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SEAN SHIBE

Thursday 1 May, 7.30pm
Djanogly Recital Hall

PROGRAMME

Scottish Lute Manuscripts

Anon

Forgotten Dances

Thomas Adès

Interval

Quatre pièces brèves

Frank Martin

Oockooing Bird; Berceuse de Jeanne

Sir Harrison Birtwistle

Prelude in C minor, BWV 999,

Johann Sebastian Bach

Suite for solo cello No. 1 in G Major, BWV 1007

J.S Bach

Sean Shibe will be signing CDs after the concert.

Please ensure all mobile phones are switched off. Photographs and videos of the performance are not permitted.

There is a Sennheiser Infrared enhanced hearing system in the Djanogly Recital Hall; please request a headset from our front-of-house staff to enhance your enjoyment of this evening's concert.

Please ensure hearing aids are switched to the appropriate concert setting.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Three anonymous pieces from Scottish lute manuscripts

Anon.

1. 'Swit Sant Nickola' from the Rowallan manuscript
2. 'The Canaries' 1 and 2, from the Straloch manuscript
3. 'A Scotts Tune' from the Rowallan manuscript

The earliest-known mention of the lute in Scotland dates from the thirteenth century, but no written music sources survive from before the beginning of the seventeenth. Of these, the Rowallan Manuscript, dating from around 1612 to 1628, and the Straloch Manuscript, compiled by Robert Gordon of Straloch between 1627 and 1629, are widely regarded as among the most important.

'Swit Sant Nickola' and 'A Scotts Tune' are both gentle, song-like pieces. Between them, Sean plays two 'Canaries'. *Canarie*, also known as *canario* and *canary*, is a dance originating in the Canary Islands, which became popular in Europe between the mid-16th and mid-18th centuries.

Forgotten Dances

Thomas Adès (born 1971)

1. Overture. *Queen of the Spiders*;
2. *Berceuse. Paradise of Thebes*;
3. *Courante – Here was a swift*;
4. *Barcarolle – The Maiden Voyage*;
5. *Carillon de Ville (for Hector Berlioz)*;
6. *Vesper (for Henry Purcell)*.

Thomas Adès first came to public attention when he won second prize in the piano section of the BBC Young Musician of the Year Competition in 1990. His meteoric rise as a composer began three years later, when his *Chamber Symphony* was played by the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, and he was appointed Composer in Association with the Hallé Orchestra. His chamber opera *Powder Her Face* brought him international recognition, and his second opera, based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, was staged at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in 2004, to great acclaim. He is also active as a pianist and conductor, working regularly with the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and London Sinfonietta; he conducted performances of *The Tempest* at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, in 2012 and the Vienna Staatsoper in 2015. From 1999 to 2008, he was Artistic Director of the Aldeburgh Festival. In 2010 he was composer-in-residence at the Melbourne Festival, Australia. Currently Artist in Residence with the Hallé Orchestra, he was presented with the Royal Philharmonic Society's prestigious Gold Medal in September 2024.

Co-commissioned by the Barbican Centre and the European Concert Hall Organisation, *Forgotten Dances* was written in 2023 for Sean Shibe, who gave the premiere at the Wiener Konzerthaus, October 2023, and the UK premiere at LSO St. Luke's, London, in January 2024.

'Queen of the Spiders' is mostly fast-running and mysterious. 'Berceuse – Paradise of Thebes' refers to an episode in the film *The Exterminating Angel*, directed by Luis Buñuel, the basis of Adès' 2016 opera of the same name, though the film scene in question does not feature in the opera. 'Here was a swift' is a reference to the German artist Max Ernst (1891-1976), though it appears not to be linked to a specific art work. A courante is a French baroque dance; this one is marked to be played lightly, brilliantly. 'Carillon de Ville' (Bell-chimes in the city) begins with a passage in harmonics, evoking bell-sounds. The opening three-note figure dominates the piece, as it builds to a powerful climax, with the final notes left to continue resonating. 'Vesper'

is a chaconne – continuous variations over a repeating phrase in the bass – as is the song by Purcell on which it is based: 'Now that the sun hath veiled his light', generally known as his 'Evening Hymn'. The ending is richly resonant, with all six of the instrument's strings in play.

