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TITLE:
Switched-On Bach: Wendy Carlos' Electronic Interpretation of Bach

ABSTRACT:

When we think of Bach, few of us think of electronic music as essential performances of his work. Though in the late Baroque period clavier meant any keyboard instrument, Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier is usually associated with a clavichord or harpsichord. Most performers who play the Well-Tempered Clavier opt for a piano or harpsichord, with careful articulation attempts to play their instruments in a way that would be close to the timbre of Bach's keyboard. However, Wendy Carlos approached Bach's Well Tempered Clavier without a keyboard at all. An early synthesis pioneer, Carlos was working closely alongside Moog to develop the analog synthesizer and improve the instrument. Carlos worked from a mathematical perspective to craft a sound as close to Bach's keyboard as she could, using non-equal temperaments and analog modulation of envelope, frequency, and velocity. Often starting from scratch, with just a sine wave, Carlos had to theorize the timbre she wanted from the instrument and how to deliver it mathematically and mechanically. The resulting album, *Switched-on Bach* (1968), was the first Bach performance to win a grammy for the Best Classical Album.

Switched-on Bach was also the first album within the Grammys Classical categories to break from traditional instrumentation and include electronic instruments. Carlos' *Switched-on Bach* is not just a "reinterpretation" of Bach's music as past conductors and instrumentalists have done, but something entirely new. To understand Carlos' *Switched-on Bach* it is essential to evaluate the techniques used by Bach in orchestration and composition, as well as traditional interpretation to understand how Carlos used these performances to influence her own creation. In this presentation I will analyze the techniques that Carlos used to create the timbre for her album "Switched on Bach" and why it was effective.