VANCOUVER RECITAL SOCIETY

20 SEASON 26/27



Ema Nikolovska mezzo-soprano
Sean Shibe guitar

Sunday, November 8, 2026

Telus Studio Theatre
at The Chan Centre for the Performing Arts

From the Artistic Director



Dear Friends:

Welcome to the Telus Studio Theatre this afternoon for a most unusual journey, which, by all accounts will be fabulous!

Both Ema Nikolovska and Sean Shibe made their debuts on our Next Generation series in the past couple of years, and the minute that I heard that they had joined forces to collaborate on this remarkable project, I knew we had to present it.

These are two of the most imaginative and daring artists of their generation and they have crafted an immersive, genre-defying program. *Orlando* traces the legendary troubadour's journey across centuries and continents, from the medieval Chanson de Roland to Ariosto's epic poem, and Virginia Woolf's groundbreaking 1928 novel. This highly-original program explores love, conflict, identity, and transformation across centuries, weaving together works by John Dowland, Franz Schubert, Thomas Adès, Bob Dylan and others, alongside newly-commissioned pieces by Sasha Scott and Cassandra Miller.

I have seen some video clips of Ema and Sean performing this program at the wonderful Pierre Boulez Saal in Berlin, where it was very well received. I think you're in for a memorable experience today!

We can only bring this kind of programming to you with the generous support of our sponsors and donors. We are so grateful to our Season Sponsor, GIANTS, and to today's concert sponsors George Pick and Santi Pelaez.

I would also like to thank The Chan Centre for the Performing Arts for its support of our performances in their lovely venues.

Open your minds and open your ears. You won't be sorry!

Leila

Program

Ema Nikolovska, mezzo-soprano
Sean Shibe, guitar

Sunday, November 8, 2026 3:00 pm
Telus Studio Theatre
at The Chan Centre for the Performing Arts

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Orlando

JULES MASSENET (1842–1912)
Ô Souverain, ô Juge, ô Père
from Le Cid

JOHN DOWLAND (1563–1626)
Praeludium
Come Again, Sweet Love
Come, Heavy Sleep
Think'st Thou Then by Thy Feigning

SASHA SCOTT (b. 2002)
1000 Parts of You

LINDA CATLIN SMITH (b. 1957)
Dark Light

THOMAS ADÈS (b. 1971)
Blanca
from The Exterminating Angel

DETLEV GLANERT (b. 1960)
Hexensabbat
from Orlando-Lieder

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)
Einsamkeit
from Winterreise, D. 911

DETLEV GLANERT (b. 1960)
Lied der Wehmut
from Orlando-Lieder

THOMAS ADÈS (b. 1971)
Habanera
from The Exterminating Angel

INTERMISSION

NAHRE SOL (ALICE GI-YOUNG HWANG) (b. 1991)
This Other Here

MADDIE ASHMAN (b. 2001)
pearl (2026)

CASSANDRA MILLER (b. 1976)
Dream Memorandum
(It Reminded Me of the Truth)

HANS ABRAHAMSEN (b. 1952)
See the Small, Limpid Well-Spring
from Two Inger Christensen Songs

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)
So laßt mich scheinen
from Gesänge aus Wilhelm Meister, D. 877, No. 3

ALEX PAXTON (b. 1990)
Be Kind

– small pause –

JOHN DOWLAND (1563–1626)
Orlando Sleepeth

PAULINE VIARDOT (1821–1910)
Aimez-moi

BOB DYLAN (b. 1941)
Masters of War

LAURIE ANDERSON (b. 1947)
O Superman

Ema Nikolovska, mezzo-soprano



Photo credit: Marco Borggreve

Early Life & Education: Born in North Macedonia, Ema grew up in Toronto where she studied violin at The Glenn Gould School, before studying voice with Helga Tucker. She received her master's degree in Voice at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London, where she also completed the Opera Course.

This Season: In the 2026-27 season, Ema returns to the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin for Cherubino (*Le Nozze di Figaro*) and to the Canadian Opera Company for her role debut as Komponist (*Ariadne auf Naxos*). She will also sing Phèdre in Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie* with Marc Minkowski and les Musiciens du Louvre at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, Paris, and Purcell's Dido (*Dido & Aeneas*) with les Violons du Roy and Bernard Labadie in Quebec City and Montréal.

