

Upcoming Events of the Seventy-Sixth Season of The William Nelson Cromwell and E. Lamot Belin Concerts

Unless otherwise noted, all programs take place in the West Building, West Garden Court.

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Inscap Chamber Orchestra
Featuring Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals*, with new verses by Marc Bamuthi Joseph, and Mahler's Symphony no. 4, chamber version
April 22, 3:30

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The Westerlies
The Songs We Sang: American Vocal Music of the 20th Century
In celebration of International Jazz Day, the Westerlies premiere four pieces by Duke Ellington adapted for brass quartet.
April 29, 3:30

—
Julia Bullock, soprano
John Arida, piano
Music by Schubert, Barber, Fauré, and more
May 6, 3:30

—
Ranky Tanky
Celebrating *Outliers and American Vanguard Art*
May 13, 3:30

—
Christina and Michelle Naughton
Piano music by Mozart, Schubert, Bolcom, Bach/Kurtág, Debussy, Chopin, and Lutosławski
May 20, 3:30

Admission to the National Gallery of Art and all of its programs is free of charge, except as noted.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that all portable electronic devices are turned off.

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Cover Arthur L. Flory, *Blossoms* (detail), 1962, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Rosenwald Collection

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76TH SEASON OF CONCERTS

APRIL 15, 2018 / NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART



Program

Fretwork

Asako Morikawa, viola da gamba
Sam Stadlen, viola da gamba
Emily Ashton, baroque cello and viola da gamba
Richard Boothby, viola da gamba
William Hunt, viol

APRIL 15, 2018 / 3:30
WEST BUILDING, WEST GARDEN COURT

Alexander Goehr (b. 1932)
Fantasia 1

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)
Die Kunst der Fuge (The Art of Fugue)
Contrapunctus 1
Contrapunctus 2
Contrapunctus 3
Contrapunctus 4
Contrapunctus 5
Contrapunctus 6

Intermission

Alexander Goehr
Fantasia 2

Johann Sebastian Bach
Die Kunst der Fuge
Contrapunctus 7
Contrapunctus 8
Contrapunctus 9
Contrapunctus 10
Contrapunctus 11
Contrapunctus 14

The Ensemble

This year Fretwork will celebrate thirty years of performing music old and new and looks forward to a challenging and exciting future as the world's leading consort of viols. In these last two and a half decades, Fretwork has explored the core repertory of great English consort music from Taverner to Purcell. The group's earlier series of discs for Virgin Classics included recordings devoted to Henry Purcell, William Byrd, John Dowland, and Orlando Gibbons, while their more recent work for Harmonia Mundi has produced two exuberantly praised recordings of J.S. Bach, *Art of Fugue* and *Alto Modo*, and recordings of Ottaviano Petrucci, Sir John Tavener, and two collaborations with the choir of Magdalen College, Oxford.

Fretwork has become known as the pioneer of contemporary music for viols, having commissioned over forty new works from composers such as Sir John Tavener, Elvis Costello, Alexander Goehr, John Woolrich, Tan Dun, and Poul Ruders, among others.

Fretwork frequently tours North America and has won particular praise for its "Birds on Fire" program of Jewish music for viols. The group's recording *Birds on Fire* was Editor's Choice in *Gramophone Magazine*, with Julie-Anne Sadie commenting, "This is demanding, wonderfully offbeat music inspired by Ashkenazi Klezmer (more cabaret than camera), which Fretwork brings off with a panache that astonishes and delights."

Another major area of interest for the ensemble is J.S. Bach. Initially, the group performed and recorded *The Art of Fugue* to rapturous notices and more recently has arranged many of Bach's keyboard works, including *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, the *Goldberg Variations*, and the *Clavierübung*, which have been released on the Harmonia Mundi label.