With grateful acknowledgements to Benjamin Poore, Faber Music

Quatre Pièces Brèves (Four Short Pieces)

Frank Martin (1890-1974)

1. *Prélude*;
2. *Air*;
3. *Plainte*;
4. *Comme une Gigue*.

Together with Ernest Bloch and Arthur Honegger, Geneva-born Frank Martin was the most prominent Swiss composer of the twentieth century. He wrote music in a wide variety of genres, including orchestral, chamber and choral pieces. Like Thomas Adès, he composed an opera based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Other large-scale works include an oratorio, *Golgotha*, and the work which established his international reputation, *Le Vin Herbé* (The drugged wine), a treatment of the Tristan and Isolde legend in the form of a chamber-scale oratorio.

He composed his *Four Short Pieces* in 1933. He revised them in 1955, and they were eventually published in 1959. He wrote them for the leading Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia, though it is not known whether Segovia first approached Martin, or the other way round. Either way, Segovia is said to have found the music's style alien to him, and never played the pieces, even claiming to have lost his copy. Martin transcribed the pieces for piano in 1933, and for orchestra the following year, prompted by a request from Swiss conductor Ernest Ansermet; both transcriptions were given the new title, *Guitare*.

Its formal outline reflects that of a baroque instrumental suite. 'Prélude' begins in a slow, improvisatory style, with faster passages breaking in, not least the extended central section. 'Air', the shortest of the four pieces, is marked "slow and very rhythmic". 'Plainte' (Lament) starts with a melody that repeatedly circles round the same few notes, over sonorous, strummed chords. Two increases in speed lead to the music finally running into the ground, with a muffled concluding gesture. Baroque suites usually end with a fast, lively Gigue, and this set of pieces does the same.

Oockooing Bird; Berceuse de Jeanne (Jeanne's lullaby)

Sir Harrison Birtwistle (1934-2022)

Transcribed by Forbes Henderson

Composed in about 1950, *Oockooing Bird*, originally for piano, is Birtwistle's earliest surviving piece, which he later described as "an adolescent melody." The bird in question is purely imaginary, and is evoked in music that is remarkably hushed and concentrated. At the top of the manuscript, Birtwistle wrote "Once I saw an Oockooing bird so white o God so white." *Berceuse de Jeanne*, also originally for piano, and dating from 1984, is one of Birtwistle's children's pieces; 'Jeanne' has not been identified.

Prelude in C minor, BWV999

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Transcribed by Sean Shibe

This is thought to have been composed either shortly before or shortly after Bach moved from Cöthen to Leipzig in 1723. Its only known contemporary source is a manuscript copied by Bach's

friend, and possibly one-time pupil, Johann Peter Kellner, a composer and organist based in Gräfenroda, in the central German region of Thuringia.

Suite for solo cello No. 1 in G major, BWV1007

J.S Bach

Transcribed by Sean Shibe

1. *Prélude*;
2. *Allemande*;
3. *Courante*;
4. *Sarabande*;
5. *Menuett 1 and 2*;
6. *Gigue*.

Bach's six suites for solo cello probably date from his time as *Kapellmeister* to Prince Leopold of Cöthen, from 1717 to 1723, although some may have had origins going back before then. There is no hard evidence to show why, or for whom, they were written. One suggestion is that they were composed for Christian Ferdinand Abel, cellist at Cöthen, whose son, Carl Friedrich, would later go into partnership with Bach's youngest son, Johann Christian, in promoting a prestigious series of concerts in London between 1765 and 1781.

Although the suites were never completely neglected after Bach's death, it was only when the Spanish cellist Pablo Casals encountered them in the 1890s and began playing them in public, after a long period of private study, that they started to be recognised as one of the foundations of the cello repertoire.

