



20²⁵₂₆
SEASON

SEAN SHIBE guitar
Sunday, November 2, 2025
VANCOUVER PLAYHOUSE

From the Artistic Director

Dear Friends,

We are thrilled to welcome guitarist Sean Shibe in his Canadian debut. This is a young musician we have had our “ears on” for a couple of years, and now the time has come!

Sean has been described by Gramophone Magazine as “the most interesting voice on the guitar for a generation”, which is evidenced in the program he is presenting in this concert. For sure, there is Bach, but there is also Frank Martin, Thomas Adès, Sasha Scott and Steve Reich. The program also features the Canadian premiere of a new work, For Bill Frisell, by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Tyshawn Sorey. This work was co-commissioned by the VRS alongside Wigmore Hall, Elbphiharmonie and the 92nd Street Y.



We have many to thank for today’s concert. First of all, our Season Sponsor, the Peak Group of Companies, and the John C. Kerr Family Foundation, which is supporting our Next Generation performances this season. We are also grateful to the Royal Bank Foundation for its continued support of the Next Generation Series. Sean’s performance is sponsored by the Forster Stephenson Legacy Fund. We are truly blessed to have all this support.

Thank you to the City of Vancouver for its support through its Grants in Lieu of Rent program and last, but not least, thank you for joining us for this concert.

Enjoy the performance!

Sincerely,


Leila



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The use of cellphones and recording devices is prohibited in the concert hall. Please take this opportunity to turn off all electronic devices.

音乐厅内禁止使用手机，禁止拍照，录音，录像。请观众关闭所有电子器材，谢谢您的合作。

Program

Sean Shibe, guitar

Sunday, November 2, 2025
Vancouver Playhouse

FRANK MARTIN (1890–1974)

Quatre Pièces Brèves

Prelude. Lent

Air. Lent et bien rythmé

Plainte. Sans lenteur

Comme une Gigue. Con moto

(approx. 11 minutes)

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)

**Suite No. 1 for Cello Solo in G major
BWV 1007 (arr. for guitar)**

Prelude

Allemande

Courante

Sarabande

Menuet I – Menuet II

Gigue

(approx. 18 minutes)

THOMAS ADÈS (b. 1971)

Forgotten Dances

Overture: Queen of the Spiders

Berceuse: Paradise of Thebes

Here was a swift

Barcarolle: the Maiden Voyage

Carillon de Ville

Vesper

(approx. 14 minutes)

INTERMISSION

SASHA SCOTT (b. 2002)

Rush

(approx. 5 minutes)

TYSHAWN SOREY (b. 1980)

For Bill Frisell

(approx. 10 minutes)

STEVE REICH (b. 1936)

Electric Counterpoint

Fast

Slow

Fast

(approx. 15 minutes)

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Sean Shibe, guitar

Early Life & Education: Sean studied at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland with Allan Neave, later continuing at the Kunst-Universität Graz and in Italy under Paolo Pegoraro. He currently serves as a Guitar Professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He is a former BBC New Generation Artist, a 2012 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship recipient, winner of the 2018 Royal Philharmonic Society Young Artist Award and the 2022 Leonard Bernstein Award, and an ECHO Rising Star during the 2023-24 season.

This Season: Highlights of Sean's 2025-26 season include the world premiere of Mark Simpson's electric guitar concerto ZEBRA at the 2025 BBC Proms, his debut with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Thomas Adès, a residency at the Southbank Centre including his debut with Philharmonia Orchestra under Marin Alsop, a residency at Porto's Casa da Música, and recital tours across the UK, Europe and the US. This season he premieres works by Tyshawn Sorey, Poul Ruders, Carola Bauckholt and Ben Nobuto.

Performances: Recent engagements include a residency at Wigmore Hall, featuring a special program marking Pierre Boulez's centenary with the chamber cantata *Le Marteau sans maître* (a program which also went to Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Aldeburgh Festival and the BBC Proms). Sean also toured the UK with folk fiddler Aidan O'Rourke; collaborated across the UK and Europe with mezzo-soprano Ema Nikolovska in an innovative exploration of the Orlando myth incorporating electronics, melodica, protest songs and spoken word; and joined tenor Karim Sulayman for a critically acclaimed US tour of their GRAMMY-nominated program *Broken Branches*. He also made debuts in Shanghai and Hong Kong and toured Australia with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, performing Cassandra Miller's concerto *Chanter* in thirteen concerts nationwide.

Recordings: Sean's latest solo album *Profesión* was awarded the 2024 BBC Music Magazine Award. Released the same year, his collaboration with tenor Karim Sulayman – *Broken Branches* – was nominated for the 2024 GRAMMY Award for Best Classical Solo Vocal Album, and his solo album *Lost & Found* was awarded the OPUS Klassik 2023 Award for Solo Instrument, adding to an OPUS Klassik 2021 Award for Chamber Music Recording, a 2019 Gramophone Concept Album of the Year Award and a 2021 Gramophone Instrumental Award for softLOUD and Bach respectively. His 2026 Pentatone release, *Vesper*, features world premiere recordings of works for solo classical guitar by Thomas Adès, Harrison Birtwistle and James Dillon.



