, and for studio/class competitions.

Other uses of apps they suggested were for vacation practice, studio class, seasonal and summer camps, studio challenges, and marketing.

Table 1. App Matrix

NAME	COST	LEVEL	DEVICE REQS	REPERTOIRE	RECS
ABRSM Piano Sight Reading Trainer	$4.99	Beginner-Intermediate	iPad or Windows/Mac with app emulator	Classical excerpts composed for the app	Score study + prep scanning
Piano Adventures Sight Reading Coach	$2/mo per student	Beginner-Intermediate	iOS /Android device OR computer with Chrome	Faber sight reading books	Teacher involvement throughout the week
Piano Maestro by JoyTunes	$12.99-19.99/mo for entire studio	Beginner-Early Intermediate	iPad	Multi-genre (Pop, Movie, Classical, Sacred, etc.)	Motivating young students
Piano Marvel	$12.99/mo or $110.19/yr per account/ student	Beginner-Advanced	Windows/Mac, MIDI-enabled keyboard+cable	Multi-genre (Pop, Jazz, Classical, Contemporary, Sacred, etc.)	Expanding reading skills over multi genres + tracking progress
Read Ahead Piano Sight Reading App	Levels: $14.99 Sections: $5.99	Beginner-Late intermediate	iPad	Standard classical rep + specially composed pieces	Helping students look ahead before + during playing
Sight Reading Factory	$35/yr for teacher $2+/yr per student	Beginner-Intermediate	Browser-based: Safari, Chrome, Firefox, Microsoft Edge	Composes classical-style music on demand	Large studios + group programs