Performances: Last season, Ema made three milestone role debuts: Cherubino (*Le nozze di Figaro*) at Opernhaus Zürich, the title role of Olga Neuwirth's *Orlando* at Komische Oper Berlin, and Niklausse in Lydia Steier's new production of *Les contes d'Hoffmann* at the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin where, as an alumna of their Opera Studio, her roles included Stéfano (*Roméo et Juliette*) and Octavian (*Der Rosenkavalier*).

A champion of contemporary music, Ema has premiered works by Sasha Scott, Cassandra Miller and Héloïse Werner. She made her debut last season with Ensemble Intercontemporain in Boulez's *Le Marteau sans maître* and returned to Wigmore Hall with Hikaru Kanki in a recital featuring songs by Dai Fujikura and Sato Matsui. In 2023 she sang the Woman in George Benjamin's *Picture a Day Like This*, making her debut at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. She revived the role in 2024 at Opéra du Rhin, Strasbourg.

Awards & Prizes: Ema was a BBC New Generation Artist from 2019-2022. In 2019, she won first prize at the International Vocal Competition in 's-Hertogenbosch, the Ferrier Loveday Song Prize (Kathleen Ferrier Awards), and was a prize-winner at the Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) International Auditions. In 2022 she became a recipient of the prestigious Borletti-Buitoni Trust award.

Ema Nikolovska is represented by Étude Arts, New York, NY

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: The 2026-27 season features two exciting world premieres: Mark-Anthony Turnage's classical guitar concerto Caught Hand (with Swedish Chamber Orchestra) and David Fennessy's electric guitar concerto The Noise (with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, in collaboration with New Music Dublin). Sean also returns to the Philharmonia Orchestra, programmes a concert with the BBC Philharmonic, and appears with The Hallé under Thomas Adès in Francisco Coll's concerto Turia.

Sean makes regular appearances at prestigious halls and festivals including Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, 92 Street Y, Wigmore Hall and the Aldeburgh Festival. Engagements in the 2026-27 season include a North American tour of his critically acclaimed programme 'Orlando Variations' with mezzo-soprano Ema Nikolovska and recitals at Heidelberger Frühling and Dublin International Chamber Music Festival.



Photo credit: Iga Gozdowska

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.

Sean Shibe is represented by HarrisonParrott, London, UK.

Program Notes

The knight immortal, the troubadour ever-changing, the lover constant: Orlando adventures in all their/her/his forms, uncovering who they truly are. This program explores the non-linear journey between the multiple iterations of Orlando through disparate time, genders and media, inspired by written stories such as the Old French Chanson de Roland, Ludovico Ariosto's Orlando furioso, and Virginia Woolf's Orlando: A Biography.

Orlando's experience with war begins with the Chanson de Roland (written c.1040), one of the oldest surviving works of French literature, and continues with his part in Ariosto's Orlando furioso (1532). These poems focus on the duties of a knight, as well as courtly love and the chivalrous adventures that ensue. Virginia Woolf forces Orlando to consider his identity in her novel Orlando: A Biography (1928), making him both long-lived and genderfluid. Inspired by her first female lover and fellow writer, Vita Sackville-West, Woolf created an Orlando who not only shifts from a man into a woman and steps up in social class from a court page to a noblewoman, but who explores their gender expression and sexuality. The novel follows Orlando's centuries-long adventures through both physical countries and metaphysical ways of being.

This program follows Orlando's kaleidoscopic existence via the four musical signposts of Sasha Scott's '1000 parts of you', Cassandra Miller's 'It Reminded Me of the Truth', Detlev Glanert's Orlando-Lieder and Laurie Anderson's 'O Superman'. Along the way, we touch upon music by Dowland, Massenet, Bob Dylan and others.

Both Sasha Scott and Cassandra Miller contend with Orlando's identity in their world première works, deriving inspiration from Woolf's novel. '1000 parts of you' by Scott, a Londoner and current composition student at the Royal College of Music, mirrors her cover of 'O Superman', employing voice, guitar and electronics. About this piece, she said,'...[Chapter 6 of Orlando] led me to contemplate how we all as humans have what feels like thousands of different selves and parts of us, which all make us who we are. When I was thinking about this, I visited the exhibition Infinity Mirror Rooms by Yayoi Kusama. I was really moved and struck by the infinitive amount of reflections there were in the mirrored room, and how it almost felt like a simulation of Orlando's introspection. I wanted the sound world to feel infinitive and contemplative, yet consuming and overwhelming.'

