

A close-up, teal-tinted photograph of a Baroque ceiling. It features intricate white stucco work, including scrolls, floral motifs, and a central figure of a cherub or putto. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the plaster.

Nicolas Kynaston
BACH at Amorbach





J.S.BACH 1685 – 1750

	Concerto in D minor after Vivaldi, BWV596	11:54
1	Presto - Grave	1:58
2	Fugue	3:46
3	Largo & Spiccato	2:53
4	Finale	3:17
5	Choral Prelude ' <i>Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ</i> ', BWV639	2:29
	Passacaglia & Fugue in C minor, BWV582	13:38
6	Passacaglia	8:00
7	Fugue	5:38
8	Choral Prelude ' <i>Nun freut euch, lieben Christen g'mein</i> '	2:02
	Prelude & Fugue in E flat, BWV552 ' <i>St Anne</i> '	16:18
9	Prelude	8:29
10	Fugue	7:49



11	Choral Prelude ' <i>Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier</i> ', BWV731	3:00
	Fantasy & Fugue in C minor, BWV537	9:19
12	Fantasy	5:16
13	Fugue	4:03
14	Choral Prelude ' <i>Herzlich tut mich verlangen</i> ', BWV727	2:34
	Chromatic Fantasy & Fugue in D minor, BWV903 (J. S. Bach transcribed by Max Reger)	15:50
15	Fantasy	8:45
16	Fugue	7:05

For the past 150 years J.S. Bach has been universally acknowledged as the greatest composer of his age – perhaps of any age. But during Bach's own lifetime things were very different. His employers at Leipzig, where he spent more than half his working career, do not seem to have appreciated his talents, and colleagues were divided over the merits of his compositions. In the words of his Obituary (1754), "His serious temperament drew him by preference to music that was serious, elaborate and profound"; while this was a virtue in the eyes of later generations, it was a fault for many of his contemporaries, whose tastes were less demanding. There was just one area in which Bach's unique mastery was generally recognised, and that was his organ playing. As early as 1717 he was already being described as "the famous organist of Weimar", and the Obituary declared unequivocally that "Our Bach was the greatest organist and clavier player that we have ever had". Bach himself was apparently quite modest about his own achievements: "There is nothing remarkable about it. All one has to do is hit the right notes at the right time, and the instrument plays itself." (It should perhaps be pointed out that on a historic instrument like the Amorbach organ, this is not always strictly true!). At the same time, he expected everyone else to reach his own standard of perfection, and is reported to have hurled his wig at an organist who played a wrong note, exclaiming that his

talents would have been better employed as a cobbler.

This story dates from the Leipzig years (1723-50), when Bach was employed as Cantor at the Thomas-Schule and Director of Music at the principal churches. But the traditional picture of an old man in a wig is not really appropriate for Bach the organist, as his activity in this area was concentrated in the earlier part of his career, and a large proportion of his organ works were already composed before he was 30. He was still a teenager when he obtained his first salaried position in the town of Arnstadt (1703), and in 1708 he was called to Weimar, at the age of 23. Here, as Organist to the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, Bach continued to develop his skills for the next ten years; this was his golden age as an organist. In 1717 he moved to Cöthen, where his duties were mostly concerned with instrumental music, and finally in 1723 he settled in Leipzig, where again the organ often had to take a back seat.

Performances of Italian string concertos were a regular feature of musical life at the Court of Weimar. As an accomplished string player, Bach no doubt took part in these performances, but he also found a more effective way of penetrating to the heart of the Italian style, by transcribing many of these works for solo keyboard. His own creative personality was profoundly affected by this vibrant music from

Southern European – by its motoric rhythmic drive, by its wealth of characteristic musical figures and turns of phrase, and by the formal principle of the concerto *ritornello* or recurring theme, which offered endless possibilities for the building of large-scale musical structures. Bach's arrangement of Vivaldi's **Concerto in D minor** was first published in 1844 as an "original organ work" by his son Wilhelm Friedemann; only later was it discovered that Friedemann had erased his father's name on the manuscript, and substituted his own. The true origins of the work were finally revealed in 1911, when Vivaldi's lost original resurfaced in an old library, 200 years after its first publication in 1711.

