

Lost & Found

Sean Shibe





LOST & FOUND

Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179)

1 O Viridissima Virga (arr. Sean Shibe) 6. 54

Chick Corea (1941-2021)

2 Children's Song 1 (arr. Forbes Henderson) 1. 42

Daniel Kidane (b. 1986)

3 Continuance * 2. 05

Chick Corea

4 Children's Song 4 (arr. Forbes Henderson) 2. 14

Moondog (1916-1999)

5 Sea Horse 1. 18

6 Pastoral II 4. 00

7 High on a Rocky Ledge 4. 15

Chick Corea

8 Children's Song 2 (arr. Forbes Henderson) 1. 29

Oliver Leith (b. 1990)

9 Pushing my thumb through a plate + 10. 44

Meredith Monk (b. 1942)

10 Nightfall (arr. Sean Shibe) + 9. 38

Bill Evans (1929-1980)

11 Peace Piece 6. 42

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)

12 O Sacrum Convivium! 3. 51

Shiva Feshareki (b. 1987)

13 VENUS/ZOHREH (arr. Shiva Feshareki and Sean Shibe) + 5. 22

Hildegard von Bingen

14 O Choruscans Lux Stellarum (arr. Sean Shibe) 4. 58

Julius Eastman (1940-1990)

15 Buddha 4. 41

Total playing time: 70. 01

Sean Shibe, electric guitar

* world premiere recording

+ world premiere recording of this arrangement



The composers and pieces on this album might not immediately stand out as having very much in common; this album is less portraiture than a journey that revels in eclecticism. If an image did come to mind, it would be something like an overflowing toybox, some kind of emporium of curiosities; but what appears to be child's play portends something darker and ecstatic, particularly when rendered through the post-modern chaos of the electric guitar.

Each musical object influences the interpretation of the next: evocations of Bingen; alternate naïveté and menace of Corea; tense liquid of Leith; inherent qualities are transformed, exaggerated and — in a sense — modernised. And yet, this is still the Old World: the opening branches and songs are earthly; the hazy utopia of 'High on a Rocky Ledge' is the jangle of the band in a lazy bar; only with 'Pushing my thumb through a plate' do we begin the uneasy climb to the heavens. From this point onwards interpretation becomes necessarily more drastic — scordatura alteration in Venus and the transmogrification of Buddha.

William Blake — a radical searching for the revelatory, seen as old-fashioned in his own day — sums up this journey. The illustrations that accompany his writings disregard convention, demonstrate miraculous prescience of the Arts and Crafts movement, and present a vital auteurship of craft and philosophy exemplified in the often androgynous characters of his personal mythos. I would worry that posing him as 'the way in' might seem a little grand, but the fecundity of his influence on so many artists eases that a little. Only he reflects the strange light and celestial ambition of the works presented here.

Sean Shibe



Lost & Found borrows its title from poems in William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. This is music that Sean Shibe has found, through arrangement or adaptation, for the electric guitar, and by using its technical resources, re-finds it. It is music that asks us to lose ourselves and go looking for other kinds of states of being or experiences; shedding what Blake called the "mind forg'd manacles" of ordinary custom. It is frequently meditative music that can be cosmically vast or childishly naive (at least on the surface), representing different coordinates of innocence and experience. It is William Blake's visionary poetry that ties together many of the figures contained here and provides an overarching artistic and experiential framework for these heterogeneous pieces.

"Pipe a song about a Lamb;" begins Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, "So I piped with merry cheer", the poet responds. Play it again, the child asks: "So I piped, he wept to hear." The sustained music of *Lost & Found* is the

kind that makes time's drifting, cumulative movement especially felt. Sometimes this comes from a meditative quality; sometimes from repetitions, whether in bass or melody. Through this unfolding one state — innocence, tenderness — morphs into others. "Hear the voice of the Bard!", the *Songs of Experience* begin, "Who Present, Past, & Future sees".

Lost & Found contains music by outsiders, mystics, visionaries, who often have more than one identity and lay claim to various artistic traditions, genres, or audiences. Some of these musicians are marginal and have not just been found by Shibe for the electric guitar but rediscovered by musical history. Others are more central and canonical — though Shibe's realizations of these pieces re-enchants the world of their music.

Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179) was a polymath: mystic, composer, writer, Benedictine Abbess, philosopher. She

founded two monasteries in the Rhineland in the twelfth century. As with Julius Eastman's score to *Buddha*, Hildegard created her own enormous visionary egg in *The Cosmic Tree*. It is not shaped like a tree but a wheel. In the bottom left corner the mystic records her vision onto a wax tablet. The wheel burns with fire both purifying and generative; the outer edge features creatures blowing — literally inspiring — the power and glory of creation depicted in the center. Stars twinkle amongst the inferno.

It represents the opening and penultimate tracks on this recording: *O Viridissima Virga* — 'O Branch of Freshest Green' — and *O Chorusans Lux Stellarum* — 'O Gleaming Celestial Light'. In the latter the light is blinding, terrifying even, but also suggests Hildegard's creative and spiritual vision, as vast as that of William Blake. Fires are a renewing and essential part of the natural life cycle of forests; from their ashes new tendrils creep through. Hildegard describes in her writings an essential *Viriditas*: a greening

power that situates divine creative force in something as small as a shoot or single leaf. Dylan Thomas would describe this force in his poetry: *The force that through the green fuse drives the flower.*

Hildegard's music, often setting her own Latin poetry, features melodies that soar beyond the conventions of Gregorian plainchant, into the stratosphere. Their melismatic quality is extravagant, and in line with conventional notation of plainchant from the period eschews precise indications of tempo, pulse, or duration. In Shibe's hands *viriditas* means electrification. Hildegard was a vessel for divine insight; Shibe makes the electric guitar the technical vessel for the same cosmic vision.

"After this I saw a vast instrument, round and shadowed, in the shape of an egg, small at the top, large in the middle and narrowed at the bottom; outside it, surrounding its circumference, there was bright fire with, as it were, a shadowy zone under it... But



Hildegard von Bingen, *The Cosmic Tree*

from the fire that surrounded the instrument issued a blast with whirlwinds, and from the zone beneath it rushed forth another blast with its own whirlwinds, which diffused themselves hither and thither throughout the instrument. In that zone too there was a dark fire of such great horror that I could not look at it, whose force shook the whole zone, full of thunder, tempest, and exceedingly sharp stones both large and small."

Hildegard von Bingen

Chick Corea's *Children's Songs* (1,2, and 4, 1971-) were first arranged for guitar by Forbes Henderson. Shibe takes them one step further by electrifying them. The title is constructively ambiguous. The relative simplicity of the pieces suggests they are indeed *for* children, as performers and listeners. They are also about children. Lyrical and rhythmic simplicity asks performers to manifest a kind of naivety too, to take on the attitude of the child — open, creative, playful.

They are designed with imaginative open-endedness in mind. "Play them and play with them", Corea wrote in the score in 1980, "Take a child's approach and fool around with them." This trust in performers — childlike in its way — expanded. "I again invite you to apply these written notes to any form of music and art you envision with any combination of instruments and scenes you imagine."

A lack of dynamic (and other) markings make the *Children's Songs* into a sandpit or toybox which, ironically, demands musical maturity and experience. (None of the few markings, Corea says, "are to be taken literally.") The *Children's Songs* call equally on worldliness and artlessness. Shibe uses the electric guitar to craft textures and colours that complicate the singsong naivety of the pieces. Such choices touch on their lyricism, but temper it with a whisper of threat or menace.

Daniel Kidane's (b. 1986) *Continuance* was written in 2020 for Sean Shibe, as a direct response to lockdown. Despite its challenges and traumas, lockdown also offered an unusual space for reflection. *Continuance* is intended as a "calm yet resonant work... filled with the hope that this too shall pass." Its reflective atmosphere, mantra-like repetitions of melodic gestures, and bright shafts of light that appear in the upper register create that sense of openness and optimism.

Shibe's textures are glassy — shining but fragile — and the brightness of its higher reaches make this a music that looks upwards. Yet its calm is never fully established, and the piece drifts out of view as suddenly as it appeared. Kidane notes that the piece is manifest from his "inner anxieties"; we hear these, perhaps, in shafts of dissonance that suddenly lead away from the prevailing mood.



William Blake, 'Night', *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

Louis Thomas Hardin (1916-1999) is more properly known as **Moondog**: an inventor of musical instruments, a composer, and urban mystic who had an altar dedicated to the Norse god Thor in his country home.