Fretwork has toured Russia, Spain, France, and Ireland, with visits to the Edinburgh, Lufthansa, Spitalfields, and Aldeburgh Festivals. As part of a residency at Sidney Sussex College, the ensemble took part in a Festival of Evensong at five Cambridge Colleges: King's, Trinity, St. John's, Gonville, and Caius, as well as at Sidney Sussex, which also included a recording of Thomas Tomkins.

Program Notes

Die Kunst der Fuge (*The Art of Fugue*) is Johann Sebastian Bach's last major work, though, as we shall see, he certainly didn't die before being able to complete it. It survives in an autograph manuscript and in print a year after his death, in 1751.

It is unique in form and intent. While the *Well-Tempered Clavier* deals with preludes and fugues in all the possible keys, the *Art of Fugue* remains in D minor throughout. And while the *Well-Tempered Clavier* employs a new theme for each prelude and fugue, the *Art of Fugue* deals with just one theme that binds all its movements together.

We don't know Bach's purpose in writing the work. It seems like a demonstration of his skill in contrapuntal writing; but the purpose also seems to go much further than that, perhaps to show a whole world of expression within the confines and discipline of counterpoint, or to sum up a lifetime of attention to this art, deeply unfashionable, with Bach as one of the few composers submitting to the rigors of counterpoint.

We also don't know what instrument Bach wrote it for. Both manuscript and print editions are presented in open score; that is, with four separate staves, unlike keyboard music, which has the parts condensed onto two staves. However, it was common for contrapuntal keyboard music to be written that way, in order to illustrate the counterpoint. Most scholars now agree that the piece was conceived for keyboard, either harpsichord, clavichord, or organ, as it is playable by two hands on a keyboard. However, that doesn't mean that Bach intended the *Art of Fugue* to be performed at all, or that he would have had any objection to it being performed on other instruments. Indeed, it has been played by all sorts of ensembles, both strings and wind, or mixtures of both. One advantage of a viol consort is that its range is large enough that each line can usually be accommodated on a single instrument. But another consideration is balance, and Fretwork employs five viols, making it possible to divide up a line to keep the music in an expressive part of the viol—also, at the end of several “contrapuncti” (fugues), Bach dramatically introduces a fifth voice. Finally, the viol consort was the primary vehicle for the great tradition of English contrapuntal music, and Bach would surely have appreciated that tradition, were he to have known it.

The work consists of fourteen contrapuncti, all based on the original theme in some form or other. The fugues become increasingly complex, and the original theme is transformed and manipulated in ever more ingenious and expressive ways. Also, new themes are incorporated as well, and then combined with the original tune. In between these themes, Bach puts four canons, also using the original theme, and these also increase in complexity, culminating in an extraordinary chromatic canon moving at two different speeds and in two different directions.

Contrapuncti 12 and 13 are mirror fugues, which work in two ways: the original and an exact mirror inversion, but are omitted here because they would require extra instruments to cope with their extended range. The first four contrapuncti form a unit presenting the theme in its original version and in its inverted form. The manuscript and printed versions differ in many ways, not least in the ordering of the fugues; for example, the manuscript has the order: 1, 3, 2, 4. But it is certain that Bach had a hand in the printing of the work, as the printed version often reveals his expanded and later thoughts, such as in the first contrapunctus, which has an extra five bars at the end in the print version.

It is wonderful to see the fantasy that went into the printing of this work. Blank space is filled up with extraordinary flights of graphic fantasy. The end of contrapunctus 4 looks like this:



Contrapunctus 5 sees a significant transformation of the theme: the falling thirds are filled in with a dotted note, and this gives it fourteen notes, a significant number; and both original and inverted versions are used simultaneously. Number 6 sees this change taken a step further, giving us this newly transformed theme in both versions, but now in two different speeds, all expressed as part of a French overture—“in *Stylo Francese*,” as it says in the print edition.

