

# SOUTHBANK CENTRE

## Sean Shibe: Forgotten Dances – Lute & Guitars

Saturday 10 January 2026, 8pm  
Purcell Room and Foyer at Queen Elizabeth Hall

We are proud to be a place where people come together to discover and connect with the wonder of classical music. Throughout the year, we provide unrivalled opportunities to encounter, live in person, the full range of music, and a variety of different ways for you to experience it.

Some of the world's most exciting artists, including our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists, join us to shine a light on this incredible art form. Welcome to Classical Music: Autumn/Winter 2025/26.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

### Repertoire

#### Renaissance Lute

**MS Rowallen** Selection of Scottish lute manuscripts 20'

#### Classical Guitar

**Bach** Prelude, Sarabande & Gigue from Suite No.1 in G, BWV.1007 arr. Sean Shibe 8'

**Thomas Adès** Forgotten dances 21'

#### Electric Guitar

**Daniel Rothman** What bodies know arr. for electric guitar (World premiere of new arrangement) 6'

**Carola Bauckholt** divining rod for electric guitar (World premiere) 16'

**Alex Paxton** Carpig arr. for electric guitar (World premiere of new arrangement) 8'

### Performers

Sean Shibe *lute, guitar, electric guitar*

### Renaissance Lute

**MS Rowallen** Selection of Scottish lute manuscripts

Leading us through the building as his mini-programmes near the present, Sean Shibe begins in the Queen Elizabeth Hall Foyer with pieces from the *Rowallen Manuscript*, which is most likely the earliest Scottish collection of lute music, dating from the years 1612–28. It takes its name from Rowallen Castle, in Ayrshire, the ancestral home of the manuscript's first owner, Sir William Mure, laird and poet, who might well have played the lute himself.

Lutes and guitars entered Europe over a thousand years ago through contact with the Islamic world, but the lute had its heyday before the guitar, in the 16th and 17th centuries. As was usual at that time, *Rowallen* is notated in tablature, which shows the performer on which string to play and where. The manuscript includes a few dances of kinds known across Western Europe, but most of the pieces are distinctly Scottish.

### Classical Guitar

**Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)** Cello Suite No.1 in G, BWV.1007 arr. Sean Shibe

*I. Prelude – IV. Sarabande – VII. Gigue*

**Thomas Adès (b. 1971)** Forgotten Dances

*I. Overture – Queen of the Spiders – II. Berceuse – Paradise of Thebes – III. Courante – Here was a swift (for Max Ernst) – IV. Barcarolle – The Maiden Voyage – V. Carillon de Ville (for Hector Berlioz) – VI. Vesper (for Henry Purcell)*

Bach almost certainly wrote his six cello suites when he was in his mid-30s and Director of Music at the princely court of Köthen, 40 miles north-west of Leipzig. As Shibe has shown often before, this is music that can flourish in all its exactness and brilliance equally on the guitar.

The Prelude to the First Suite, being the entrance to the whole collection, prepares for a long tour by wheeling along

*This performance lasts approximately 2 hours.*

through some elemental harmonic pathways. Each of the suites follows its Prelude with a sequence of dances, always including a Sarabande as centre of gravity and ending with a lively Gigue. The dance movements are invariably in two sections, the second a longer parallel in answer to the first.

In 2023 Thomas Adès provided Shibe with a suite shadowing Bach and made specially for guitar, his *Forgotten Dances*. Melodies run away from broken chords as the music moves up into the extreme treble. Next comes a berceuse, or lullaby, whose title refers to the Buñuel film *The Exterminating Angel* and so to the opera Adès based on the film.

The third movement, suggesting a dance form found in Bach's suites and in *Rowallan*, alludes also in its title to a painted plaster relief by Max Ernst showing two birds. Adès offers two musical tracks, one highly syncopated and in stop-start motion, the other flowing faster and freely. A dreamy barcarolle, or boating song, follows in fourth place.

A carillon is a run of bells on which melodies can be played – in the case of the 'City Carillon' in fifth place, a melody that takes off from Berlioz' *Symphonie fantastique*, adds an emphatic dissonance, and becomes wilder and weirder. The last movement, also much the longest, reaches further back to Purcell and his *Evening Hymn*. Where the Purcell piece is based on a repeating bass, Adès does something similar, but in a more wandering way. His title keeps up the association with evening.

### Electric Guitar

**Daniel Rothman (b. 1958)** What bodies know  
arr. for electric guitar

**Carola Bauckholt (b. 1959)** divining rod for electric guitar

**Alex Paxton (b. 1990)** Carpig arr. for electric guitar

Shibe arrives at the electric guitar for a piece by Daniel Rothman, who studied in New York and at Yale with a range of composers from Charles Wuorinen to John Cage, worked at leading electronic studios around Europe, then took himself to Southern California. Among the musical friends and associates he has made there is the pianist Mark Robson, for whom he composed *What bodies know* in 2024.

'Sitting down to compose for an admired musician', he wrote at the time, 'I was flooded with thoughts; not all of them translated into music and I thus decided not to think. As the music came of its own accord, one may say it is what bodies know. "Freely" is therefore the performance instruction fixed atop the score. Indeed, I myself have never played the music the same way twice.'

This time the music is coming from a different body – or, rather, from a different relationship between two bodies, those of instrument and musician. With the change of instrument, Rothman has altered the music to include

harmonics. With the change of musician, it is up to Shibe to discover what his body knows.

Carola Bauckholt, in her new piece lasting a little over 15 minutes, is also concerned with the relationship between performer and instrument. That relationship is changed, as often in her work, by finding an unconventional way to perform, but soon a new relationship comes into play, between what is performed live and what Shibe and Chris Moy recorded. Eventually this relationship turns into interplay, though Shibe's 'words' come only from the guitar.

Bauckholt's note explains the title:

'A divining rod is a traditional tool (typically a forked branch or two metal rods) used for radiesthesia, a practice of sensing subtle energies or veins of water. The rod is said to swing in the hands of the seeker as soon as such a hidden source is located. Scientifically, this effect has not been proven; culturally and symbolically, however, the divining rod is considered an instrument of intuition, a tool for sensing the invisible.

'What is an electric guitar? A rod strung with strings that reacts with extreme sensitivity to touch. Fingers, hands, and aids feel their way along it that, in a mysterious manner, capture, extract, distil and set musicality flowing.'

Musicality flows very differently in Alex Paxton's *Carpig*, which he wrote in 2022 for Zubin Kanga to play on synthesiser. His new version for Shibe goes the same abundant and multifarious ways, with the whirling line played live summoning a swarm of pre-recorded material and sampled sounds. Or to put it another way, in the composer's words:

'Travel barrel on the English Channel.

'Vibrating flesh machine, string, singing songs and television. strum hum ti dum. Waiting while i wash wot i'm not wearing. "your face is dirty use a flannel!" It's so bad mate, you need to clean it. Get one of those little hoovers which run on battery house smells early morning mouth (\*grunt) Hog! The soddin' vicar is leaning on the clutch, wearin' it out. Grovelin' aroun' underneath, at your feet, your well, take a sip, wrong foot, leak... well cos you like it. Like you own it, when you need it, do you get me? Put the collar back on! It's not a fucking ferrite. Carpig = Half car and half pig...yeah. Like Transformers.'

**Programme notes © Paul Griffiths, 2026**

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### Find out more

- ▶ Sean Shibe
- ▶ [southbankcentre.co.uk](http://southbankcentre.co.uk)

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