

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Sean Shibe, 12 Ensemble & GBSR Duo (Double Bill)

Saturday 27 September 2025, 8pm | 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

Oliver Leith Doom and the dooms for electric guitar & ensemble

35'

Performers

12 Ensemble

GBSR Duo

Sean Shibe *electric guitar*

This performance lasts approximately 1 hour. There is no interval.

Here's the story, in the composer's words:

'The piece is a transcription of a gig that happened at some point, some time ago. These aren't the original players; it is a recreation of this gig, scored out as accurately as possible. This is an archaeological dig and presentation of bones, compiled from bootlegs, footage and hearsay. There are imperfections – for example, we do not quite know whose voices are on the recordings, nor who the line-up was at the time, so some lines may be misattributed. The band was called Doom and the Doods. There was a moment in time where this sound, and even instrumentation, was becoming a genre. There were copycats, even similar setups with singers from quite famous bands. There was traction – it might have stayed, could have been a movement, bands might have looked like this now. Instead, it was swept away by other bands of the time. People preferred lyrics and more beautiful people, which is fair.'

Doom and the Doods were doomed, then, and their music with them – their doom-laden music as it appears from the start, as if they were already foreseeing, in their performance, their unsuccess, their sorry outcome. But remember: we're not listening to them but to a reconstruction of their act, presumably made – in the world of Oliver Leith's fiction – from a recording, very likely a lost recording. Maybe, in the process, their fate has got itself written into the reconstruction, immersing their music in an ocean of echo and loss. Or maybe this is the effect of time we're witnessing, the disintegrating, distorting, distancing effect of time as it corrodes memory – even electronic memory, if we're

talking, as we well may be, of a tape that's been lying for decades in a damp cellar, probably unboxed.

There are nine songs surviving:

'All I ever wanted': Someone is idly walking by, but repeating the same step, as if we were watching a loop. Sean Shibe is the walker, sometimes joined by the strings or, at the end, giving way to them, so that he can move on to the flying slides of the next number. The tune is lost, except in snatches that float in, whether as keyboard samples or played by the strings, simultaneously whistling (as they'll do again in subsequent songs).

'Javelin shearwater': Shearwaters are birds that skim over the oceans, as Shibe skims over the juicy string chords here. From the last chord, second violins flutter away.

(Title not known and incomplete): A majestic progression comes to a standstill and restarts, and restarts...

'Lug': Grinding grunge. You lug something awkward or heavy. The layers multiply, and diminish.

'The Abider': Long slides in empty space before a hymn tune takes over, Shibe joined by the strings.

'My Horse Named Dream': Shibe is the rider, rippling up scales, fast against a steady background. Violins and violas are with him briefly, then more fully towards the end, before which he disappears. Long fade.

'Donjon Droll': Spelled another way, a donjon is a dungeon. Shibe keeps time, keeps guard. Upper strings wander, lower strings groan. A long slide takes us up and away.

'Old times away': The image of horse-riding returns: 'riding a big horse at the end of something' the score is marked at the start. There is a big tune, introduced many times by the strings, always to be left in the air. Pitches bend and the texture crowds, to thin again. Now and again the percussionist brings forward other colours: bar chimes, tuned bottles, tubular bells.

'The Winch': Again weight and effort. Shibe is turning the wheel, drawing up what sounds like the sacred music of another era.

But come on: this 70s band never existed. The actual composer is in the audience. He wrote the piece last year. The thick sound, the trudge – it's all of a piece with other works of his. So what's all this about doom?

After Dark: Sean Shibe – Electric Counterpoint

Saturday 27 September 2025, 9.15pm | Queen Elizabeth Hall Foyer

Repertoire

Sasha Scott	Rush for electric guitar & electronics	5'
Julia Wolfe	LAD arr. Sean Shibe for electric guitar & prerecorded electric guitars	17'
Hildegard of Bingen	O coruscans lux stellarum	4'
Steve Reich	Electric Counterpoint for electric guitar & tape	15'
Meredith Monk	Nightfall arr. Sean Shibe for electric guitar & prerecorded electric guitars	9'

Performer

Sean Shibe *guitars*

This performance lasts approximately 1 hour. There is no interval.

This part of the evening gets off to a flying start with Sasha Scott's *Rush*, which she wrote for Shibe two years ago. The piece plays a waiting game for a bit; then it's away, with syncopated dash and engines roaring. Pinch harmonics allow the instrument to reach the stratosphere. The synthesised track gives the guitar prompts and energy, but you might come to feel the relationship is going the other way, that the live player is kicking the electronic sound into action. As the piece gets wilder, this unseen participant ups and vanishes. A visitation has gone.

Julia Wolfe, one of the founders of the New York collective Bang on a Can, wrote *LAD* in 2007 for nine bagpipers, or one plus eight recorded tracks. What fired her was finding that the Scottish pipes could produce slow slides – a kind of sound associated with the electric guitar. Shibe's version therefore brings the piece home twice over: home to the guitar and home to Scotland. 'There's something really destructive and terrible about it', he's said, 'but it also has a redemptive element too.'

To hold onto that element, a moment with Hildegard of Bingen in the 12th century might help. Born into the minor nobility, Hildegard had visions from early childhood and was enclosed as a nun at 14. The visions continued, and gave her subject matter for the chants she composed to her own words, and also for pictorial imagery she had an assistant transfer to parchment. *O coruscans lux stellarum* seems to be a call to the heavenly church to descend into a new earthly building: 'O sparkling light of the stars, o brilliant jewel, partner of the angels, come into the palace of the king.'

Leaving Hildegard's celestial song aside, Steve Reich's *Electric Counterpoint*, from the summer of 1987, is the oldest spot on the programme. It is also, in terms of form, the most traditional: three movements, fast–slow–fast, make up its 15 minutes or so. The first movement is based on a theme from Central African horn music, treated in eight-part canon by recorded guitars. So many layers turn into regular pulsation, while the live player picks out resultant melodic patterns. The same principle operates in the slow movement, but now the recorded canon is for nine guitars and on a different theme. There are further canons in the finale, where bass guitars swing the music between three fours and four threes, the latter winning out.

Then *Nightfall*, to close. Meredith Monk composed this piece in 1995 for wordless voices – voices Shibe transfers to his guitar, live and multitracked. 'Nightfall is', to quote Monk, 'an incantatory piece inspired by how light changes at the end of a day: the adding and subtracting of color and shadow; the slowly building and diminishing dynamics; the shifting texture as the sun intensifies and then disappears over the horizon.'

Programme notes © Paul Griffiths, 2025

Find out more

- ▶ Sean Shibe
- ▶ 12 Ensemble
- ▶ GBSR Duo
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Manchester Collective: Lights and Places

Sunday 9 November 2025, 6pm | Purcell Room

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