

BBT Press Release: 2 May 2024



## ORLANDO

**Ema Nikolovska and Sean Shibe present a 'Meta-Orlando' for our times in a boldly conceived recital that defies expectation and convention, including two world premieres by Cassandra Miller and Sasha Scott**

**London, Wigmore Hall, 14 May (world premiere)  
Bath Festival, St Swithin's Church 23 May**

Troubadours, chivalry, poetry, love, immortality, gender-fluidity, identity, freedom, fantasy, adventure, war ... this programme is brimming with invention, inspired by the kaleidoscopic existence and enduring appeal of the fictional character, **Orlando**. Mezzo-soprano **Ema Nikolovska** and guitarist **Sean Shibe** are soaring young stars who have let loose their boundless imaginations to devise a recital that combines instrumentation, voice, electronics and music ranging from Dowland and Schubert to brand new works specially commissioned for the project.

The starting point for Ema and Sean's exploration of different *Orlandos* was five years ago when they encountered Detlev Glanert's **Orlando-Lieder** for voice and guitar. From there they discovered Orlando, the victorious crusader in the 11<sup>th</sup> century French narrative of heroic deeds, **Chanson de Roland; Orlando Furioso**, the chivalrous knight of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian epic poem by Ludovico Ariosto about war and love; and the titular

Orlando of **Virginia Woolf's** novel, an immortal, gender-fluid conqueror who fearlessly romps through history from the Court of Queen Elizabeth I to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The structure of the concert is a series of sets representing different universes of adventure that dart between various settings, characters and time periods. The main structural pillars are **Glanert's Orlando-Lieder**, the world premieres of ***Dream Memorandum/It Reminded Me of the Truth*** by **Cassandra Miller** and **Sasha Scott's 1000 parts of you**, as well as Scott's tribute to **Laurie Anderson's O Superman**, which morphs the voices of both Ema and Sean through electronics/Ableton to create an immersive finale. A troubadour-esque connective thread runs throughout the recital including instrumental music featuring guitar and melodica, settings for voice and guitar and iconic **Schubert** songs.

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* made a particularly strong impact on Ema who enjoyed the sense of adventure and freedom inherent in the roving, almost breathless, non-linear narrative: *"So much is about sensations and I love this Orlando who is driven by curiosity, not fear. The idea of having so many different selves, not one single self, challenges the very concept of identity."*

The two new works are truly borne of discussion and collaboration between the composers and performers. Sasha Scott was inspired by *'how we all as humans have what feels like thousands of different selves and parts of us, which all make us who we are ... I wanted the sound world to feel infinitive and contemplative, yet consuming and overwhelming'*, while Ema's voice memos to Cassandra Miller formed the basis for *Dream Memorandum/It Reminded Me of the Truth*. With guitar accompaniment, Miller found Ema's spoken voice to be *'magical, evocative and intelligent'* in the transcription process where *'her flights of insight manifest in an effervescent F-major and her most profound reflections have a rich D-minor cadence'*.

Glanert's *Orlando-Lieder* provide the scaffolding for the entire recital; harmonic complexities shine through new song texts inspired by Ariosto's epic poem of passion and adventure, allowing the voice to move freely over the lute-like accompaniment of the guitar, in real troubadour fashion. Anderson's *O Superman* displays the effects of war on Orlando's identity and Scott's cover version emulates the electronic accompaniment of the original while adding an acoustic element through the use of guitar.

Spurning all notions of a traditional concert recital and in keeping with the nature of Orlando's many guises and the spirit of adventure, this project is something of a moveable feast of music and ideas that will undoubtedly evolve as time goes by (performances at Heidelberg Festival, Munich and Berlin are already confirmed this year). Alongside the main pillars of the project the Wigmore Hall programme includes songs by **Hans Abrahamsen**, **Thomas Adès**, **Bob Dylan**, **Jules Massenet** and **Pauline Viardot** - but there could be more surprises in store as *Orlando's* adventure continues.

Ema Nikolovska and Sean Shibe are both alumni of the **Borletti-Buitoni Trust**, which has supported *Orlando* by way of Ema's 2022 BBT Award, including the commissioning of Cassandra Miller's new work. Both are currently Artists in Residence – Ema at Wigmore Hall and Sean at Bath Festival. Sean and Ema performed together to great acclaim at last year's BBT 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations at Wigmore Hall. Sasha Scott's new work, *1000 parts of you*, is co-commissioned by Richard Cauldwell and Wigmore Hall.

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## **LINKS**

<https://www.wigmore-hall.org.uk/whats-on/202405141930>

<https://bathfestivals.org.uk/the-bath-festival/event/orlando-the-adventurer-song-and-guitar/>

**EMA NIKOLOVSA** *mezzo-soprano* BBT Award 2022

<https://askonasholt.com/artist/ema-nikolovska>

<https://www.bbtrust.com/artist/ema-nikolovska/biography/>

**SEAN SHIBE** *guitar* BBT Fellowship 2012

<https://seanshibe.com/>

<https://www.bbtrust.com/artist/sean-shibe/biography/>

**CASSANDRA MILLER** *composer*

<https://cassandramiller.wordpress.com/>

**SASHA SCOTT** *composer*

<https://www.sashascott.com/>