

FRIDAY 5 SEPTEMBER

SWITCHED-ON BACH

JAMES MCVINNIE ENSEMBLE

HONOURING
WENDY CARLOS

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James McVinnie Ensemble

“What is full of redundancy or formula
is predictably boring.

What is free of all structure
or discipline is randomly boring.

In between lies art.”

– Wendy Carlos

PROGRAMME

Fugue in G minor

BWV 542 (ca. 1720) 7'

Piece d'Orgue

BWV 672 (1739) 9'

Trio Sonata in E-flat

BWV 525 (1720) 13'

Nun Komm, der Heiden Heiland

BWV 659 (1724) 5'

Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir

BWV 687 (1739) 4'45"

Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr

BWV 664 (1747) 5'

Canon alla Ottava

from The Art of Fugue BWV 1080 (1739) 3'

Fuga a 3 soggetti (with Lionel Rogg completion)

from The Art of Fugue, BWV 1080 12' (1739)

The mark Wendy Carlos has left on electronic music is undeniable and indelible. Graduating from Columbia University with an MA in Music Composition in 1965, during her time as a student Carlos studied under fellow electronic pioneers Vladimir Ussachevsky and Otto Luening at the Columbia-Princepton Electronic Music Center — the first institution of its kind in the U.S. Her student years also began what would become a pivotal working relationship – meeting Robert Moog at the 1964 Audio Engineering Society Show, Carlos’ desire for custom-designed synthesiser modules, extensive advice and technical assistance would facilitate the development of what would become the iconic System 55 Moog Synthesizer.

Recommended by Ussachevsky, until 1968 Carlos worked as a recording and mastering engineer at New York City’s Gotham Recording Studios. It was here she would meet Rachel Elkin in 1967 – a fellow employee and former singer with a jazz and musical theatre background. The pair began sharing a home, studio and business premises in a brownstone building in the West Side of Manhattan in New York City.

Shortly after moving in together, Carlos would play Elkind some of her electronic compositions; a repertory of innovative reworkings and interpretations including various renditions of the work of J S Bach, including the *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G major*. Inspired by the latter, Elkind convinced Carlos to record an album of Bach pieces using the

then-recently invented Moog synthesiser – this would become the unexpected critical and commercial hit, *Switched-on Bach* (1968).

Desiring to use the technology to make ‘appealing music you could really listen to’ (in contrast to the ‘ugly’ music that typified contemporary avant-gardism), the album was recorded in Carlos’ apartment using a custom built 8-track recording machine. Performed by Carlos with fellow musician Benjamin Folkman, the Elkind-produced album was pivotal in bringing the synthesiser, previously the reserve of experimentalism, into popular music. Carlos’ synthesiser only allowed her to play one note at a time; she recorded each instrumental part in the score separately, before layering them – “You had to release the note before you could make the next note start, which meant you had to play with a detached feeling on the keyboard, which was really very disturbing in making music” (Carlos). Comprising 10 tracks in total, the album took around five months and 1,000 hours to produce, with the composer working on it 8 hours a day, five days a week for five months, on top of her full-time day job at Gotham Studios.

With her high-quality home studio, proficiency as a programmer and performer on the Moog, and ability as a recording engineer, Carlos was able to record and produce the album independently. With unprecedented control over every aspect of the timbral, expressive and environmental qualities of each

note recorded, Carlos and Elkind were able to create a new level of clarity for each compositional ‘voice’, avoiding what Elkind saw as the ‘soggy’ audio quality of contemporary classical recordings.

Following on from the success of her debut, in 1969 Carlos followed *Switched-On Bach* with *The Well-Tempered Synthesizer* – a play on Bach’s set of preludes and fugues *The Well-Tempered Clavier*; expanding her mastery of the Moog to works by Monteverdi, Scarlatti and Handel.

We are thrilled to welcome the James McVinnie Ensemble with a unique programme devised and arranged specially for this occasion to pay ode to Bach and Carlos. James writes: “As an organist, Bach’s music is at the heart of my instrument’s repertoire. You get very used to transplanting it onto instruments occupying vastly different sonic territories to that which Bach himself would have known. Tonight’s concert on the Moog synth lab in some senses is therefore a natural addition to this practice, although this is my first time working with these instruments which has been a thrilling and fascinating process. What’s striking about Carlos’s work is that it uses such specific technology to create something both iconic and timeless — in exactly the same way as Bach’s originals did for the organ in the 18th century.”