The titles hint at his imaginative scale. *Pastoral II*: the countryside, where in Shakespeare's comedies we see the inversion of normal rules and roles (here, Shibe reflects this freedom with an improvised sequence); *High on a Rocky Ledge*: seeing the world from a precarious, lofty place, and therefore with greater — though risky — insight; *Sea Horse*: a creature whose physiology allows it to see in two directions at once. A 1957 record with Julie Andrews called *Songs of Sense and Nonsense* hints at this music's ability to press at boundaries of reason and meaning, just as the blind prophetic John Milton of Blake's poetry did.

Moondog is known for his use of counterpoint. It is contrapuntal in more than a technical sense, describing too

the variegated traditions — musical and extra-musical — that coincide in his music. Moondog was at home in canon and round as he was in pop and jazz, pulling in sounds of the street, the music of the Arapaho Native American people (whose culture he experienced as a child), or indeed that of Charlie Parker.

He styled himself as both street musician, poet, and musical philosopher, wandering around New York in a Viking cloak and horned helmet. These many cultural registers did not clash in Hardin's world, but are part of one sublime continuum. Like the Sea Horse, Moondog looks in more than one direction. His supporters were equally genre-defying: he retained his right to use the performing name Moondog after a court case against a radio DJ to which both Arturo Toscanini and Benny Goodman lent their support. Like many figures on this album he is a chameleon, and joins a roster of figures who make their own conventions instead of following others.

"I am a composer and a poet. 6th Avenue was my stomping ground, and I would sleep in doorways mostly around 54th and 55th Street."

Peter Martens, 'Moondog', East 51st Street,
New York, United States

Moondog



Pushing my thumb through a plate (2018) was written for solo harp. **Oliver Leith's** chords and pitches bleed and twist — achieved by turning the tuning pegs — in a way that suggests the wash of watercolour rather than the certainties of pen and ink; a bleed exaggerated by presenting the music in the haze of electric guitar.

“This is music about movement and fluctuation”, Leith writes. Movement towards what? Leith's title forces the thought of something impossible, pressing the soft flesh of the thumb against the immovable ceramic of the plate, and imagining it could perhaps pass through it. The musical microtones, the spaces between standard pitches, test conventions of pitch and test imaginative limits in turn. This is not a comfortable journey to transcendence. We enter a woozy, lightheaded space that induces vertigo as much as feelings of freedom.

The wordless lines of **Meredith Monk's** vocal writing evoke her connection with

the melismatic unfurling of Hildegard von Bingen. Indeed, *Nightfall* (for 12 voices) was written for Musica Sacra who recorded it alongside pieces by Hildegard on 1995's *Monk and the Abbess*.

Nightfall is another vision of transformation. Its intensity comes from Monk's layering of simple melodic gestures which accumulate and fade. Monk describes it as “an incantatory piece” that evokes the gloaming, deploying colour and shadow as the sun sinks beneath the horizon. Its form is inspired by a Baroque passacaglia, which imbues *Nightfall* with a sense of monumental, gravitational heft.

The electric guitar means new colours and textures for painting this scene, whose bloom and decay are given special finesse and scale. The very final gesture of Monk's vocal version is a long, unvoiced exhalation; Shibe finds the guitarists' equivalent by brushing the strings with the flesh of his right hand fingers.



William Blake, *Jerusalem*

In *Peace Piece* (1958), **Bill Evans** picks up a chord progression from his version of ‘Some Other Time’ from Leonard Bernstein's musical *On the Town*; Bill Evans and his trio first improvised it at the end of a recording session for his 1958 record *Everybody Digs Bill Evans*. It has been found again by various artists: the

Kronos Quartet, pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet, and flautist Herbie Mann, amongst others.

Peace Piece is made of two contrary components: an insistently repeating and simple accompanying figure, and increasingly elaborate improvisations over it. The pun of the title speaks of two distinct but related states. Two things are held in tension: the searching improvisatory consciousness of experience, and the repetitive simplicity of innocence. The French jazz critic Jacques Réda wrote a poem after *Peace Piece*. The final line captures its balance of active rumination and pregnant stillness: “Neither dream nor sleep. More waiting. Peace.”

