

BELLE CHEN  
Years of Pilgrimage

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Liner Notes

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# Introduction

*Years Of Pilgrimage* is a solo piano album of original compositions. A dynamic journey across a wide musical landscape, with scenes inspired by travel, introspection, searching, and discovery.

Inspired by Liszt's *Annees de Pelerinage*, *Years of Pilgrimage* is a documentation of my evolving voice as pianist-composer over the past 3 years. Splashes of jazz and Gamelan sound worlds can be heard in a curious blend with classical and post-classical sensitivities.

Some of these works are homages to pianist-composers who have been influential in my journey to-date: Franz Liszt, Frédéric Chopin, Maurice Ravel, Bela Bartók, Felix Mendelssohn, Philip Glass, Ryuchi Sakamoto, Bill Laurance, Tigran Hamasyan, Keith Jarrett...

This set of work is purposefully stripped away from keys, synths, sound art and production usually found in my work. Through <Years of Pilgrimage>, I communicate directly from the beautiful instrument where I started my musical journey: the piano.

I hope that you will enjoy this journey!

Belle



## Track 1. Perasaan

The word *Perasaan* is Indonesian and Malay for 'feeling.' I wrote this piece in 2021, and it depicts the beginning of a feeling, a mood.

The piece opens calmly, before small ripples begin to disturb the calmness. Before we notice, the melody is gently swept up by the wind. Perhaps catching a feeling is a bit like catching a cold... when you start to notice an early onset of symptoms, you know what is coming.

## Track 2. Fade

*Fade* is inspired by the brief, magical moment before the sun disappears behind the horizon; the moment where an array of vivid changing colours in the atmosphere can be seen before the last of the sunlight fades into the night.

The piece begins with the right hand playing the notes F-A-D-E. This pattern is repeated, flutteringly over a moving bass line, like the shimmering sunlight.

Soon, the pattern erupts into a burst of fast changing harmonies before disappearing again. Like the sun setting over the horizon - blink, and this moment is gone.

## Track 3. Terns

Terns are seabirds that migrate a great distance. They migrate in small flocks over open water, forming extraordinary shapes against the horizon. During times of migration, they can fly at all times of the day (including after dark).

This piece is inspired by the elegant and lively silhouettes of the terns, darting and flying freely against the sun and the moon.

## Track 4. Sandolo

The piece *Sandolo* is an evocation of a ride on the traditional, flat-bottomed Venetian rowing boat, the sandolo.

At first slow-moving, the writing reflects the push of the oar against the forward movement of the sandolo.

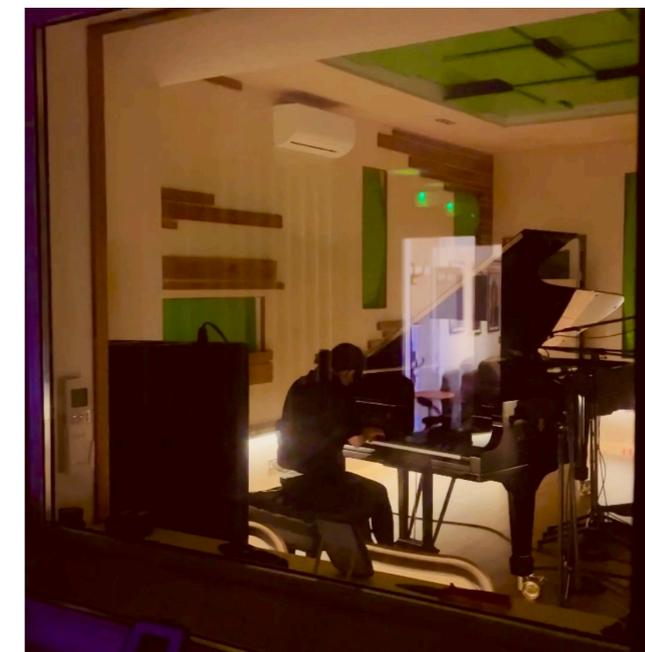
An easy-going piece, echoes of ringing bells slowly and gradually lead us to a broadened, open scenery.

## Track 5. Quai

The word *Quai* is French for quay, or wharf.

Like a walk alongside an uncrowded segment of The Seine, the piece captures the feeling of observing an area at a time when it is empty and soulless, versus a time when it is crowded with people and liveliness.

A brief, yet powerful moment.