James is joined by Eliza McCarthy, Siwan Rhys and Hugh Rowlands playing a sequence of works specially

arranged for portable studio the Moog SoundLab UK, modelled after the limited edition reissue of the legendary 1960s System 55 Moog Synthesizer that Carlos was pivotal in developing. Specially designed by Moog Music Inc in 2014, the Lab is based in the Institute of Sound Recording in the University of Surrey.

With many thanks to Scops Arts Trust for their support of this event, to Paul Smith for supplying the Moog SoundLab UK and to Finlay Shakespeare, Engineer with Moog SoundLab UK.

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James McVinnie Ensemble (James Mcvinnie, Eliza McCarthy, Siwan Rhys and Hugh Rowlands) is a group of virtuoso keyboardists dedicated to exploring work often preoccupied with political themes by contemporary and emerging composers. The group was launched in its current form in 2021 with two programmes: the first at Bold Tendencies featuring works by Gabriella Smith, Graham Fitkin, Philip Glass and John Adams; the second at London's Barbican Centre with Chris P Thompson *True Stories & Rational Numbers* and Philip Glass *Glassworks*. New works by Gabriella Smith & inti figgis-vizueta are planned for the Ensemble in 2025 and beyond.

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. Over 1,000 known compositions are 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*. 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.

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.

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UPCOMING LIVE EVENTS

Until Sunday 7 September

The Listening Room — Susan Sontag

We gather LPs and EPs referenced in the works of **Susan Sontag**, alongside portrait photographs, a new interview with her son David Rieff, archival footage, and extracts from her diaries, journals and notebooks. Like her bibliography, Sontag's record collection takes us on a musical journey across geographies and time – from Bach, master of counterpoint, to the elegance and romanticism of Hadyn and Mozart; the soul sensibilities of Dionne Warwick to the skiffle and beat sounds of The Beatles. We commune in ode to the intellectual polymath as a champion of benevolent humanism; a voice whose genre-spanning work continues to reverberate across the decades.

Sunday 7 September at 7pm

J S Bach — Goldberg Variations

Jean Rondeau, Harpsichord

Jean Rondeau, celebrated contemporary ambassador for his instrument, plays the *Goldberg Variations* (1741) on harpsichord – just as they would have been first played by **Bach's** student and the work's dedicatee, 14-year-old harpsichordist Johann Gottlieb Goldberg. Bach's Goldberg Variations fascinate every generation of musicians. Composed (according to the title page)

‘for the soul’s delight of music lovers’. Each of the 30 successive variations grows out of the previous one yet unfolds its own individual magic and drama, offering reassurance as well as exhilaration. Demanding, exacting, and filled with glittering, intricate ornaments, the *Goldberg Variations* are equally liberating for player and listener both.

Saturday 13 September at 7pm

Rachmaninoff — The Complete Piano Concertos

Spanning 50 years of **Sergei Rachmaninoff’s** 69 year life, the composer’s four Piano Concertos are enduringly popular, famous and much-loved in popular culture. We are thrilled to welcome acclaimed Rachmaninoff interpreters – **Ryan Wang, Jeneba Kanneh-Mason, Boris Giltburg** and **Junyan Chen** – for back-to-back iterations of the four Piano Concertos: rarely performed in this complete form, and never before in the UK. The soloists are joined by the **Philharmonia Orchestra**, returning for a fifth consecutive year of performances, conducted by **Charlotte Corderoy**.

Thursday 18 & Friday 19 September at 7.30pm

Oliver Leith – *Garland* (World Premiere)

Commissioned by Bold Tendencies, *Garland* is new work by **Oliver Leith**, visionary British composer of the new generation. A spectacular procession of sound, music and singing, Leith’s most ambitious work to

BOLD TENDENCIES

date gathers an orchestra and chorus of more than 120 performers: the amassed forces of **12 Ensemble**, **GBSR Duo**, **EXAUDI**, soprano **Patricia Auchterlonie** and **The Bold Chorus** directed by **Oli Kitching**; conducted by **Naomi Woo** and **Jack Sheen**; with choral refrains written by **Charlie Fox** and costumes designed by **Ellen Poppy Hill**. The choir and orchestra are augmented by a horse and other pedestrian detritus 'played' to create noise and rhythm, enveloping the audience in sound as the performers circulate our Concrete Concert Hall.



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BOLD TENDENCIES

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More and better! We cannot do the work we do without our supporters. Your generosity allows us to bring a world-class Visual Arts, Creative Learning and Live Events programme to Peckham. If you'd like to join the Founding Friends please ask at the Kiosk or info@boldtendencies.com.