Miller, a Canadian composer and previous Associate Head of Composition at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, created her piece, Dream Memorandum ('It Reminded Me of the Truth'), from the voice-memo of her conversation with Ema Nikolovska about the overarching themes of Woolf's novel. Speaking about her process, Miller said, '...I've asked Ema to re-learn excerpts of her voice memos to me, and to speak them now in concert accompanied by Sean. I find the sound of Ema's voice to be magical, evocative and intelligent – and, fortunately for the transcription process, quite tonal. Her flights of insight manifest in an effervescent F major, and her most profound reflections have a rich D minor cadence.'

While adventuring the musical landscape, we continuously return to Detlev Glanert's Orlando-Lieder. This set of songs explores facets of Orlando's personality while providing



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a musical scaffolding for the entire recital. The texts, although inspired by Ariosto's Orlando furioso, are new poems by writers Margareth Obexer and Angela di Ciriaco-Sussdorff. This work had its complete world première in Berlin in 2005, with Aron Brieger and Juliane Tief. Glanert's propensity for harmonic complexity in his vocal work shines through these songs, although he swaps his usually dense soundscape for the sparse narrative style common to the troubadours of the Middle Ages. The voice moves freely over the lute-like accompaniment of the guitar, Glanert's emotion-forward compositional voice lending itself well to these texts that focus on passion and adventure.

This troubadour-esque sound serves as connective thread throughout the recital, exemplified by Dowland's work and colouring the wartime songs of Bob Dylan and Laurie Anderson. When placed alongside Dylan's 'Masters of War', a Cold War protest song from 1963,

Anderson's 'O Superman' displays the effects of war on Orlando's identity and hampered ability to create community. Having started as an indie avant-garde artist, Anderson burst onto the commercial scene with her 'O Superman', taking the number two spot on the UK singles chart in 1981. The song began as part of United States, an 8-hour stage work that spanned two evenings and included musical numbers alongside purely visual segments, spoken word pieces and animated vignettes. Both the stage work and the song explore life in the United States, with the song focusing on how new technology can change communication between individuals during wartime. This song is sometimes called 'O Superman (for Massenet)' because Anderson was inspired by the aria 'O Souverain, ô juge, ô père' from Massenet's Le Cid. The opening line of the piece ('O Superman, O Judge, O Mom and Dad') mirrors the translated opening line of Massenet's aria ('O sovereign lord, O judge, O father'), but the text diverges after that. The original recording of 'O Superman' utilizes looping electronics and a vocoder, allowing Anderson's voice to serve as both a constant beat and an accompanying, chordal Greek chorus. This program's cover version, created by Sasha Scott, emulates the electronic accompaniment of the original while adding an acoustic element through the use of guitar. Orlando's adventure continues through and beyond this program, their identity changing as they repeatedly reflect upon it. Who and what will they become next?

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Orlando as Collage

A Note from Ema Nikolovska

Why bother with programming or "curation" at all?

It is a question that has appeared many times in my thoughts and in conversations with friends, colleagues. A response: to digest, to triangulate, to make connections in unlikely spaces.

Flurries of sound and images are launched onto our senses daily, often uncomfortably although we are used to it by now. Virginia Woolf 's character Orlando, having lived for centuries, expresses the overwhelming spirit of the modern age when she's speeding through London in a convertible in 1928: "Nothing could be seen whole or read from start to finish. What was seen begun – like two friends starting to meet each other across the street – was never seen ended. After twenty minutes the body and mind were like scraps of torn paper tumbling from a sack and, indeed, the process of motoring fast out of London so much resembles the chopping up small of identity which precedes unconsciousness and perhaps death itself that it is an open question in what sense Orlando can be said to have existed at the present moment."

Such growing stimuli inevitably become ingredients for experiments in collaging, and this is where curation becomes fun and exciting. Being alive in 2025 means we have access to many time periods of stories and sounds simultaneously, and a central curiosity in my work with Sean (as a duo and for our individual projects) is: what happens when these sounds coexist? The "ancient" and "modern" are in dialogue, sewn together in this sound quilt, as are the realistic and uncanny – the familiar becomes unfamiliar and vice versa. A sort of "third entity" emerges from the alchemical interaction of these found objects.

