

# SOUTHBANK CENTRE

## GBSR Duo: Stockhausen vs Aphex Twin (Double Bill)

**Saturday 31 January 2026, 8.30pm | Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall**

We are proud to be a place where people come together to discover and connect with the wonder of classical music. Throughout the year, we provide unrivalled opportunities to encounter, live in person, the full range of music, and a variety of different ways for you to experience it.

Some of the world's most exciting artists, including our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists, join us to shine a light on this incredible art form. Welcome to Classical Music: Autumn/Winter 2025/26.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

---

### Repertoire

**Stockhausen** Kontakte for electronic sounds, piano & percussion 35'

Recorded excerpts from *The Music Machine: The Technocrats*, BBC Radio 3, 23 – 27 October 1995, presented by Dick Witts. Soundbite Productions, Lizzie Jackson (producer), Robert Heller (researcher).

### Performers

GBSR Duo:

George Barton *percussion*

Siwan Rhys *piano, percussion*

### Stockhausen vs Aphex Twin

In 1995, Stockhausen was asked to listen to the music of Aphex Twin, commenting that Aphex should 'immediately stop with all these post-African repetitions'. Aphex Twin responded that Stockhausen might want to 'stop making abstract, random patterns you can't dance to'.

It depends, of course, what you mean by 'dance'. In 1961, the year after completing *Kontakte*, Stockhausen and his future wife Mary Bauermeister drafted a version in which the music was to be the basis of a theatrical happening, *Originale*. A film of the 1964 New York production may be found on YouTube.

*Originale* was an invitation to add further layers to *Kontakte*, which can be presented in the way it came out of the studio, as four-track electroacoustic music, or as that plus live piano and percussion, or as one or other of those forms plus further material and activities. This evening *Originale* gives permission for visits from additional recorded sources.

### Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928–2007): Kontakte

Composed between 1958 and 1960, this was Stockhausen's second big electroacoustic piece (after *Gesang der Jünglinge*), and his first to combine electronic sounds with those of live instruments: piano and percussion. The long period of composition was due partly to the work's duration and partly to the fact Stockhausen had other projects on the go; but also, nearly 70 years ago, electronic composition was a laborious process, requiring in this case sounds in four channels to be created on tape, edited and overdubbed. The composer first wrote out a detailed plan; this was then realised in the electronic music studio of West German Radio, Stockhausen's long-time home for electronic composition, with the assistance of Gottfried Michael Koenig and Jaap Speck.

---

*This performance lasts approximately 40 minutes.  
There is no interval.*

Stockhausen was very much occupied with the unity of music's dimensions, how, for example, a high frequency that was a component of a timbre would, when slowed down, become a distinct pitch, and, when slowed down further, a rhythmic beat. His new electronic piece, composed entirely from regular impulses, was intended to show such contacts (*Kontakte*) between timbre and tone, tone and rhythm. But there are also contacts on other levels: between musical scales, between pitched sounds and unpitched, between timbres, between the electronic and instrumental domains. The pulse-generated sounds will sometimes resemble those of a piano or of percussion instruments, which makes possible a constant dialogue between the seen and the unseen, the known and the unknown.

Another of Stockhausen's preoccupations around 1960 was with alternatives to the strongly progressive, goal-directed character of Western music. The events of *Kontakte*, he wrote, do not unfold from beginning to end, 'rather the concentration on the Now – on every Now'. The work is composed of 16 'structures' – 16 'Nows', as it were – most of which are further subdivided. Moreover, its duration of 35 minutes carries it from the status of work, which we witness from outside, towards that of state, in which we exist for a while.

Even so, the composition has a very definite – and dramatic – opening and a clear close; it is also full of small-scale processes. Stockhausen himself distinguished between structures and substructures that are dynamic, pressing forward, and those that are static, lingering in what feels like an extended present. There is no doubt about the dynamism of the first two minutes, during which the work sets out the elements of its character. The relationship between recorded and live sound is by no means limited to imitation; rather the pianist and the percussionist may seem to react to electronic signals, may equally appear to be transmitting signals to the electronic sound, may counter and contradict what comes from the loudspeakers, or may simply be in worlds – or a world – of their own.

Also presented at this early point are effects created in space. By adjustment of volume levels and reverb, Stockhausen and his technicians can suggest layers of sound receding into the distance; there are also places where a sound seems to rotate, passing from one to another of the four sets of loudspeakers surrounding us. Another immediate feature is how the electronic element, diverse as it is, seems to have a personality as distinct as those of the pianist and percussionist – a personality whose traits include humour (notably in quasi-vocal interventions). As so often in Stockhausen, the extraordinary and the comic interlock; the shaman is also a clown.

