



PASSACAGLIA

OLIVER NEALE

Organ

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1 **Passacaglia in C minor, BWV. 582** | Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) 13:39

Collins Organ | St Peter Mancroft | Norwich

Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue, Op. 149 | Healey Willan (1880-1968)

2 **Introduction** 3:56

3 **Passacaglia** 9:05

4 **Fugue** 5:16

Father Willis Organ | Truro Cathedral

Prelude, Scherzo and Passacaglia, Op. 41 | Kenneth Leighton (1929-1988)

5 **Prelude** 4:20

6 **Scherzo** 3:37

7 **Passacaglia** 9:21

Walker Organ | St Chad's Cathedral | Birmingham

Ann Preston's sculpture, 'Passacaglia', pictured on the front cover, is an evocation of the musical form of the same name; it represents a complex web of variations governed by an absolute mathematical structure (the ground bass). This juxtaposition between art and music complements the collection of pieces on this disc, which highlights some of the most prominent organ works that define the passacaglia genre.

The passacaglia is a musical form that has matured over centuries of compositional idioms. Originating in seventeenth-century Spain, the name is derived from the Spanish *pasar*, to walk, and *calle*, a street. This illustrates the underlying construction of the musical form, whereby a constant harmonic rhythm driven by a ground bass theme or ostinato is decorated by a series of cumulative variations shared between the voices. Though the passacaglia is not limited to the organ, this selection of passacaglia-based works for the instrument presents some of the most powerful realisations of the musical form: ranging from the exquisite contrapuntal rhetoric of J.S. Bach, through to the broad symphonicism of Healey Willan, and Kenneth Leighton's quintessential neo-classical brilliance.

This collection of works is performed on an eclectic range of instruments, which not only demonstrates some of the finest organs in the United Kingdom, but also captures the unique sound worlds and aesthetics necessitated by the repertoire on this disc.

J.S. Bach's **Passacaglia in C minor** was written sometime between 1706 and 1713 - whilst Bach was organist in Arnstadt or Mühlhausen. The work is a fine example of Bach's contrapuntal genius, and is regarded as one of his most important works for organ. The **Passacaglia** opens with a statement of the theme in the pedal. It is probable that Bach took inspiration for this theme from André Raison's *Christe - Trio en Passacaille* (1688), which shares the first four bars. This statement is then followed by twenty variations, each demonstrating a variety of rhythmic, motivic, and contrapuntal textures - exploring fugal, *manualiter*, and harpsichord *brisé* (broken chord) figurations. A double **Fugue** follows without break, and takes its subject from the first half of the Passacaglia theme. Bach's navigation of fugal counterpoint is exemplary, as the Passacaglia 'subject' maintains integrity throughout the work without affecting the Fugue's structure or wider harmonic scheme. The Fugue culminates with a dramatic Neapolitan arrest, before an improvisatory coda concludes the work in seven voices.

Introduction, Passacaglia and Fugue (1916) by Healey Willan, is a jewel in the twentieth-century organ repertory. The work was composed after Willan heard his friend, the organist Dalton Baker, perform a piece of the same title by German Romantic composer Max Reger (1873-1916). After the performance, Baker claimed that none other than a German philosophical mind could write a truly fine passacaglia – a challenge which Willan embraced. The **Introduction** opens with a series of mystical chords on rich, undulating strings - these chords flank the dramatic symphonic core of the movement. The **Passacaglia** is founded on a haunting eight-bar theme presented in the pedal. This is followed by eighteen variations - each of which is fabled to have been written whilst commuting between Toronto and Willan's summer residency at Lake Simcoe. These variations exhibit the vast array of colours, timbres, and textures available on a symphonic organ, ranging from virtuosic scherzos to melismatic orchestral writing. The **Fugue** draws upon material from the Passacaglia theme for its subject. This is adorned by dense chromatic harmony, reminiscent of the late German Romanticism from which Willan took his inspiration. The work culminates with a dominant pedal point before a final coda restates the Passacaglia theme.

Kenneth Leighton's **Prelude, Scherzo and Passacaglia** (1963) was his first major work for organ, and presents a kaleidoscope of tonal and rhythmic inventions, powered by a deep fusion between traditional contrapuntal aesthetics and Leighton's twentieth-century harmonic language and rhetoric. The **Prelude** is based upon the development of one sinuous chromatic motif, punctuated by the growing intensity of alternating major and minor tonalities implied by the *pesante* ostinato in the pedal. The **Scherzo** by contrast is playful and energetic: The movement's highly rhythmical and contrapuntal texture in the style of a Baroque *gigue* is supplemented by a series of complex polyrhythms and syncopations – building tension as the movement progresses. The **Passacaglia** occupies the latter half of the work, and is based on a serial theme encompassing all twelve tones of the chromatic scale. Thirteen variations form the core of the movement, each featuring a unique blend of diatonic and chromatic harmony with increasingly vivid dissonances and textures. A dramatic cadenza over a pedal point marks the end of the disciplined passacaglia form, before a final six statements of the theme in the pedal leads to a declamatory C major resolution on full organ.