Number 7 takes this transformation a stage yet further with the new theme both right way up and inverted, at three different speeds. This is another contrapunctus that is considerably shorter in the manuscript, with twelve bars added at the beginning. Also, like number 6, in the final bars, Bach dramatically adds a fifth voice, with a decorative flourish that rounds off this section of the whole work.

Number 8 is one of the longest contrapuncti and the only one in three parts throughout. It presents us with two entirely new themes before sneaking in the original theme, heavily disguised with rests. It is also highly chromatic in a way that breaks with the harmonic language we have become used to, giving it a much more gallant feel, closer in spirit to the music of Bach's son, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach.

Number 9 sweeps away this equivocal chromaticism with the imperious and virtuosic scales and roulades of yet another new theme. And here we have the original theme, without alteration, without inversion, in only one speed binding the rushing quavers together.

But number 10 takes us back to the more introverted world we left with number 8. Another new theme—beautifully mirrored in itself (rising semitone followed by a falling fourth, then falling semitone followed by a rising fourth)—is worked out in twenty-two bars before the transformed original theme is introduced in “stretto,” meaning that the new entries come sooner than they should, as if they were impatient to come in. We also hear this theme only in its inverted form. This contrapunctus is notable for the pairs of voices that join the theme, producing a creamy, rich texture, again suggesting later musical styles.

Number 11 takes this further. We have the halting, broken-up version of the original theme that we heard in number 8 as the opening tune, then an inversion of the chromatic theme that opened number 8, which is treated to the most tortured and intense chromatic harmony, before the first theme returns. Another theme is then introduced, which whips up the intensity to almost hysterical proportions, Bach pushing his counterpoint to the very limit.

The two mirror fugues, numbers 12 and 13, have been omitted, as mentioned above. The final contrapunctus is labeled “Fuga a 3 soggetti” in the printed edition; and it indeed has three themes, none of which is the original theme or a variant of it. It is clear that we are returning to the pure contrapuntal style of the opening contrapunctus. The first theme is in long, slow notes, the second in flowing quavers, and the third in Bach’s signature “B A C H” (H is German nomenclature for B natural). When all three of these themes are combined, the manuscript breaks off:



At this point, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach has written in German: “NB in this fugue, where the name B A C H is Brough in the countersubject, the composer has died.”

However, either Carl Philipp Emanuel is deliberately trying to mislead us (unlikely), or he genuinely had no idea what was happening during the last few years of his father’s life, because, as we can see, the handwriting shows no signs of infirmity, still less is there any sign of eyesight problems: Bach’s writing is as firm, vigorous, and certain as always. Calligraphic experts suggest that the writing is characteristic of the last eight years of his life. And the watermarks for the paper also suggest an earlier date of 1730–1742.

The romantic idea of Bach struggling to complete his last magnum opus and dying just before he managed to crown the achievement was, of course, started by Carl Philipp Emanuel’s note written on the manuscript. This proved to be absolutely compelling and was accepted without comment. But in 1881, Gustav Nottebohm discovered that the three subjects of this final fugue combined not only with themselves, but also with the original theme. And a recent PhD thesis suggested that Bach deliberately left this work unfinished to encourage others to work out the “solution” to its puzzle. Indra Nicholas Martindale Hughes established exactly how many bars were missing (forty-seven) and how the themes could be combined in the way suggested by Bach’s obituary: “This is the last work of the author, which contains all sorts of counterpoints and canons, on a single principal subject. His last illness prevented him from completing his project of bringing the next-to-last fugue to completion and working out the last one, which was to contain four themes and to have been afterward inverted note for note in all four voices.”

Hughes didn’t complete all forty-seven bars, but showed how the themes combined. I was sufficiently inspired by his work to attempt to fill in the gaps he had left. I made a few changes to his suggestions, feeling that we needed a longer pedal to provide a sufficiently big finish to this enormous work. I liked the idea also of signing the work off with BACH in the final bars. I stole a few moves from previous contrapuncti, number 5 in particular.

Program notes by Richard Boothby