
Sean Shibe

Selected Reviews

softLOUD, Music for Acoustic & Electric Guitars Delphian Records (DCD34213)

"...there's no doubting that he himself is an artist blessed with grace to spare, and a roar that is fearsome... Like Julian Bream before him, Shibe has a natural yet creative rapport with 17th-century lute music... Both refract the music through a generous soundworld that demands you savour every note, whether surprisingly urgent and thrusting... or disarmingly seductive... And marking the transition from 'soft' to 'LOUD', Steve Reich's *Electric Counterpoint* is dispatched with tremulous, ear-opening brio, tingling precision and funky relish." – **Paul Riley, BBC Music Magazine, Instrumental Choice *******

"This disc works on so many levels." – **Graham Rickson, The Arts Desk**

"SoftLOUD is a gripping recital from guitarist Sean Shibe, dealing in extremes – I suspect his beautifully touched-in accounts of pieces from 17th-century Scottish manuscripts will get more living-room plays than Julia Wolfe's *LAD*, an abrasive electric-guitar scream originally conceived for nine bagpipes. In between, he also supplies a definitive performance of Steve Reich's *Electric Counterpoint*." – **Erica Jeal, The Guardian**

"Following live festival performances last year, the talented young Scottish guitarist Sean Shibe brings this bracingly original concert programme featuring music for acoustic and electric guitars into the recording studio. The results, like the performances themselves, are spectacular.

'softLOUD' is certainly a departure from Shibe's last recording, the Julian Bream-inspired 'Dreams & Fancies' (9/17). But listening to these disparate pieces I thought of a work on the earlier album, Britten's *Nocturnal*. Something about cumulative effect. About taking the music of the past and transforming it. Or deconstructing it. Or dissolving into it. Or just plain smashing it. Shibe's motivations are as much political as musical. 'It's a pointed and urgent probing of the question of national identity for Scotland in the age of the rise of the new right, nativist politics, Trump and Brexit', he writes in a note. Listening to 'softLOUD' halfway across the globe – not that Australia is immune to extremist politics or brittle notions of national identity – one feels freer to pick up on purely musical effects and universal concepts such as anger, grief and nostalgia.

Shibe imbues the early Scottish lute pieces with a profoundly moving intensity that carries them far beyond their modest frames, through to the MacMillan arrangements, themselves as much transitions from the old to the new as Reich's *Electric Counterpoint*, which seems to gather the previous works in a boppy afterparty. Then they are torn apart in Julia Wolfe's *LAD*, a searing siren song of lamentation originally for nine bagpipes. And Lang's explosive *Killer*, originally for electric violin. But try listening to 'softLOUD' in reverse order, and remember Britten's *Nocturnal*." – **William Yeoman, Gramophone**

"...the second Delphian album is the sort of release for which the potential audience is vast. Guitar aficionados will of course love it, while marvelling at repertoire that starts with lute tunes from the 17th century collection of Wemyss Castle in Fife, and embraces contemporary composition by James MacMillan, Steve Reich and David Lang and Julia Wolfe of New York's Bang on a Can, the latter's *LAD* originally scored for nine bagpipers.

Then there are those whose taste may be distant from ancient and contemporary classical music but for whom the album title suggests The Pixies from Boston or Glasgow's Mogwai. The dynamic contrasts that characterises the best work of both those bands is exactly what Shibe is playing with here. While that perhaps has to be experienced live for fullest appreciation (as is true of the rock bands), the recordings, both in the studio and in a Midlothian church, perfectly serve the acoustic and electric instruments, so that there is a seamless transition from the arrangement of a motet from MacMillan's *Since it was the day of preparation . . .* to a performance of Reich's *Electric Counterpoint* which the composer has already enthusiastically endorsed. The first hard-to-ignore contender for the Scottish Album of the Year award from a classical label? I very much think so." –

Keith Bruce, The Herald

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"Sean Shibe is one of those bright young virtuosi who see programming as an act of creative challenge and responsibility rather than dull routine. Don't be fooled by the initial delicacies on this disc – arrangements of music from four early Scottish lute manuscripts. Though beautiful and simple in their own right, and played with gorgeous sensitivity by Shibe in his own guitar arrangements, they are merely the start of an absorbing aural journey that treads gently into the 20th and 21st centuries with James MacMillan's dreamy *From Galloway* and his meditative *Motet I* from *Since it was the Day of Preparation*, before awakening to the multi-tracked minimalist haze of Steve Reich's *Electric Counterpoint*, Julia Wolfe's gallus *LAD* (raw-edged and written originally for nine bagpipes), and David Lang's violent *Killer*, where heavy metal collides head-on with the classical avant-garde." – **Ken Walton, *The Scotsman* *******