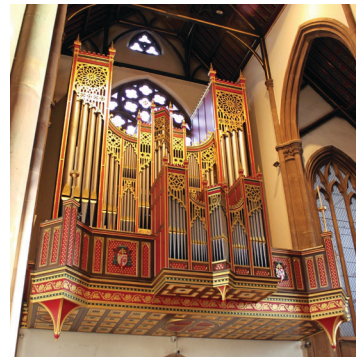
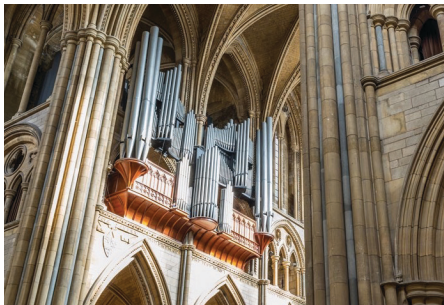


The organ of **St Peter Mancroft** in Norwich is regarded as one of Peter Collins' finest installations. Upon completion in 1984, Collins stated that it was a "once in a lifetime opportunity" to construct an instrument of such importance. The instrument is voiced and constructed in accordance with eighteenth-century North German traditions, but is visually abstract in its form and architecture. The striking angular casework was designed by Herbert Norman, and consists of over one hundred and fifty 'tuned' panels; each designed to resonate at different frequencies to focus and project the sound.

The disposition of the organ is very traditional: The Great sits high above the console in the centre of the main case, with the Pedal department situated in two towers on either side. The Positive is located at the front of the instrument, and speaks directly towards the Nave. A small intimate 'Echo' division is enclosed within the core of the instrument, yielding distinctive antiphonal possibilities with registration. All 38 stops are mechanically operated, with each division controlled by sensitive mechanical action.

The instrument's specification is rooted in the North German tradition. The principal choruses on each division are crowned with a variety of bright mixture work, mutations and reeds. The instrument is tuned to *Valotti* temperament, and the wind supply is sympathetic to traditional organ building techniques. This makes the Collins organ particularly suitable for historical performance.

To view the organ specification, please visit the National Pipe Organ Register at www.npor.org.uk, and search for the index number: N06521.



The 'Father Willis' organ of **Truro Cathedral** is one of the most renowned cathedral instruments in the United Kingdom. Built by Henry Willis I at a cost of £2,742, it was delivered by boat in 1887, and installed whilst construction of the cathedral Nave was taking place. The instrument has an almost identical specification to the organ Willis built a year earlier for the then parish church of St Michael, Coventry (later Coventry Cathedral) which was destroyed during World War Two.

A conservative restoration was carried out in 1963, when the grandson of the original builder relocated the console to a new gallery placed above the South choir stalls to a design by the architect John Phillips. The instrument remained unchanged until 1991, when new electronic action was installed along with updated registration aids for all divisions, bringing the instrument in-line with modern technology.

The Truro Cathedral organ retains Willis' original tonal characteristics. Each of the five divisions possess a wide array of symphonic colours and features stereotypical Willis hallmarks - Tierce mixtures on the Great and Swell, characterful Gedacks on the Choir, and a small but telling Pedal division. The instrument is furnished with a barrage of high pressure reeds including a Tuba, and a large-scale Ophicleide on the Pedal.

To view the organ specification, please visit the National Pipe Organ Register at www.npor.org.uk, and search for the index number: N11147.

J. W. Walker & Sons was commissioned at the end of 1990 to build a new organ for **St Chad's Cathedral**. The decision was soon taken that the only place where choir and organ could be together was in the West gallery, as originally intended by the Cathedral's architect Augustus Welby Pugin. The organ case and gallery was designed by David Graebe in the late medieval style, with decorative additions by Gordon Foster.

The instrument is traditional in its design: the Great and Swell divisions occupy the centre of the main casework above the console, whilst the Pedal department is divided between two towers on either side; the Positive is on the front of the gallery behind the player's back, all controlled by mechanical action with electric stop action and a wide range of adjustable aids to registration.

The tonal characteristics of this organ make it particularly versatile for realising music from a broad range of styles and idioms. Its classical layout and clear choruses on all four divisions are accompanied by a variety of colourful solo stops and mutations, which ensures organists have ample resources at their disposal.

To view the organ specification, please visit the National Pipe Organ Register at www.npor.org.uk, and search for the index number: D02905.



Oliver Neale is a versatile organist and recitalist, who performs extensively across the United Kingdom. He is currently an undergraduate organist at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, studying with Daniel Moulton and Nicholas Wearne. Whilst at the conservatoire, he was awarded the Associate Diploma of the Royal College of Organists, and held the organ scholarship at Birmingham Cathedral (2019-2020), where he assisted in the running of the music department, and accompanied the various cathedral choirs. Upon graduation from Birmingham, Oliver looks forward to embarking on the Teach First Training Programme, working to promote a fair and diverse musical education for all.

Oliver complements his organ studies as a freelance bass-baritone, working with several revered tutors including Russell Smythe, Margaret Kingsley, and Robert Rice. Prior to moving to Birmingham, he spent a year as a Choral Scholar at Truro Cathedral (2017-2018), performing in frequent radio broadcasts and tours.

As a former member of Genesis Sixteen (2018-2019) and VOCES8 Scholars (2019-2021), Oliver has enjoyed working with some of the finest choral ensembles in the country. Performance highlights include the world premiere performance of James MacMillan's Symphony No. 5 *'Le Grand Inconnu'* with Genesis Sixteen and The Sixteen, and Handel's *Messiah* at Trinity College, Cambridge with VOCES8 and the Academy of Ancient Music.