Recording at Masterchord, London, UK. April, 2022

## Track 6. First Sighting

*First Sighting* captures the feeling of suspecting to spot something from afar. As the blurriness and uncertainty decreases, the sense of anticipation builds while we move closer and closer to gain more clarity of the sighting.

*First Sighting* begins with a repeated drone in the bass, while the right hand morphs between various scales and tonalities before gradually taking concrete shape.

## Track 7. To Dance

Earthy and joyous, *To Dance* explores movement and pulse through changes in groove throughout the piece.

This piece is largely modal, switching constantly between sections of dark, bass-heavy grooves and lighter sections with playful and quasi-improvisatory lines.

At times, the right hand and left hand are playing in different time-feel, and at times they play in synchronisation,

mimicking the nuances and push-and-pull between footwork and hand gestures in various dance forms.

*To Dance* ends in a chant, where two hands play in parallel in the lowest depths of the piano.

## Track 8. Gnomes Homes

Garden gnomes are ornament figurines of small human-like creatures based on the mythological gnome, which today are often used as decorations in gardens.

*Gnomes Homes* is a sparkling piece, inspired by observing the construction of a fantasy playground filled with gnomes in Australia.

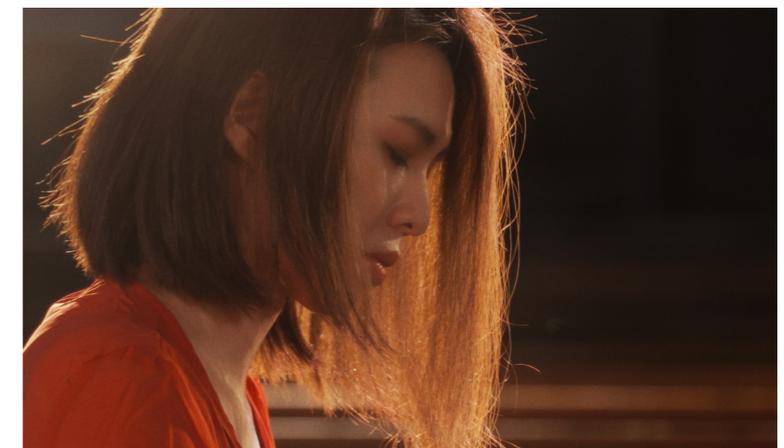
This piece evokes the playfulness of the playground - as if the gnomes have come to life; and the loving anticipation of the people who are installing the gnomes to surprise the young children who will be enjoying the garden.

## Track 9. To Sail

*To Sail* features a loose quote of a melodic fragment of *Une Barque Sur l'Océan* (hidden in rolling waves as a homage to Ravel).

Like a boat making a voyage into the sea, this piece shifts and rolls accordingly to the changing size of the waves.

Throughout *To Sail*, crystalline sparkles can be heard in the right hand, like light bouncing off water. The piece ends as the waves return back to stillness.



Live performance video shoot, London, UK. July, 2022  
(Video available on YouTube and AppleMusic)

## Track 10. Lone Cloud

Like a single cloud moving through the vast sky, *Lone Cloud* begins with a delicate motif in the right hand suspended above slow-moving harmonies.

The main melody is then introduced, steadily morphing as the cloud floats past changing scenes of people, cities, landscapes.

*Lone Cloud* was inspired by my own life experience - a feeling of not being rooted in any singular community throughout my life so far.

*Lone Cloud* is an easy-going piece, with a slight tinge of both nostalgia and joy. It is a celebration of being free, and a complete acceptance of being transient.

## Track 11. Railway

A journey on the railway has always been fascinating to me: the feeling of being constantly propelled forward, the sense of security provided by knowing that it is on track to the destination, the feeling of moving on earth, and the fast

changing sceneries that pass by the window.

*Railway* was written to capture this feeling, alongside a sense of wonderment by surprises outside the window, and the excitement of moving closer to the destination.

A steady semiquaver pattern churns away throughout most of the piece, taking only a brief break for a moment of introspection, before continuing the journey towards the endpoint.

## Track 12. Until Then

*Until Then* was written to capture a specific feeling: wishing a friend farewell as your lives move in separate ways, without knowing whether you'll meet again.

This piece is filled with warmth - a genuine appreciation of the time shared together - albeit a melancholic undertone.

Until we meet again, until then, I wish you well.

I hope that you have enjoyed this journey.

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