

# ORGAN GIANTS

J.S. BACH • MENDELSSOHN • SCHUMANN • BRAHMS • B-A-C-H



## J.S. BACH

Complete  
Organ Works

30 recitals

*played by*

**William Fox**

## B-A-C-H

The Influence  
of J.S. Bach

3 recitals

*played by*

**Simon Johnson**

## MENDELSSOHN

Complete  
Organ Works

5 recitals

*played by*

**Samuel Bristow**

*Organ*  
*Works*  
**ROBERT & CLARA  
SCHUMANN  
& BRAHMS**

Organ Works

4 recitals

*played by*

**Organ Scholars  
of St Paul's,  
past and present**

**CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF THE WILLIS ORGAN  
OF ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL**

Selected Sundays in 2021 and 2022

4.30 – 5.05 pm

Free admission

Further details at [www.stpauls.co.uk](http://www.stpauls.co.uk)

 **St PAUL'S**  
CATHEDRAL



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William Fox

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2022, 4.30 pm

 **St PAUL'S**  
CATHEDRAL

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Complete Organ Works of J. S. Bach (1685 – 1750)

*Recital XXX: works for Christmas (2)*

**Canonic Variations on ‘Vom Himmel hoch’ 769**

One of Bach’s most extraordinary compositional accomplishments for the organ, the *Canonic Variations* were written when he joined the *Korrespondierenden Sozietät der Musicalischen Wissenschaften* (Corresponding Society of the Musical Sciences) in 1747. The work could be viewed as a forerunner of *The Art of Fugue* (BWV 1080), testing the composer’s creativity and understanding of an art form through an expansive collection of contrasting canons on one theme. Each variation sees an increase in intricacy and ingenuity. The first two variations on *Vom Himmel hoch*, a Lutheran Christmas melody, are treated to simple canons between two voices, above a pedal cantus firmus. The third variation grows to four voices: the canon appearing at a seventh between tenor and bass parts, with an expressive alto line underneath a soprano cantus firmus in the right hand. The fourth variation presents the canon in augmentation, the bass appearing at double the time value of the soprano, concluded subtly with Bach’s BACH musical signature, subsequently spelled in reverse. A movement in three sections, the final variation reaches the apex of the work’s complexity. In an elaborate canonic labyrinth, canons appear at the sixth, third, second, and ninth, as well as in diminution, culminating in the chorale phrases being stated all at once.

**In dulci jubilo 608**

**Lobt Gott, ihr Christen, allzugleich 609**

**Jesu, meine Freude 610**

**Christum wir sollen loben schon 611**

**Wir Christenleut’ 612**

These five preludes emanate from the *Orgelbüchlein*, a volume of chorale settings spanning the entirety of the Lutheran calendar, compiled during Bach’s youth between 1708 and 1727. In BWV 608, the carol *In dulci jubilo* is presented canonically between the soprano and pedal, the triplets in the middle of the texture perhaps signifying the celebratory piping of the shepherds. BWV 609, BWV 610 and BWV 612 adopt a similar texture, with a soprano cantus firmus accompanied by semiquaver accompaniment. The melody of BWV 611 is a Lutheran revision of the plainsong *A solis ortus cardine*, and the chorale sits within an expansive texture utilising the full compass of a typical instrument available to Bach.

provides a superb glimpse of Bach the young, dynamic performer. The Toccata opens with a series of rhetorical gestures, followed by an extensive pedal solo. An extrovert contrapuntal section concludes the movement with assured positivity. Of the Adagio that follows, Spitta commented that the work has 'no analogy in Bach's works' and the deeply expressive melody (played here on a Cor Anglais stop) is 'reminiscent of a solo Adagio with harpsichord continuo'. A dramatic change in texture appears as if from nowhere, employing some of Bach's most daring harmonic shifts. Having returned to C major, the uniquely light fugue subject begins and is then worked out at length. The coda of this epic masterwork is announced by a long tonic pedal note, over which semiquavers energetically drive to an abrupt halt, concluding the triptych as unpredictably as it began.