Photo credit: Iga Gozdowska

Sean Shibe is represented by HarrisonParrott, London, UK.

Program Notes

Frank Martin Quatre Pièces Brèves

In 1933, classical guitarist Andrés Segovia was living in Geneva, where Swiss composer Frank Martin was also residing. Impressed with Segovia's efforts to create a place on the concert stage for his instrument, Martin sent him a copy of his newest composition, *Quatre pièces brèves* (Four short pieces) for guitar.

From Segovia's response – or rather lack of it – one may confidently assume he was not impressed, and in fact Segovia never played the work, seeking instead to promote his instrument with the more accessible repertoire of Spanish composers such as Fernando Sor (1778-1839) and Francisco Tárrega (1852-1909) as well as his own transcriptions of Bach.

It was Julian Bream's championing of the *Quatre pièces brèves* in the second half of the twentieth century that brought international attention to the work, and it is now a standard part of the guitar repertoire, having been recorded more than a dozen times, according to the website devoted to the composer.

Its importance for classical guitarists is its status as the first major work for the instrument using the emerging compositional techniques of the twentieth century, notably Arnold Schoenberg's 12-tone system.

And therein perhaps lies the reason for its initial failure to gain acceptance in the community of classical guitarists. And yet Martin was not an "atonal" composer. He believed that tonality and the idea of a tonal centre was a useful resource for composers. But for him it was not the only resource, and his early works feature a blend of 12-tone and traditionally lyrical musical ideas.

The *Prelude*, for example, is rooted in B-natural as a tonal centre, but its opening melody contains all 12 notes of the chromatic scale.

I. Prélude



The second movement, *Air*, as its name would suggest, is more directly lyrical and song-like in its melodic intentions, with many examples of traditional triadic harmony in its texture.

Lent et bien rythmé



The third movement, *Plainte*, is the most "Spanish-sounding" of the set, with its steady rippling pattern of arpeggiated chords in "bitter-dark-chocolate" harmonies,



somewhat reminiscent of the same pattern employed in the slow movement of the *Concierto de Aranjuez* by Spanish composer Joaquín Rodrigo (1901-1999).

And there is an even more “retro” reference in the last piece, *Comme une Gigue*, which, although not characterized by a “leapy” melodic line like a Baroque-era gigue, is still much more rhythmically regular than the other pieces in the collection.



You will note that here, too, Martin uses all 12 tones of the chromatic scale in creating his melodic line and also uses B-natural as a tonal centre for the piece.

Johann Sebastian Bach

Suite No. 1 for Cello Solo in G major BWV 1007 (arr. for guitar)

Writing for a single-line melodic instrument like the cello in a polyphonic age like that of the Baroque was a tricky business. The go-to solution for this conundrum was the so-called *style brisé* or “broken style”, a compositional texture popularized in seventeenth-century French lute music and therefore perfectly idiomatic for performance on the guitar.

In the *style brisé* the composer would simply *imply* what he wanted the listener to hear by feeding the harmonies out piecemeal in wide-ranging textures of arpeggiated chords and running figures that emphasized the fundamental notes in the harmony. As a result, one actually begins to hear a multi-voiced harmonic and even contrapuntal structure beneath all the fancy filigree, much in the way that the fluttering veils of ecdysiast Gypsy Rose Lee suggested far more than the eyes of her audience were actually seeing.

This technique is masterfully applied in Bach’s Six Suites for Solo Cello (ca. 1720). These are typical Baroque dance suites that feature a collection of dances in binary (i.e., two-part) form, represented in a buffet-style sampling of the major musical styles of Europe: the moderately paced German *allemande*, the more animated French *courante*, the slow and stately Spanish *sarabande* and the leap-loving English *jig*, or to use its posh French name, *gigue*.

Additional dances known as *galanteries* were often added to ease the transition between the normally grave sarabande and the frequently raucous gigue. A pair of courtly *minuets* was often among these, and many suites also began with a *prelude*, which established the key in the listener’s ear while also allowing the performer to warm up his fingers by playing passagework in a stable rhythmic pattern.

And this is the case with the *Suite No. 1 in G major BWV 1007*, the opening *Prelude* of which has almost become synonymous with Baroque cello music itself.

Prélude.



Its nobility of sentiment far transcends what one might expect to admire in a simple repetitive pattern of broken chord figures and connecting scales. The result is a rocking, undulating pattern of tones that evokes a sense of being at peace with the world.