Naïve and Sentimental Music

Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Chandos Records (CHSA5199)

"A word of warning: in these desolate stretches, Sean Shibe may steal your heart with his guitar solo." – **Patrick Rucker, *Gramophone Magazine***

Dreams and Fancies

Delphian Records (DCD34193)

"In his debut solo album...Sean Shibe performs with superb artistry some of the now classics that Bream inspired. Prime in any such catalogue is Britten's 1963 *Nocturnal* after John Dowland, and Shibe gathers the listener into its unsettling, fantastical soundworld with an intensity that combines gracefulness and threat with rapier skill." – **BBC Music Magazine, *Instrumental Choice* *******

"Mesmerising... Shibe brings an electrifyingly discursive quality ... balanced by an even-tempered yet intensely reflective grace." – **Gramophone Magazine, *Editor's Choice***

"This is the best solo guitar disc I've heard. That it comes from a soloist in his twenties makes it all the more astounding ... Remarkable stuff, and the range of colours which Shibe draws from just six strings is extraordinary." – **The Arts Desk**

"What is it about the young Edinburgh-born Sean Shibe that marks him out as one of the foremost guitarists of the young generation? It is quite simply that rare symbiosis of technical mastery and innate musicality. The evidence is there from bar one of this latest album, which is a golden representation of the old and new in English guitar music." – **The Scotsman**

"The most seductive of charmed sounds... Shibe is another Bream, or something close. His playing unites finesse and poetry, and beautifully suggests a continuity of idiom." – **The Sunday Times**

"Everything here is rich in melody and Shibe is as articulate a virtuoso as Bream, communicating the precision of these intimate chamber pieces with real passion. It also speaks volumes of an adventurous musician that, singularity of instrument aside, the album could hardly be further from the music Shibe played at the East Neuk Festival on the road to a week's run at the Edinburgh Fringe. Both incarnations of his performing are unmissable." – **The Herald**

"It's not often a guitar recital leaves me slightly stunned, but this one did. Just listen to the sound, the way Shibe changes the colour even during a phrase... what a seductive sound, incredibly clean playing, and almost miraculous changes of colour and timbre, never empty gestures, always to articulate the counterpoint and phrasing. Shibe manages to highlight Walton's inventive brilliance, Dowland's harmonic modernity, Lennox Berkeley's elegance in his *Sonatina*, Malcolm Arnold's extrovert quirkiness in

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his Fantasy and he ends with an extraordinarily articulate and compelling performance of Benjamin's Britten's Nocturnal after John Dowland. Inspired by Julian Bream's pioneering spirit perhaps, but this is playing on an exalted level and the recording gives everything a resonant halo that allows the sound to bloom beautifully. If you only by one guitar recital this year - it's called Dreams & Fancies." – **Andrew McGregor, quoted from BBC Radio 3's Record Review**

softLOUD East Neuk Festival

"Shibe [is] an infallible galvaniser as well as something completely different... that soft, hauntingly inflected and coloured soft playing at which Shibe, more than any other acoustic guitarist I've ever heard, truly excels... Only Shibe could have thought of asking her [Julia Wolfe] if she minded his transcribing it for nine electric guitars: genius, a term which should rarely be applied to performing musicians, but at 25 he has it." – **David Nice, The Arts Desk**

"LAD by US composer Julia Wolfe, originally for nine bagpipers and getting its UK premiere in a new version by Shibe for multitracked electric guitars... Shibe's towering textures of mournful, slowly rising harmonies, which made their mark almost physically in the intimate space of Anstruther's Dreel Halls. But it was the work's uncompromising monumentality that made it really memorable." – **The Scotsman**

Maxwell Davies – Mill Runes & Farewell to Stromness Linn Records (CKD 534)

"The beautifully executed guitar interludes are supplied by Edinburgh's Sean Shibe; Hill Runes is based on a cryptic five-stanza poem by Orkney poet George Mackay Brown, while Farewell to Stromness is an arrangement by Timothy Walker of the piano original." – **BBC Music Magazine**

Wigmore Hall Recital (February 2014)

"From the very first note he plays, Sean Shibe immediately draws in the attention of the audience... Sean Shibe created a magical atmosphere; he seems to intimately understand the meaning behind every note which he plays." – **Classical Guitar Magazine**

Rodrigo – Concierto de Aranjuez Scottish Chamber Orchestra (September 2012)

"A prodigious technician and supremely expressive player, Shibe gave a masterful account of this much-loved work." – **Bachtrack**