

THURSDAY 31 JULY

J

DILLA

DONUTS

CALEB AZUMAH NELSON  
CHLOE TENESHA GILES  
FRANCIS GOODING  
FRASER T SMITH  
OTAMERE GUOBADIA  
YOMI SODE

**THURSDAY 31 JULY at 7.30PM**

**J DILLA  
DONUTS**

“It's time for the show to start  
Tonight, the next guest  
The incredible...  
J Dilla, J Dilla, J Dilla”  
– J Dilla

**Caleb Azumah Nelson  
Chloe Tenesha Giles  
Francis Gooding  
Fraser T Smith  
Otamere Guobadia  
Yomi Sode**

## RUNNING ORDER

1. 'Donuts (Outro)'

**Fraser T Smith**

2. 'Workinonit'

**Francis Gooding**

3. 'Waves'

4. 'Light My Fire'

5. 'The New'

**Otamere Guobadia**

6. 'Stop!'

7. 'People'

**Yomi Sode**

8. 'The Diff'rence'

9. 'Mash'

10. 'Time: The Donut of the Heart'

**Chloe Giles**

11. 'Glazed'

12. 'Airworks'

**Chloe Giles**

13. 'Lightworks'

14. 'Stepson of the Clapper'

15. 'The Twister (Huh, What)'

**Otamere Guobadia**

16. 'One Eleven'

17. 'Two Can Win'

18. 'Don't Cry'

**Caleb Azumah Nelson**

19. 'Anti-American Graffiti'

20. 'Geek Down'

**Francis Gooding**

21. 'Thunder'

22. 'Gobstopper'

23. 'One for Ghost'

**Caleb Azumah Nelson**

24. 'Dilla Says Go'

25. 'Walkinonit'

26. 'The Factory'

27. 'U-Love'

**Yomi Sode**

28. 'Hi.'

29. 'Bye.'

**Fraser T Smith**

30. 'Last Donut of the Night'

31. 'Welcome to the Show'

Born James Dewitt Yancey in mid-1970s Michigan, J Dilla's broken beats, looping harmonies and prolific sampling have earned him the accolade the 'Coltrane of hip-hop'. Emerging during the mid-1990s underground hip-hop scene in Detroit as part of the group Slum Village, the late 90s and early 2000s saw Dilla shape and raise the artistic level of hip-hop and popular music production as a founding member of the musical collective the Soulquarians, and through collaborations with Madlib, Poe and Talib Kweli.

Dilla began beatmaking as a teenager, using a simple tape deck as the centre of his studio. Engaging in rap battles with his fellow Pershing High School classmates T3 and Baatin, the trio later formed the group Slum Village. Training himself using his growing record collection, these adolescent productions would form the basis of his unique, characteristic approach to drum programming – experimenting with non standard quantisation to produce a loose, or 'drunk' style.

By the mid-1990s, Dilla's discography encompassed singles, original songs and remix projects for artists including Janet Jackson, De La Soul, Busta Rhymes, Q-Tip, A Tribe Called Quest and others. Slum Village made their major label debut with *Fantastic, Vol. 2* (2000) – the basis of a new following for Dilla as producer and MC. A crucial figure in the development of the genre Neosoul, Dilla's mark on artists such as

Erykah Badu and Common is indelible, with the ‘super-producer’ a key contributor to the latter’s critically acclaimed breakthrough album *Like Water for Chocolate* (2000).

In 2002 Dilla leaned into his abilities as a rapper, releasing the vinyl *Ruff Draft* (2003). During this period Dilla suffered dramatic weight loss; the increasing evidence of his ill-health forced him to publicly confirm his diagnosis of Thrombotic Thrombocytopenic Purpura in 2004. Though he downplayed reports of illness and hospitalisation, the severity of his condition was writ large when he performed in a wheelchair whilst touring Europe in 2005. Despite a slower output in 2004 and 2005, Dilla’s cult status remained strong – a wave he was still riding high with the release of *Donuts* in 2006.

*Donuts* began simply enough, as an idea to turn a particularly good demo beat tape into a full-length release; it has since become a classic hip-hop album, and one of the defining works of the artist's life. Much of the album was produced by Dilla whilst at the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, drawing upon vinyls brought to him by his loved ones. Begun aged 31, the album is sensically 31 tracks – a profound reflection upon and culmination of each year of the artist’s life.

Dilla's name heralds the album's start with the mixed vocal sample 'Donuts (Outro)'. Without a break, a revved engine and screaming beat announces 'Workinonit', the sound of ambulance sirens speaking to the artist's creative conditions. Between 'Light My Fire' and 'The New' we hear the first iteration of a recurrent technique – a jarring cut and switch between tracks, emblematic of Dilla transitioning between different phases of his life.

Pauses between the samples on 'Stop' create literal gaps for contemplation; an invitation to meditation continued with the ghostly breaths that reverberate throughout 'People'. Dilla's perseverance in the face of his mortality is signalled as 'The Diff'rence' bursts into play; an energetic tone that carries across 'Time: The Donut of the Heart', and the triumphant trumpets of 'Glazed'.