The instrumental suite of Bach's day (for whatever medium) took the basic form of four contrasting dance movements: allemande, courante, sarabande and gigue. A prelude was often added and, occasionally, extra dances between the sarabande and gigue. This is the outline of Bach's instrumental suites, although he followed it more consistently in his suites for cello than in those for orchestra and his partitas for keyboard, and for solo violin.

The allemande, slow, but with a florid melodic line, was considered serious, even solemn. The courante, in a moderate triple time, was regarded as grand and majestic. The sarabande probably originated in Spain, then moved to Italy where it made a colourful, exotic effect, often played with castanets and guitars. Louis XIV's dancing masters transformed it into a more dignified, expressive dance in slow triple time; by Bach's era it was often profoundly introspective. The extra dances at this point are a pair of minuets, representing the last word in up-to-date French elegance. The gigue – the name appears to be derived from the English 'jig' – provides a lively, spirited conclusion.

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SEAN SHIBE

Sean Shibe continues to prove himself a truly original mind at the frontier of contemporary classical music.

2024/25 season highlights include a residency at Wigmore Hall with four concerts across the season, including a special programme dedicated to Pierre Boulez's centenary performing the chamber cantata *Le Marteau sans maître*. He tours the UK with folk fiddler Aidan O'Rourke; across the UK and Europe with mezzo-soprano Ema Nikolovska, exploring the many iterations

of the Orlando myth through electronics, melodica, protest song and recitation; and with Karim Sulayman for a US tour of their breathtaking duo programme *Broken Branches*. Other notable engagements include debuts in Shanghai and Hong Kong, and a debut tour with the Australian Chamber Orchestra performing Cassandra Miller's new guitar concerto *Chanter* in thirteen performances across the country. Shibe also premieres an electric guitar concerto by Mark Simpson at the BBC Proms and a solo work by the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Tyshawn Sorey.

Recent engagements include solo performances at venues including Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Philharmonie de Paris, Konzerthaus Wien, Southbank Centre, Konzerthaus Dortmund, and Alte Oper Frankfurt. Shibe has also appeared at 92NY, Musashino City Hall, Herbst Theatre, The Phillips Collection, and regularly at Wigmore Hall. He has played at numerous festivals such as the La Jolla SummerFest, Aldeburgh Festival, BBC Proms, Heidelberger Frühling, Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Mozartfest Würzburg and Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival.

Ever keen to explore new cooperative dynamics, Shibe regularly collaborates with soloists and ensembles alike. In recent years, he has worked with the Hallé, Britten Sinfonia, BBC Singers, Manchester Collective, Dunedin Consort, Quatuor Van Kujik, Danish String Quartet, LUDWIG, and conductors Thomas Adès, Krzysztof Urbanski, Christoph Eschenbach, Taavi Oramo, Catherine Larsen-Maguire, flautist Adam Walker, singers Allan Clayton, Ben Johnson, Robert Murray and Robin Tritschler, and performance artist Marina Abramović.

Shibe is an ardent supporter of contemporary music, taking a hands-on approach to new commissions and working with composers to experiment with and expand the guitar repertoire. Premieres to date include works by Thomas Adès, Oliver Leith, Cassandra Miller, Sasha Scott, Daniel Kidane, David Fennessy, Shiva Feshareki, David Lang, Julia Wolfe and Freya Waley-Cohen. He is equally committed to the canon, regularly pairing bold, new pieces with his own transcriptions of J.S. Bach's lute suites and seventeenth-century Scottish lute manuscripts.

Often praised for his original programming, Shibe's discography continues to garner recognition from critics and audiences alike. Recording exclusively for Pentatone, his latest solo album *Profesión* was awarded the 2024 BBC Music Magazine Award. Released the same year, his album 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.

Born in Edinburgh in 1992, Shibe studied at Royal Conservatoire of Scotland under Allan Neave, with further studies at Kunst-Universität Graz in Austria and in Italy under Paolo Pegoraro. He is now a Guitar Professor at Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Shibe is a former BBC New Generation Artist, a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship 2012 winner, a Royal Philharmonic Society 2018 Young Artist Award winner, a multi-GRAMMY nominee, and the recipient of the 2022 Leonard Bernstein Award.