THURSDAY 27 JUNE

JS BACH

THE ART OF FUGUE

JAMES McVINNIE

BOLD TENDENCIES

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FRIDAY 27 JUNE at 7.30PM

J S BACH
THE ART OF FUGUE
James McVinnie — Organ

"There's nothing remarkable about it.
All one has to do is hit the right keys at the right time and the instrument plays itself."
— Johann Sebastian Bach

"It ought to be possible to do everything"
— Johann Sebastian Bach

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Johann Sebastian Bach
The Art of Fugue BWV 1080

Contrapunctus 1
Contrapunctus 2
Contrapunctus 3
Contrapunctus 4

Contrapunctus 5
Contrapunctus 6 a 4 in Stylo Francese
Contrapunctus 7 a 4 per Augmenta*tionem* et Diminut*ionem*

Contrapunctus 8 a 3
Contrapunctus 9 a 4 alla Duodecima
Contrapunctus 10 a 4 alla Decima
Contrapunctus 11 a 4

Fuga a 3 Soggetti

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Despite being written some 300 years ago, the music of Johann Sebastian Bach is a source of ever-renewing inspiration for people of all ages and backgrounds. His supremely human music transcends any sense of current genre and fashion, encapsulating the total range of emotional, intellectual and physical experience. Speaking profoundly to our age, we are excited to bring Bach's rich sonic world to life at Bold Tendencies, across five distinct events under the umbrella of **Back to Bach**.

It has been said that Bach's complex writing is most legible, understandable and enjoyable when performed by solo instruments. Uplifting the legacy of Bach's aural cosmology, in our season of Déjà Vu we celebrate his music for unaccompanied instruments played on cello, harpsichord, keyboard, synthesisers and organ.

In this first of five we go 'Back to Bach' with *The Art of Fugue* – believed to be Bach's final work; written in the last decade of his life, and published a year after his death. Bringing together 18 fugues and canons, each piece uses some variation of the single principle subject – a theme introduced in the first movement, transformed and elaborated on in the same key until the climatic four-part finale.

The work is emblematic of Bach's proclivity for compiling collections of compositions of different genres; he often grouped together pieces of the same nature, and especially in his final two decades. Catalogues of exemplary works were frequently collated in patches of six: the Brandenburg concertos, the six sonatas and partitas for solo violin, the six suites for solo cello, and the six sonatas for violin and harpsichord.

This archival impetus in his twilight years was paired with a desire to push the potential of certain forms or genres to their limits – a process begun with *The Well Tempered Clavier* (1722/1742), and reiterated with the four instalments of the *Clavier–Übung* ("keyboard practice" – published in volumes in 1731, 1735, 1739 and 1741). Both these drives are present in *The Art of Fugue* – the culmination of, and the composer's most in-depth and exhaustive exploration of the possibilities derived from a single musical theme morphing into increasingly complex, powerful and hypnotic sonic experiences. This growing complexity also supports the view that the *Art of Fugue* was originally intended as an intellectual exercise, rather than a performance piece. As the fugues progress they grow in difficulty, laid out as if for a student to work through, gradually learning the form's characteristic elements.

In Bach's original manuscript the last of the 18 pieces lacks a final page and it is thought somewhere between 30 and 40 bars of music are missing. The fugue ends abruptly mid-line – the romantic version of the story paints an image of an old and infirm Bach, suddenly dropping his pen and breathing his last breath.

Prior to his death, in 1749 Bach sent the first portion of the manuscript to a respected publisher with whom he had worked before. The composer died before the proofs were ready for inspection; the collection's finalisation fell to Bach's surviving sons (four of whom were composers), and the established order we hear played today represents their best guess at their father's intended ordering.

The Art of Fugue is the work of Bach's most readily able to be transcribed, and has been variously performed on the piano and saxophone, by string quartets and chamber orchestras. In the process of transcription, various theories have been

developed, regarding both the work's principles of construction, and its thematic content. In 2011, Loïc Sylvestre and Marco Cosa suggested the work's mathematical architecture could have been conceived on the basis of the Fibonacci series, and the golden ratio. In 1984 German musicologist Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht posited a religious interpretation, on the basis that the work musically illustrates the Christian doctrine of redemption by God's grace alone (*sola gratia*), rather than by any action an individual can take. The presence of the composer's surname in the theme of fugue 3 (the sequence of notes B-A-C-H-C#-D) is framed by Eggebrecht as the composer placing himself by his grave – the end of the fugue comes to symbolise the end of his life, with Bach accepting *sola gratia* as he reaches the concluding tonic note.

We are honoured to welcome **James McVinnie** back to Bold Tendencies, to play this very special programme on the Bach 2000 Organ. A white and gold pipe organ built to mark the 250th anniversary of Bach's death, this unique mobile instrument – designed after the great organ of 1711 at Freiburg Cathedral – has travelled widely, visiting St Mark's Venice, the Musikverein Vienna and St Nicolai Leipzig; and now coming to our rooftop home. One of the oldest instruments we know, the organ – dubbed the "King of the Instruments" by Mozart – is majestic and versatile, with a grand sonic quality able to move between the rousing and relieving with ease and affect. We spotlight this most special instrument during the **Royal College of Organists Play the Organ Year,** seeking to amplify the number of those learning to play the organ, as well as listening to live and recorded organ music. Open to all ages and stages, including those without prior musical experience, Play the Organ Year has something for everyone. Visit **www.rco.org.uk/play**, or search **#PlayTheOrgan** on social media to find out more and to see what is going on in your area.

