

SEAN SHIBE
guitar

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)

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



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.¹

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!”

¹ 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.²

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.

² Musical excerpts have been added to this description.

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.

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.

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