

JEAN-BAPTISTE PILLEMENT

(Lyon 1728 - Lyon 1808)

Peasants Resting and Dancing to a Piper beside a Farm

signed and inscribed 'Jean Pillement l'an 4. D. La. R. [1795-6]' (lower left)
black chalk, stumping, grey wash, brown and black ink framing lines
35.5 x 48.3 cm (14 x 19 in)

THIS DRAWING BY JEAN-BAPTISTE PILLEMENT shows a group of peasants relaxing in the sunshine by the side of a farmhouse. On the left-hand side two men sit on a grassy bank, each talking earnestly to a woman. In the centre of the composition, another couple are dancing on the tips of their toes. The man is trying to take his partner's arm but she is distracted while in conversation with the group of figures who sit on the ground nearby. Musical accompaniment is provided by the young piper perched on a large barrel and beyond him another weary figure looks on. The landscape itself is uneven and grassy, dotted with rocks, shrubs and small piles of logs that are presumably used by the farm. The background is faint, although the occasional tree and contour of the mountains are still discernable. The whole scene is cast in light and bright sunshine.

Much of Pillement's work depicts groups of peasants within similar idyllic rural settings, an example being The Louvre's drawing *Group of Shepherds* (fig.1). Although this drawing does not have the same festive atmosphere as *Peasants Resting and Dancing to a Piper beside a Farm*, there is a comparable relaxed feel to the work. The three shepherds may be at work but one figure leans casually on his staff, another sits, while one is dozing. The two women, one of whom cradles an infant, are also sitting. There is no sense that the figures' lives are strenuous and the appearance of two sheep is the only evidence of any work taking place. The landscape appears slightly dry and rocky, although, as in *Peasants Resting and Dancing to a Piper beside a Farm*, it is covered with a thin layer of vegetation and bathed in a warm

sunlight. It is another idealised vision of rural life, a genre in which Pillement specialised.

Stylistically, both drawings are executed in a similar manner, for instance in the sensitive treatment of the figures. They all share a broad solidity and the variation of poses demonstrates the artist's interest in the human figure. In *Peasants Resting and Dancing to a Piper beside a Farm*, for example, some figures are flamboyantly dancing while others are hunched on the ground; another lies on his stomach. Similarly, in *Group of Shepherds* the poses of the three male figures are deliberately contrasted. Much attention has been paid to the figures' clothing, which is baggy with deep folds. Pillement's focus has clearly been on the foreground landscape. This is treated carefully, with quick, precise lines, the thin grass dotted with individual plants and rocks. There is considerable tonal variety, with careful modelling of both the setting and the figures. While in contrast, only the faintest outline of the background is discernable and nothing more than an impression is provided.

Even in a drawing such as *Summer*, where the subject is very different, characteristic traits of Pillement are clearly evident (fig. 2). The setting provides a contrast between rock and foliage, both depicted through a precise use of line. His application of light remains paramount - bright sunshine set against dark shadow - and with the reflections visible in the calm river, light plays an even more pivotal role. Furthermore, the scene is relaxed, tranquil and happy. As in *Peasants Resting and Dancing to a Piper beside a Farm*, it is an exemplary illustration of Pillement's *oeuvre*, which led him to become a major contributor to the spread and taste for the Rococo throughout Europe.



Jean-Baptiste Pillement, *Group of Shepherds*, c.1772, The Louvre, Paris (Figure 1)



Jean-Baptiste Pillement, *Summer*, c.1759-1760, The Louvre, Paris (Figure 2)