James McVinnie has carved out a unique career as an organist and keyboard player. He has had major concerto and solo works written for him by Nico Muhly, Tristan Perich and artist Martin Creed, amongst many others. McVinnie is Director of the virtuosic keyboardist collective the James McVinnie Ensemble, and part of the Icelandic collective and record label Bedroom Community, on which he has released three albums: *Cycles* (2013, works by Nico Muhly); *Cycles_1* (2016, a remix album); and *Counterpoint* (2021), which pairs the music of J S Bach and Philip Glass. McVinnie has recently completed a year-long residency at London's Southbank Centre, during which he gave three solo performances on the Royal Festival Hall's Organ – two as part of the RFH 'Organ at 70' celebrations, and 'Fantasias', centring around Liszt's *Ad nos ad salutarem undam* – as well as a James McVinnie Ensemble programme of American Minimalism. In the 2025/26 season he will deliver his fifth and final residency concert: an all Bach programme for piano and organ in the Queen Elizabeth Hall. In January 2025 he released *Dreamcatcher*, an album of contemporary American music by composers closely associated with McVinnie.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) was (by far) the most gifted and celebrated member of a great musical dynasty in Germany, of over 50 musicians and composers. Admired by his Baroque contemporaries primarily as an outstanding harpsichordist, organist, and expert on organ building, Bach remains, for many, the greatest composer to have ever lived. Enriching established German styles through his mastery of counterpoint, harmony and rhythmic organisation, his adaptation of musical modes from abroad, over 1,000 known compositions attributed to Bach. Spanning concertos, suites, sonatas, fugues, cantatas, masses and Passions, these numerous masterpieces of church and instrumental music include renowned works such as the Brandenburg Concertos, Goldberg Variations, the Mass in B Minor, and The Well-Tempered Clavier – the latter of which had been recorded more than 150 times by 2013. In 1723 he moved to Leipzig to be Kapellmeister (one responsible for music-making) at St Thomas Church. Composing groundbreaking compositions for the organ that still form the core of the instrument's repertoire, he occupied the role until his death.

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UPCOMING LIVE EVENTS

Thurs 3 & Fri 4 July at 7pm
Multi-Story Orchestra
STUCK — a New Musical

Thurs 10 July at 7.30pm
Rumi — WATER & GOLD
Haleh Liza Gafori

Sat 12 July at 7.30pm
Reich Repetitions
Colin Currie Group

Fri 18 July at 7.30pm
J S Bach Keyboard Music
James McVinnie

Thurs 31 July at 7.30pm
J Dilla — Donuts
with Fraser T Smith, Yomi Sode & more

Thurs 7 & Fri 8 August at 7pm
Multi-Story Orchestra
Love in Many Forms

Weds 13 August at 7.30pm
Listen World! Thomas Mann & New Tomorrows
Nikolaj Schultz, Charlie Fox, Mohsen Mohamed & more

From Weds 13 August
The Listening Room — Susan Sontag

Fri 15 & Sat 16 August at 7.30pm
Eve Stainton
The Joystick and The Reins (World Premiere)

Sat 30 August at 7.30pm
London Symphony Orchestra
Music by Grażyna Bacewicz, Sally Beamish, Tchaikovsky & Caroline Shaw

Weds 3 September at 7.30pm
J S Bach Complete Cello Suites
Sheku Kanneh-Mason & Sæunn Thorsteindottír

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Fri 5 September at 7.30pm
Switched-On Bach
Virtuoso Electronic Performances of Wendy Carlos
James McVinnie Ensemble

Sun 7 September at 7pm
J S Bach Goldberg Variations
Jean Rondeau Harpsichord

Sat 13 September at 7pm
Rachmaninoff —The Complete Piano Concertos
Philharmonia Orchestra, soloists Ryan Wang, Jeneba Kanneh-Mason, Boris Giltburg, Junyan Chen, conducted by Charlotte Corderoy

Thurs 18 & Fri 19 September at 7.30pm
Oliver Leith
Garland (World Premiere) performed by 12 Ensemble & orchestra, GBSR Duo, EXAUDI, Musarc, soprano Patricia Auchterlonie, & the massed voices of the Bold Chorus led by Oli Kitching conducted by Naomi Woo & Jack Sheen with choral refrains written by Charlie Fox

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Bold Tendencies is a not-for-profit arts organisation established in the rooftop spaces of Peckham's Multi-Storey Car Park in 2007. It has transformed a disused building in the heart of South London into an iconic, much-loved place of culture and assembly with spectacular views out over the city and pioneering architecture project Frank's Cafe. Supporting a new generation of creative voices alongside acclaimed international artists, it delivers an ambitious annual programme of Visual Arts, Creative Learning and Live Events open to the public, offering access, participation and enjoyment of the arts for everyone.

Bold Tendencies 2025 is generously supported by

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& those who wish to remain anonymous.

Oliver Leith Commissioning Circle
John & Emma Donnelly
Brian Boylan
Bob Shaw
Lukas Zueger-Knecht
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