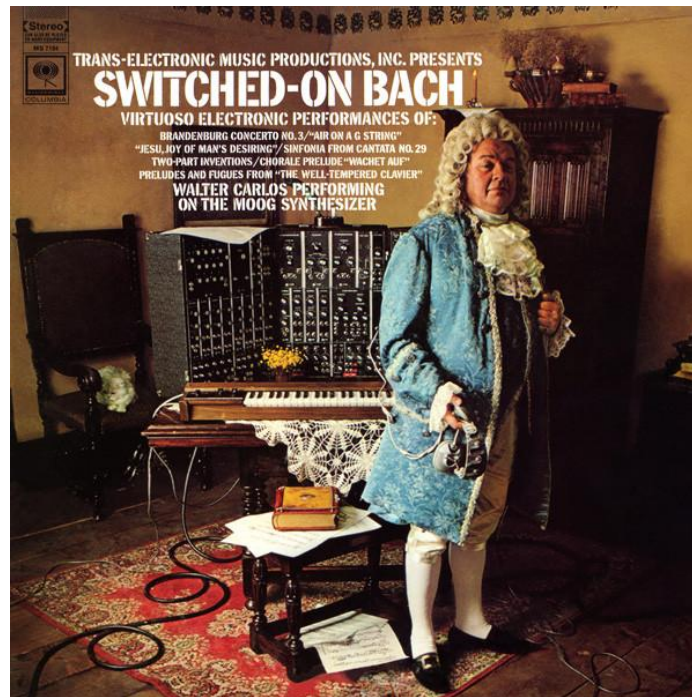


Plattentext zu „Switched On Bach“ von Walter Carlos und Benjamin Folkman (CBS 1969)



BACH À LA MOOG

In 1782, Mozart arranged a number of Bach fugues for string trio. Since then, many great virtuosos and composers have been sufficiently fascinated by Bach to take time out from their main pursuits to transcribe his music. Bach's works have thus always exerted a continuous magnetic attraction on musicians, and even today they repeatedly return to the study of his art to learn more about their own art. It is only natural, then, that today's electronic composers have continued this tradition.

On the face of it, electronic music has a great deal to offer to Bach: Many baroque characteristics, such as crisp, bright sonorities, terraced dynamics, and high relief of voices, are among the most idiomatic features of electronic music. (Indeed, no combination of live instruments could achieve the clarity of texture of this recording. At last, every note and line can be heard, which was one of our chief purposes when we first began to work on Bach.) But, of course, there is more to Bach than clarity.

Two years ago, this album could not have been made. With the equipment then available, to obtain the qualities that make up a good performance was a thankless, time-consuming, and ultimately futile enterprise. Even rudimentary phrasing, articulation, or modulation of timbre could involve many gruelling hours for the production of mere seconds of music. Crescendo and diminuendo, the two most natural vocal or instrumental means of musical expression, required the most calculated and laborious manipulation of volume controls and filters. Even programmed or computerized attempts to automate "spontaneity" were entirely a matter of guesswork, and the musician was unable even to hear, much less to modify, a sound as it was being produced. Only the least sophisticated means of expression, i.e. timbral and dynamic contrasts, could be controlled satisfactorily. These and other limitations were evident any time an electronic composition contained a line at all instrumental in nature.

It was at this impasse that Walter Carlos implored Bob Moog, the originator of the commercially packaged synthesizer, to work with him in evolving new subsystems with which the production of more sophisticated nuances of expression would be a practical matter. The modified synthesizer resulting from their collaboration was a musical instrument. Like any musical instrument, it has extraordinary capabilities and maddening limitations. Playing it beautifully requires as much skill, practice, talent and taste as playing any instrument beautifully, plus the need of a composer's ear for new and different sounds. Often two pairs of hands and several feet are needed to take advantage of all that the Moog Synthesizer can do, but the instrument is constantly being improved.

This album, then, is a proving ground both for the synthesizer and for our collaborative musicianship. We have tried to make our performances musically expressive, electronically idiomatic, and spiritually and musicologically faithful to Bach—conditions probably not totally reconcilable. Some sounds took hours to perfect; others were built and then regretfully abandoned; sometimes we had to choose between technique and spirit; sometimes the historically correct ornamentation didn't "sound"; many sessions were spent re-thinking, retouching, re-mixing, rejecting. But at last we achieved results that we feel have musical validity. Through all these difficulties, Bach's great works were an ever-renewing inspiration to us, so it is with a sense of deep humility that we present them to you in electronic garb.

The last movement is much less complex than the first. It is a good-humored, bumptious dance with lots of exuberance and sparkling first violin and first viola solos. How Bach managed to preserve the "sound" of the first movement here with such a lighter texture is a secret he shares with only the greatest masters.

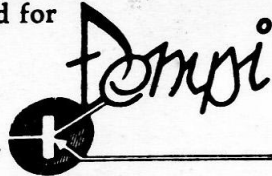
—Benjamin Folkman

THE BIRTH OF AN IDEA

About a year ago, Walter Carlos asked me to listen to several of his electronic compositions and realizations, which encompassed his experiments from 1957 and his subsequent collaborations with Ben Folkman that started at the Columbia-Princeton Music Center in 1964-65. One of the tapes I heard contained the charming performance of the Invention in F, included in this album. This completely electronic realization seemed so right and natural that we immediately made plans for a whole album of "electronic Bach." Then, a few months later, the first movement of the Brandenburg No. 3 was finished. It exceeded my already high expectations. Excitedly, I called my good friend Ettore Stratta, at CBS Records, who generously spread his enthusiasm throughout the rest of the company. The album was completed with the guidance of Mr. Stratta and also of Mr. Paul Myers, of the CBS Masterworks Department, who kindly allowed us complete artistic freedom in the production and realization of this album.

It would perhaps be presumptuous of me to claim too large a role in a project developed and realized by the genius of Walter Carlos—composer, virtuoso performer and symbiotic musician/technician—and his dear friend and collaborator Benjamin Folkman—musician/musicologist extraordinaire, whose special insight into the nuances of great performance was an invaluable contribution to the artistry heard on this album. It is a respectful amalgam of old and new that leads into a most hopeful and interesting musical future. I know you will share my enthusiasm.

—Rachel Elkind for



**This album was devised and produced by
Trans-Electronic-Music Productions, Inc.
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Electronic music began as an aesthetic experiment in which early electronic music composers allowed the basic processes and simple materials of "classical" electronic composition to dictate the form as well as the content of their music. Today, despite the availability of sophisticated equipment for the electronic production of music, few musicians have taken the trouble to develop the combination of technical expertise, aesthetic discretion, and manual dexterity that is generally associated with a professional performance of traditional music. Walter Carlos' realizations contained in this album are a dazzling display of virtuosity in the electronic medium. But Carlos has clearly gone beyond mere virtuosity. He has shown that the medium of electronic music is eminently suited to the realization of much traditional music, and in doing so has firmly brought the electronic medium into the historical mainstream of music. This album is the most stunning breakthrough in electronic music to date.

—Robert Moog