For the next five minutes or so, the music takes on a much more static character. It then enters a sphere dominated by pitched sounds and chimes, leading to a climax around the 11-minute mark.

The whole central third of the piece is made up largely of static episodes including passages of electronic sounds suggestive of skin drums and, later, wood percussion. A piano build-up is followed by a short pause, a ringing metal moment and a new arrival at dynamism. This is where, at the halfway point, the unity of timbre, pitch and rhythm is most graphically presented, an upper frequency separating itself from its parent sound, zooming down through the pitch spectrum and becoming pulsation.

Largely dynamic, the final third of the work engages the three participants – piano, percussion and electronic – more comprehensively. There would have been several minutes more had Stockhausen not had to down tools in order to have the piece ready for its premiere, given in Cologne on 11 June 1960. It is hard to imagine a better ending, though, than that of cosmic winds circling into extinction.

**Programme notes © Paul Griffiths, 2026**

---

#### **Find out more**

- ▶ GBSR Duo
- ▶ Sam Wilson
- ▶ Joseph Havlat
- ▶ [southbankcentre.co.uk](http://southbankcentre.co.uk)

# After Dark: GBSR Duo Performs Aphex Twin

Saturday 31 January 2026, 9.30pm | Queen Elizabeth Hall Foyer

## Repertoire

Aphex Twin Computer Controlled Acoustic Instruments pt2  
for 2 prepared pianos & percussion

- |                                       |      |
|---------------------------------------|------|
| 1. diskhat ALL prepared1mixed 13      | 5'22 |
| 2. snar2                              | 0'20 |
| 3. diskhat1                           | 2'26 |
| 4. piano un1 arpej                    | 0'50 |
| 5. DISKPREPT4                         | 1'53 |
| 6. hat 2b 2012b                       | 1'25 |
| 7. disk aud1_12                       | 0'10 |
| 8. 0035 1-Audio                       | 0'26 |
| 9. disk prep calrec2 barn dance [slo] | 4'22 |
| 10. DISKPREPT1                        | 3'30 |
| 11. diskhat2                          | 0'38 |
| 12. piano un10 it happened            | 1'48 |
| 13. hat5c 0001 rec-4                  | 4'46 |

Recorded excerpts from *The Music Machine: The Technocrats*, BBC Radio 3, 23 – 27 October 1995, presented by Dick Witts. Soundbite Productions, Lizzie Jackson (producer), Robert Heller (researcher).

## Performers

George Barton *percussion, drums, piano*

Sam Wilson *percussion, drums, piano*

Siwan Rhys *piano, wah-wah bass, lever harp*

Joseph Havlat *piano*

---

*This performance lasts approximately 35 minutes.  
There is no interval.*

By the time *Computer Controlled Acoustic Instruments pt2* came out, as an EP in 2015, 20 years had passed since its composer's verbal joust with Stockhausen. But Aphex had not changed his ways. The music is, throughout, charged with repeating units in strongly pulsed rhythms.

Aphex's argument that 'you can't dance to' Stockhausen was always tongue-in-cheek, though. As one of the creators of Intelligent Dance Music (IDM), he was putting out records designed for dancing in the mind, which, not constrained by muscles and tendons, can move any which way. The prominence he gives repetition was not an inevitability but an artistic choice.

The principal 'computer controlled acoustic instrument' here is the disklavier, which responds not to fingers but to digital instructions, and which Aphex had used on his double album *Drukqs* (2001), adding percussion instruments controlled by digital devices he had made himself. That was the first part of his endeavour with digitalised instruments, the 2015 EP being the second. Its track titles indicate where the disklavier plays and show when it is prepared with foreign objects between the strings, as in some of John Cage's music. Also indicated are an unprepared piano, snare drum and hi-hat.

Aphex's instrumentation for piano and percussion with electronics parallels that of *Kontakte*, and we might hear some resemblance, too, in how both composers engineer separate planes of sound extending away from us.

As originally released, *Computer Controlled Acoustic Instruments pt2* had ten tracks. Three bonus tracks were added for the 2017 re-release, which we hear tonight.

Programme notes © Paul Griffiths, 2026

## You might also like...

### Jasdeep Singh Degun & Friends

Saturday 7 March 2026, 8pm | Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall

Sitarist Jasdeep Singh Degun is joined by players from the London Philharmonic Orchestra for sparkly cinematic music for sitar and strings.

### Manchester Collective & Sean Shibe: Sea Shanties

Saturday 28 March 2026, 8pm | Queen Elizabeth Hall

All aboard as we chart an unlikely course through the world of sea shanties, encountering classical, folk and contemporary works along the way.