The *Allemande* moves along a similar sequence of steady sixteenths,

Allemande.



although here the tempo feels slower and more dignified because the texture is dominated by runs rather than arpeggios.

The *Courante* (French for “running”) establishes a more overtly dance-like rhythm

Courante.



with its regular pattern of rhythmic and melodic sequences and large leaps balancing out its scalar running figures.

The grave dignity of the **Sarabande** is communicated through the use of multiple-stop chords



that emphasize this dance's typical emphasis on the second beat of the bar.

Between the sarabande and the gigue Bach inserts a pair of minuets of contrasting characters. The sprightly rhythms of **Minuet I**



remind us that the minuet had its origins in a quick dance rather than the stately tempo we have come to associate with a dance popular at court.

Minuet II is the only dance in the suite not in G major.



Bach moves it to D minor for a change to a darker tone colour, but that contrast is erased when, as tradition dictates, the first minuet returns to close out this section of *galanteries* in the same mood as it began.

The concluding **Gigue** is made toe-tapping by its almost constant stream of triplets in the melodic line



enlivened every once in a while by a short "skip" in 16ths.

Thomas Adès Forgotten Dances

The multi-award-winning British composer, pianist and conductor Thomas Adès is a towering figure in the world of contemporary classical music. A major factor in his success is that despite the modernity of his musical language, he writes from inside – and from *well* inside – the classical tradition, always anchoring his listener's attention in some element of the aurally familiar.

One finds within his works clearly defined melodies walking abreast with lively contrapuntal side-chatter. And indeed, musical connoisseurs will raise an eyebrow of discerning interest to discover canons and *ostinati* pulsing within his most embroiled textures, even while their toes prove unable to resist tapping in the face of repeated rhythmic invitations to the dance.

And we can expect no less in the composer's *Forgotten Dances*, his first published work for a solo instrument other than the keyboard, commissioned by the Barbican Centre and the European Concert Hall Organisation.

Premiered by Sean Shibe on October 5 last year at the Wiener Konzerthaus in Vienna, this six-movement work invokes composers and artists of bygone times.

Faber Music, Adès' publisher, gives us these insights into the new work:

It opens with ***Overture: Queen of the Spiders***, in which shifting tempi and ornate melodic lines create an atmosphere of mystery and anticipation.

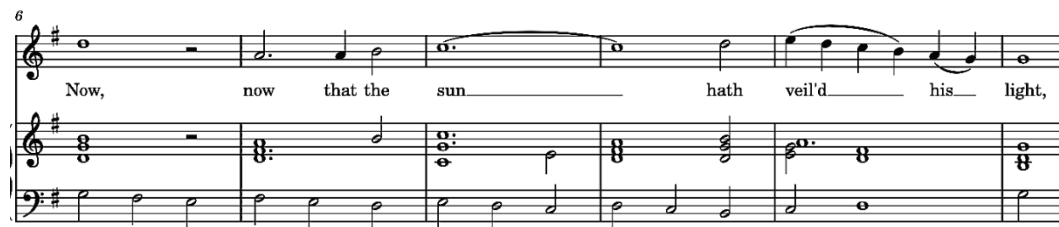
Berceuse: Paradise of Thebes follows, whose title recalls an episode in Luis Buñuel's *The Exterminating Angel*.

Here was a swift references Max Ernst and calls for brilliant virtuosity in quicksilver passagework.

Barcarolle: the Maiden Voyage offers a more delicate, lyrical contrast to the preceding tumult.

Carillon de Ville follows, a tribute to Berlioz that begins with delicate pealing before its resounding chords grow denser and more dissonant, ushering in a clamorous end.

It concludes with the chaconne-like ***Vesper***, dedicated to Henry Purcell and based on his *Evening Hymn*.



Sasha Scott Rush

*I'm very inspired by the state of being in a trance, or being dragged into a spiral ... the feeling of being lost and transported to a different world ... and you just forget where you are. That's what I'm chasing to achieve in my music.**

Sasha Scott is a British violinist and composer, a recent graduate of the Royal College of Music in London, whose works combine acoustic and electronic sounds. A typical example is *Humans May Not Apply*, in which orchestral musicians play alongside electronics – a piece for which Scott was named BBC Young Composer of the Year 2019.

Her works have been performed by the London Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Symphony, as well as by guitarist Sean Shibe and mezzo-soprano Ema Nikolovska in recital at Wigmore Hall.

Her interest in electronica derives from her exposure to the music of the English “trip hop” collective Massive Attack, as well as that of Aphex Twin, i.e., British composer and DJ Richard D. James (b. 1971), and the American record producer, DJ and rapper Steven Ellison (b. 1983), known professionally as Flying Lotus. Scott explains the attraction as follows:

“I really love music that has hundreds of layers, and a lot of depth.”