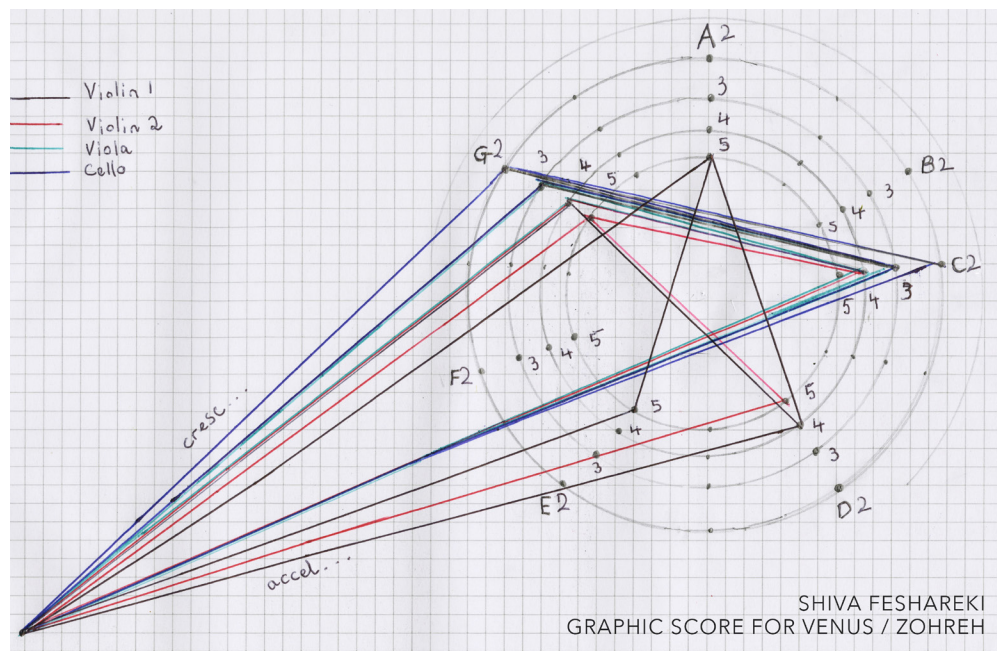
Olivier Messiaen knew that his motet *O Sacrum Convivium!* (1937) might leave churchgoers and choristers all at sea. “I believe my music to be much too complex to be of use to you”, he wrote in 1968 to Abbé Pézeril, “it...is intended only for an initiated élite. I think it would be unsingable by a congregation and also by young children.”

The forked harmonies of *O Sacrum* light the theological mystery of the sacred banquet from below. The paradoxes of Christian doctrine are held in taut consideration and left unresolved. Messiaen's musical language rejoices in mystery, and though a more or less tonal work, repudiates resolution and therefore reason in the face of metaphysical pondering. In this respect he follows Blake, who was wearied by the cold instrumental thinking of the Enlightenment, and loathed the division of thinking mind from feeling body.

For all this mystery there is also a kind of sure-footed radiance in the piece — the exclamation point of the title is sign enough. This is found in Messiaen's beloved F-sharp Major, a key associated with the blinding salvation of the next world, ravishingly used in pieces like *Éclairs sur l'Au-Delà* and *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*, where it is the sound of eternal joy.

The division of science and art in the modern imagination represents a deeper split between reason and feeling, and soul and body. "I will not Reason & Compare", wrote Blake, "my business is to Create". British-Iranian composer **Shiva Feshareki** (1987) takes apparent contraries and lets both inhabit her music in *VENUS/ZOREH* (2018), a piece she devised after talking to Dr. Philippa Mason, an expert in plate tectonics, and originally composed for the Ligeti Quartet.

Scientific and spiritual journeys are one and the same in the piece, which takes its intertwined title from two apparently distinct entities. First *Venus*, the planet, which the international EnVision project will investigate in 2029; second *Zohreh*, her mother's name, which means Venus in Persian. The former represents, Feshareki has said, "physicality of the sound and the actual physics of the sound" - scientific energies - and the latter "spiritual energies", associated perhaps with the intimate spheres of family, care, and belonging — love, in short. Feshareki's



music blurs boundaries between processes and disciplines, drawing on architectural and geometric models to create pieces that speak of "the infinite patterns of the universe".

The piece is one enormous crescendo. The difference between 'soft' and 'loud' is one fundamental to Shibe's previous work, which has played off the contrast between acoustic and electric in both studio and

concert hall. Originally conceived for string quartet, Venus/Zohreh sees the vibrations of one string expand into several, growing and then burning with furious intensity. The piece represents cosmic journeys metabolized through sound - both into the heavens but also into the self, inducing in the listener an increasingly taut awareness of their own being as a body in space, flooded with sound.

"Energy is the only life, and is from the Body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy. Energy is Eternal Delight."

Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell



William Blake, *Jacob's Ladder*

Despite a substantial claim on it, **Julius Eastman** (1940-1990) was almost lost to musical history. His compositions are fearlessly inventive combinations of minimalist procedures, experimental approaches to score-writing, and a host of musical traditions, drawing on both pop conventions and the free and aleatory procedures of the avant-garde. His work was fearlessly political, foregrounding Black and gay experience.

For all this, and notable collaborations with Meredith Monk, Pierre Boulez, Peter Maxwell Davies (amongst others), Eastman died in obscurity in New York in 1990. No public notice of his death was given for eight months, which followed periods of homelessness and drug addiction. His scores were impounded by the city.

Finding Eastman's music again is not the same as finding his scores. They represent a challenge of their own. Like Blake his penmanship was also remarkable. "Julius

insisted on clear penmanship when writing scores, the correct way to notate music, which materials to use, etc.", wrote Eastman's student Evan Lurie, "while at the same time producing scores that could test the patience of a saint".

The score for *Buddha* is hand-drawn, the title inscribed in sensuous but exacting lines below the egg-shaped piece. It is for "unspecified instrumentation", and offers no clues as to duration or harmony; there are scraps of melody with few clues about rhythm and none about speed. The egg is surrounded by curved lines, progressively larger, as if it is vibrating with some mysterious cosmic forces. Its melodic gestures have bowl-like curves, dipping and rising again. These patterns are like waves and give the music its tidal drift.

Benjamin Poore

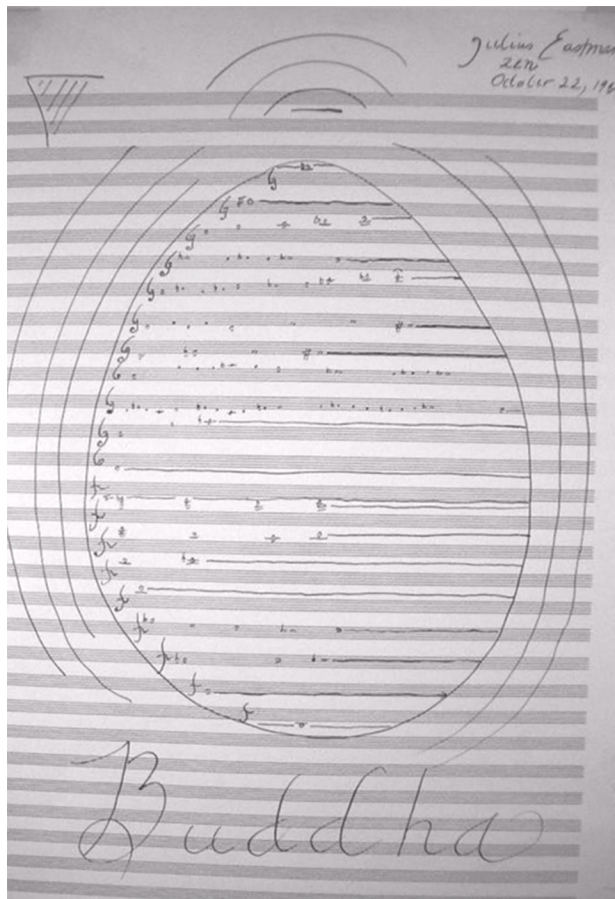


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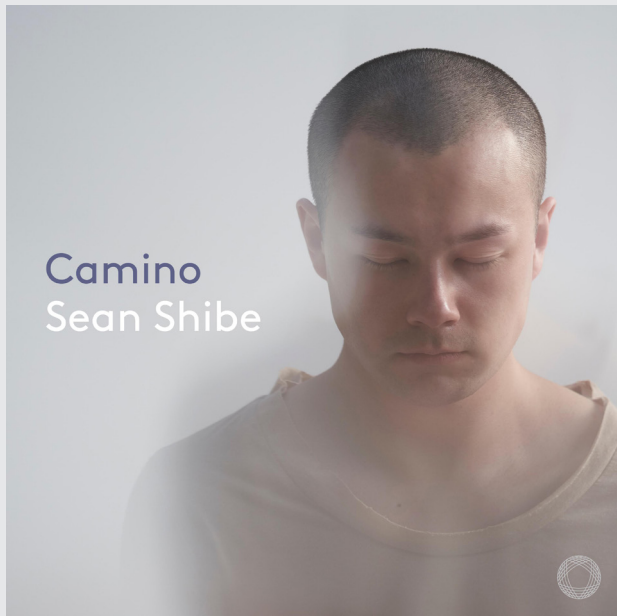
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Pedals included:

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