In our program, we play around with many Orlandos from various sources (often relating to knights, adventurers, troubadours) and indeed we ourselves become Orlandos through the process. At the root of it all is Virginia Woolf 's Orlando: a character who has inspired generations of readers (and us) with their sheer optimism, curiosity, openness to the world, playfulness, and audacity. The mutability of our identity, the "thousands of selves" within remind us that we will always be a

surprise to ourselves and also, to allow surprises from others; the spirit of this project is to find those surprises.

Woolf's novel was itself experimental, thwarting the concept of the western novel and approach to telling stories, a revolution in post-modern literature – almost a parody on biography and any linear concept of "self" and additionally a stream-of-consciousness whirlwind. Such structures and ideas from Woolf are a fertile playground for programming that is abstract enough to involve the audience's imaginations as active participants, so they can fill in certain prompts for story and sense as they move through the experience.

Sean and I have grown in our programming practices through following the instincts that emerged from our exploration of this character, scavenging for sound worlds and poetry that could be relevant: we have expanded our ideas about what 70 minutes of music can be, morphing into this hybrid of concert and theatre, electric and acoustic, and inventing ways to create halls of mirrors, illusions, elisions. How fitting that it was in London's Bloomsbury neighbourhood (where Virginia Woolf lived and worked for a time) where we first met! Woolf herself was a master curator, engaging with rhythm of language, pacing of images and poetry, and her literary collages have left a huge impression on our creative practice.

Woolf's *Orlando* reminds us that the only boundaries and binaries that exist are the ones we create for ourselves; our imagination has the power to restrict, or to connect and extrapolate. Orlando's story (whether it is the character as seen by Woolf, Ludovico Ariosto, or ancient French poetry) is a celebration of the infinite potential for adventure in any moment, the unreality of time and space, and the freedom that is to be found between our ears.

Dreaming Orlando

A Note from Sean Shibe

Ema and I met when living together in London, and we made music together for the first time one evening in 2019. In a dark subterranean setting, our smiles grew as we worked through the songs that we had found, with murmurs of "yeah", "nice", "right on"...

Whiteboards and post-its were useful, but engaging with the general flavour of the Orlando tales was even more important than reflecting details accurately. When comparing and selecting highlights from a plethora of tellings of an epic, one cannot render a full composite – at least not in a single evening recital. What we show is where those tellings took us.

The version we love most is Virginia Woolf's fantastical romp through space and time, described through scenes that feel like dreams. At one point Orlando wakes up, realizes England has become damp, and decides to go to Constantinople. And why not?! She (both Woolf and Orlando, I suppose) insists; and we are compelled to obey a new set of rules. Characters and creatures explode into scenes without invitation or reason. A type of chaos is embraced. Through Woolf we found the way forward. Logic is restriction. Keep moving.

The planning periods, I feel, reflected the array of place and period and person I experienced when reading Woolf's *Orlando* for the first time. Meeting Sebastian Blue (who had a tattoo of Orlando Gibbons on their arm, wore a leather flight cap, and looked after the nunnerly crown of Hildegard) in Bern; watching Cassandra Miller and Ema sing and make bird noises to one another while I lay on the ground in an attic; melodica duet listening sessions rendered feverish through flu and Carragelose nasal spray; all of this felt right. I remember the cold; cars full of bags and instruments trundling around dimly lit Victorian streets; and the mind-fog of trying to wrestle something ungraspable into logic. Orlando had been in us from our first musical meeting, but actually contorting our vestigial ideas into a full and coherent program took a huge and – at least for myself – unprecedented effort.

Our Orlando is therefore out of necessity not a full history (listening to anyone's dream in detail is a terrible experience), but a sort of turbo-dream. It is a program put together during meetings that felt otherworldly. Cassandra has even written a piece for us that remembers our own dreams. In retrospect this was, perhaps, inevitable. Our Orlando is chaotic, in part because the tale is chaotic, but also because Ema and I are. We want to tell you more, and when we can we will.

Thank You!

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Vancouver Recital Society acknowledges that we are on the traditional and unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.



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