Now it was said of Franz Liszt that he treated the piano like an orchestra and the orchestra like a piano. And Sasha Scott, for her part, confesses that in writing for acoustic instruments she ends up “treating the ensemble more like a synth,” while her *synthetic* sounds are for the most part actually samples of *acoustic* instruments, electronically manipulated much as a DJ would do.

With regard to **Rush**, the work on this afternoon’s recital program, Sasha Scott says:

It was inspired by the feeling of being overwhelmed with emotion – almost like a headrush.

I was really inspired by metal bands ... I wanted to make him [Sean] a piece where he could feel like “this is my rockstar moment!”

* This and further quotations are taken from an interview published on *PrXludes beyond genre* (15 Jan. 2024). <https://prxludes.net/2024/01/15/sasha-scott/>

Tyshawn Sorey

For Bill Frisell

The dazzlingly talented multi-instrumentalist, composer and conductor Tyshawn Sorey is a unique phenomenon in American music. His creative output, shape-shifting between musical styles and genres, defies classification. He has appeared as composer, band leader and sideman (drums, trombone, piano) on dozens of critically acclaimed recordings, both classical and jazz, and his works have been performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, the Newport Jazz Festival and the Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Centre.

Awarded a MacArthur Fellowship in 2017 and the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2024, he is currently Professor of Contemporary Music at the University of Pennsylvania.

He takes the broadest possible view of what defines creative music-making, rejecting as artificial the division of music into distinct genres in favour of the concept of “genre mobility” and even the division between composition and improvisation.

Sorey’s written and spontaneously composed works can range from lyrical, expressive content to slowly unfolding, barely inaudible sonorities and gestures.

Moreover, his music can also contain raucous, maximalist structures that are influenced by noise, death metal, and fast-paced improvisations.

Finally, his music also largely deals heavily in multiple streams of black American music – including improvisation and groove-oriented vernacular musics – as well as West African, Afro-Cuban, and Asian folkloric, ritual, and ceremonial traditional musics and practices.

Mr. Shibe will be introducing from the stage Tyshawn Sorey’s newest work, **For Bill Frisell**, dedicated to the celebrated Grammy-winning jazz guitarist.

Steve Reich Electric Counterpoint

In the 1960s, Steve Reich and American composers Philip Glass (b. 1937) and Terry Riley (b. 1935) began creating a new kind of pattern-oriented ensemble music, soon labelled *minimalism* for the transparent simplicity of its construction. This type of music featured extended passages of static harmony animated by repeating patterns of short motives, well-captured in the French term *la musique répétitive*.

While Philip Glass specialized in kaleidoscopic arrays of flickering tonal colour and Terry Riley in free improvisation within separate modules of motivic patterning, what distinguishes Reich's music is his use of pulse-driven figures to create a vibrant "tapestry" of interlocking rhythms in which repeated small fragments of melody constantly vie for the ear's attention.

* * *

Electric Counterpoint, composed in 1987 for jazz guitarist Pat Metheny, features a pre-recorded tape of 10 guitars and two electric bass parts against which a soloist plays the 13th part live for the audience.

At its premiere this work featured the pre-recorded accompaniment by Pat Metheny. For this performance Sean Shibe has pre-recorded his own version of the 10 guitars and two electric bass parts in the accompaniment score.

Steve Reich provides the following description of the work.*

Electric Counterpoint is in three movements: fast, slow, fast, played one after the other without pause.

The first movement, after an introductory pulsing section where the harmonies of the movement are stated, uses a theme derived from Central African horn music that I became aware of through the ethnomusicologist Simha Arom.



That theme is built up in eight-voice canon, and while the remaining two guitars and bass play pulsing harmonies the soloist plays melodic patterns that result from the contrapuntal interlocking of those eight pre-recorded guitars.

The second movement cuts the tempo in half, changes key and introduces a new theme, which is then slowly built up in nine guitars in canon.



Once again two other guitars and bass supply harmony while the soloist brings out melodic patterns that result from the overall contrapuntal web.

* Musical excerpts have been added to this description.

The third movement returns to the original tempo and key and introduces a new pattern in triple meter.



After building up a four-guitar canon, two bass guitars enter suddenly to further stress the triple meter. The soloist then introduces a new series of strummed chords that are then built up in three-guitar canon.

When these are complete the soloist returns to melodic patterns that result from the overall counterpoint, when suddenly the basses begin to change both key and meter back and forth between E minor and C minor and between 3/2 and 12/8 so that one hears first 3 groups of 4 eighth notes and then 4 groups of 3 eighth notes.



These rhythmic and tonal changes speed up more and more rapidly until at the end the basses slowly fade out and the ambiguities are finally resolved in 12/8 and E minor.

Program notes by
Donald G. Gislason, 2025

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103 - 119 West Pender Street
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V6B 1S5

Telephone: 604.602.0363

Email: info@vanrecital.com

Web: vanrecital.com



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