

## PRESS RELEASE :FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### How Great Thou Art – 50 Years of African Caribbean Funerals in London



Photographer Charlie Phillips presents a sensitive photographic documentary of the social and emotional traditions that surround death in London's African Caribbean community.

Taking place at Photofusion Gallery in November 2014, *How Great Thou Art* represents a lifetime's work by Charlie. A video installation will accompany the exhibition.

The title for the exhibition is borrowed from the popular hymn sung at funerals. The song *How Great Thou Art* praises the life of an individual, and this project is a declaration of love and celebration for the traditions and cultures of the African diaspora in London.

Dr Michael McMillan, curator of West Indian Front Room and long-term collaborator of Charlie Phillips said: "*Charlie Phillips captures in his photographs and ephemera of West Indian funerals cultural practices and spiritual beliefs that resonate across the African diaspora from the idea that death is part of life, to the Nine Night wake, dressing up for the funeral, to the belief that though the deceased have physically gone their spirit remains with us.*"

Paul Goodwin, curator, lecturer and urban theorist based in London has observed: *How Great Thou Art is a new landmark in black British photography. The question of death and the cultural responses to death through funerals in the Caribbean community has featured sporadically in various photographic oeuvres before but no one has explored this subject in such depth and in such a participatory and embedded manner as Charlie Phillips in How Great Thou Art.*

Eddie Otchere, exhibition curator said: "*curating Charlie's funeral works has been a hugely rewarding task, it is rare that one gets the opportunity to see the establishment of a photographer's style. Looking at his earliest images from 1962, you can see where Charlie's unique street style, and grass roots aesthetic was born. The confidence and sensitivity with which Charlie has captured his community, reminds us of the powerful role the photography, and photographers have as shapers of history; providing source documents for future historians and adding new communities to the British photographic canon.*"

The exhibition is being hand-printed by Nick Jones and Danny Pope at Photofusion's darkroom, using all traditional photo-chemical printing processes.



Photofusion



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A series of talks and events will accompany the exhibition, including artist-led talks and exhibition tours. A limited edition book will be for sale at the exhibition, which has been successfully funded via Kickstarter.

Eddie Otchere and Lizzy King are curating this exhibition, with support from Arts Council England's Grants for the Arts Fund.

## EVENT INFORMATION

Photofusion Gallery, 17a Electric Lane, Brixton, London, SW9 8LA

Private View: 6pm -9pm Thursday, November 6th

Public Exhibition: 10am -5.30pm Friday, November 7<sup>th</sup> – Friday, December 5<sup>th</sup>  
(open till 7pm Thursdays, closed Sundays)

Web links:

How Great Thou Art: [www.howgreatthouart.photography](http://www.howgreatthouart.photography)

Photofusion [www.photofusion.org](http://www.photofusion.org)

Arts Council [www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

Kickstarter [www.kickstarter.com](http://www.kickstarter.com)

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### For all media enquiries please contact

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Project: Lizzy King [itslizzyking@gmail.com](mailto:itslizzyking@gmail.com), +447919 231135

### Notes to Editors

- **Charlie Phillips**  
Born in Kingston Jamaica, he arrived in London in 1953. Charlie's photography career started in the early 1960s when he was given a camera by a Black American GI who was stationed in Notting Hill at the time. With his new camera he set about photographing the lives of the African Caribbean community, which was establishing itself in what Charlie describes as "the ghettos...the no-go areas" of Notting Hill. Charlie's love of photography was cemented from that point, he used his money from a paper-round to buy darkroom chemistry, and waited until the users of the communal bathroom were all in bed before processing and printing his photographs in the bath-tub.  
  
In the late 1960s, fuelled by a love of opera, Charlie left London for Italy. Whilst in Europe, he photographed student uprisings in Paris and Rome and worked as a paparazzo, photographing Omar Sharif, Gina Lollobrigida and Mohammed Ali. Charlie's first exhibition "Il Frustrazi" was in Milan in 1972, exploring the frustrations of migrant workers in Europe.  
  
Since then Charlie has had his work shown at Tate Britain, Museum of London, Nottingham New Art Exchange and MOCA in Detroit. His work also forms part of The Wedge and V&A collections.
- **About Photofusion** [www.photofusion.org](http://www.photofusion.org) Originally founded as the Photo Co-op in 1983 in South London, Photofusion provides a range of photographic services with analogue, digital and moving image facilities. Photofusion also delivers a range of crucial outreach engagement projects, working with socially and culturally marginalised young people, offering photographer-led creative programmes, skills-based accredited courses, bursaries and internships in collaboration with local organisations and a range of funding partners. As a National Portfolio Organisation, the ongoing investment from Arts Council England enables Photofusion to maintain its innovative, high-quality facilities that continually address and support the creative, technical and critical development of a photographer's practice so the organisation can continue its commitment to support photography in the UK.
- **About Arts Council**  
How Great Thou Art is supported through by the National Lottery through Arts Council England. To find out more about the Arts Council visit [artscouncil.org.uk](http://artscouncil.org.uk)