Notes by *Samuel Bristow*

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### **William Fox**

William Fox is currently the Acting Organist and Assistant Director of Music at St Paul's Cathedral, having been Sub-Organist since 2018. He works with the world-famous choir of St Paul's, accompanying and directing the music at services, including services of national significance. In June, William played the organ at the National Service of Thanksgiving for the Platinum Jubilee of HM Queen Elizabeth II, and at the Service of Prayer and Reflection the day following her death, broadcast to millions around the world. William began his musical education as a chorister at York Minster, before holding organ scholarships at Wells and Hereford Cathedrals. Prior to his appointment at St Paul's, he was organ scholar and a prizewinning academic scholar at Magdalen College, Oxford, from where he graduated with a first class degree in Music. William became a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists as a teenager, winning the Turpin and Durrant prize.

William's debut recording, of the organ works of Cecilia McDowall was released in 2021, gaining 5 \* reviews in *Choir and Organ* and *The Organ*. As a continuo and orchestral organist William has recently appeared with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, the City of London Sinfonia, Gabrieli Consort and Players, the Cardinal's Musick, and the London Youth Choirs. Since 2019, William has additionally been a Junior Fellow at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, where he also studies. As a piano accompanist, he is the winner of the 2018 Sir Anthony Lewis Memorial Prize Competition.

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### **The Organ of St Paul's**

St Paul's Cathedral was built on an epic scale and with absolute attention to detail. These are qualities deeply embodied in its Grand Organ.

In 1694 a contract was signed with eminent German organ builder, Bernard Smith, to supply an organ for the new Cathedral. The 27-stop, three-manual, no-pedal instrument was placed on a screen in the quire.

The organ remained relatively unaltered until, in the 1870s, Henry 'Father' Willis completed an essentially new instrument. The original Wren case was boldly divided

in half and placed against the pillars on either side of the quire. At considerable risk to his own reputation, Willis had constructed something of a musical and visual *coup de théâtre* in one of the most important ecclesiastical buildings in the world.

Further alterations and reconstructions have been made by Henry Willis III (1930s), N P Mander Ltd (1970s) and Mander Organs Ltd (2000s). A second, mobile console has also been provided. The two consoles are identical – each of 137 drawstops and 140 controls. The operating system needed to make this set-up work utilises the same technology as the NASA space shuttle programme and the International Space Station. But what of the instrument's ability to make music? Like the building in which it finds itself, the organ is capable of the big and the small and finds a unity in its very diversity.  
*Simon Johnson*

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## YouTube recitals

Recitals in the Organ Giants Series given by staff organists of St Paul's have also appeared on YouTube. Simon Probert, a keen follower of the series from afar, writes:

St Paul's Cathedral boasts one of the finest organs in the world, and the Cathedral's organists (past and present) have celebrated its one hundred and fiftieth birthday in suitably grand style over the last two years.

The centrepiece of these celebrations has been William Fox's presentation of the complete organ works of J. S. Bach over the course of thirty recitals, the last of which you will hear this afternoon.

Many other composers have featured too, including Mendelssohn, Richard and Clara Schumann, and Brahms. Former Organ Scholar Samuel Bristow has provided succinct and scholarly programme notes for every concert.

Sitting beneath Wren's magnificent dome this afternoon it is hard to comprehend how different the world was in January 2020, but audiences around the world have been able to enjoy this music too.

As we listen to Bach's beautiful Christmas music I am reminded that many of us will soon sing the carol 'Unto Us is Born a Son' again, and the words 'let our merry organ go'. On for another 150 years, I need hardly add.

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## Thank you

To Daniel Mould (Head of Organ Studies at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire) for teaching me and for his unstinting encouragement and generosity; to Samuel Bristow for his programme notes; to Michael Stephens-Jones, Ben Collyer and Samuel Bristow for page-turning; to Simon Johnson, Samuel Bristow, Benjamin Nicholas, Nicholas Freestone, Joseph Beech and Ben Collyer, for playing in this series.

*William Fox*

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Members of the audience are kindly requested to switch off all electronic devices, and are reminded that photography and recording are not permitted.

**The musical heritage of St Paul's has come under severe pressure as a result of COVID-19. There will be a collection as you leave the Cathedral today. We recommend a donation of £5, and thank you in advance for your contribution.**