'Lightworks' is a track that continues to puzzle producers, its deft sampling and pacing unprecedented with the tech available to Dilla at the time. 'One for the Ghost' is at once a dedication to friend and Wu-Tang clan member Ghostface Killa, and a premonition of Dilla's own fate. This presage colours 'Hi' and 'Bye' – dual tracks that represent Dilla's lifespan. Whilst the latter drips with emotion, the former rings with childlike peppiness, an invocation to witness the world's beauty amidst the bloodshed.

Our hero signals his goodbye with ‘Last Donut of the Night’, before the album’s closer ‘Welcome to the Show’. Cutting off abruptly into a series of calls of Dilla’s name, the track is rife with the dips and trips the producer pioneered across his career. We come full circle, like the shape of the sweet treat that lends the album its name – Dilla’s final act was to gift us a compact iteration of his life, musical vocabulary and influences, traversing the spectrum of human emotion.

On 10 February 2006 – three days after his 32nd birthday and the release of *Donuts* – Yancey died from cardiac arrest at his home in Los Angeles, losing the battle with his rare blood disease. He is survived by two daughters, the J Dilla Foundation, and his indelible legacy: the creation of a ‘pleasurable, disorientating rhythmic friction and new-time feel’.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Charnas, “Dilla Time” (Swift Press: 2022)



**Caleb Azumah Nelson** is a British-Ghanaian writer, photographer and filmmaker living in South East London. His first novel *OPEN WATER* won the Costa First Novel Award and Debut of the Year at the British Book Awards, and was a number-one Times bestseller. He was selected as a National Book Foundation '5 under 35' honoree by Brit Bennett. His second novel *SMALL WORLDS* was published in 2023.

**Chloe Tenesha Giles** is a poet and spoken word artist, who has worked with and chaired panels for UWE Bristol, Amnesty, UJIMA, Xpress Radio, the National Trust and V&A East. Named one of Rife's 30 under 30 for her blog *Melanin and the Mind*, Giles was a finalist in the 2025 Roundhouse Poetry Slam.

**Francis Gooding** is a writer. He is a Contributing Editor at the *London Review of Books*, writes the Global column for *The Wire*, and is a Contributing Editor at *Critical Quarterly*. He has written widely on music, ecology, anthropology, colonial film, and art. Co-compiler of Strut's *Next Stop Soweto* collections and a regular sleevenote author for record labels including Strut, Jazzman, Matsuli and Athens of The North, he co-runs the Tapestry Works label.

**Fraser T Smith** is a multi-award-winning producer, songwriter and musician. He has contributed to 7 No.1 singles in the UK, two Billboard No. 1 singles in the US, and 18 No. 1 albums – including Dave's Mercury-Prize nominated *Psychodrama* (2019). His collaborations with acclaimed artists include work with Stormzy, Kae Tempest, Drake, Kano, and Adele, amongst many others.

**Otamere Guobadia** is a multidisciplinary writer, who graduated from Oxford University with a degree in Jurisprudence. Guobadia's writing explores queerness, art, race, desire, agency, and pop culture: how these things constellate and complicate each other. Guobadia's work has appeared in Dazed, i-D, Wonderland, British Vogue, Vogue Italia, Gay Times, GQ and more.

**Yomi Şode** is an award winning Nigerian-British writer. His debut collection *Manorism* (2022) was shortlisted for the Rathbones Folio Prize 2023 and the T S Eliot Prize 2022, and accompanied by a stage adaptation at the Southbank Centre. In 2021 his play *and breathe...* premiered at the Almeida Theatre. Yomi is a Complete Works alumnus, a member of Malika's Poetry Kitchen, and founder of BoxedIn, First Five and The Daddy Diaries.

**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.

## UPCOMING LIVE EVENTS

**Thurs 7 & Fri 8 August at 7pm**

Multi-Story Orchestra — Love in Many Forms

**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 play music by Grażyna Bacewicz, Sally Beamish, Tchaikovsky & Caroline Shaw

**From Sat 30 August**

The Listening Room — Susan Sontag

**Weds 3 September at 7.30pm**

J S Bach — Complete Cello Suites  
Sheku Kanneh-Mason & Sæunn Thorsteindóttir

**Fri 5 September at 7.30pm**

Switched-On Bach — Virtuoso Electronic Performances of Wendy Carlos

**Sun 7 September at 7pm**

J S Bach — Goldberg Variations  
Jean Rondeau, Harpsichord

**Sat 13 September at 7pm**

Rachmaninoff — The Complete Piano Concertos

**Thurs 18 & Fri 19**

**September at 7.30pm**

Oliver Leith – Garland (World Premiere)



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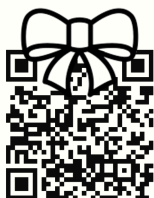
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