The organ **Passacaglia** stands with the Chaconne for violin and the *Goldberg Variations* as one of Bach's three great masterpieces in variation form. The earliest source is found in a manuscript collection written out by Bach's elder brother between about 1706 and 1713, which is also the only surviving source for four masterpieces in ground-bass form by Buxtehude. Bach visited Buxtehude in Lübeck in 1705; it appears that he brought Buxtehude's *ciaconas* home with him, and it is tempting to regard this work as his own tribute to the great master of 17th-century North German organ music. But the scale of this musical homage far exceeds its models. The traditional length for a ground-bass theme was four bars, but Bach (like Purcell in his

Chacony for strings) doubled it to eight, and this opened up a whole new world of possibilities for logical motivic development within each of the twenty variations. Many of these figures and motifs are derived from the work of older composers, but the way Bach uses them, and his control of the whole magnificent structure, are quite unique (notice how the theme leaves the bass and soars up to the soprano at the exact mid-point, Var. 11). And then after the last variation Bach crowns the Passacaglia with a Fugue on the same theme, bringing the whole work to a climax of almost symphonic proportions. No other work provides a more concentrated demonstration of the essence of his genius: the Passacaglia displays in its purest form "a veritably breathtaking logic and consistency in the development of musical ideas that has never been surpassed or perhaps even equalled since..."

Very few of Bach's works were ever published during his lifetime; most of his organ works only survived in hand-written copies, and were not published until the 19th century. A rare exception is the **Prelude and Fugue in E flat** which form the first and last movements of a collection of pieces published in 1739 as the third part of Bach's *Clavierübung*. The chorale preludes that make up the bulk of the volume are all permeated by the various kinds of symbolism that preoccupied Bach in his later years, and the Prelude and Fugue also share in

this, with key signatures of three flats and three themes each, all in homage to the Holy Trinity. Dominated by its grand opening ritornello, in the dotted rhythm of the traditional French overture, the Prelude is particularly direct in its appeal – majestic, brilliant, profound, but at the same time tuneful, straightforward and modern (modern for 1739, that is). The great triple Fugue falls into three separate sections, each with its own subject, but the first theme makes its presence felt throughout. Once again the form of the piece looks back to earlier composers, but they could never have conceived a structure as perfect as this, or a climax as logical and satisfying as Bach achieves here when the main theme finally returns in the pedals at the end.

The elegiac character of the **Fantasia & Fugue in C minor** is distinctively Bach's own, and is also found in much of his other C minor music, such as the closing choruses of the Passions. The first subject of the Fantasia is an angular theme presented in a sombre exposition over long pedal points, and the second is composed of paired descending quavers – a motif that Schweitzer described as “the motif of noble lamentation”. There is a striking resemblance between this music and the opening aria of Cantata 56, *‘I will gladly bear the cross-staff’*, and this perhaps provides a clue to the significance of the whole work, especially since the figure of a jagged diminished seventh,

which forms such a prominent feature of the fugue subject, also delineates the outline of a cross. The structure of the Fugue is unusual: it is one of only two surviving organ fugues in which Bach uses *da capo* form, repeating the opening section at the end. But although it appears symmetrical on paper, it is also one of his most dynamic works, and the tortuous chromatics of the middle section drive the music forward to a triumphant conclusion.

The major works in this recital are separated by four short chorale preludes which provide a wonderful illustration of the advice that Bach gave one of his pupils: “The organist should not play chorales in an offhand manner, but should express the sentiment of the text”. **Nun freuet euch** is a lively trio, with the chorale tune in the pedal, perfectly suited to the mood of this hymn: *‘Now rejoice, good Christians all, and let us leap with joy’*. The other three pieces are more subdued, with the melodies of their respective chorales delicately ornamented in the soprano part. **Ich ruf' zu dir** (*‘Lord, hear the voice of my complaint’*) is a prayer for grace, in the sombre key of F minor, a key that was traditionally described as “gentle, calm, deep and melancholy”. Similarly, the serenity of **Liebster Jesu** is emphasised by the warm key of G major; this chorale is also a prayer, which was often sung before the sermon (*‘Blessed Jesus, we are here..’*). The last prelude is an exquisite setting of the well-known **Passion Chorale**, in which Bach just adds little breaths and

decorations to the tune, creating an effect of great poignancy through the simplest of means.

The final work in the recital provides both a summing-up and a postscript to all that has gone before. In the 19th century Bach was rediscovered by the Romantics, who were overwhelmed by the grandiose and sublime character of his music (as Goethe said, "It is as if the eternal harmony were communing with itself..."). The publication of Bach's work had a great influence on many German composers – Schumann, Liszt, Brahms, and particularly Max Reger. Around 1900 Reger transcribed for organ a number of Bach's harpsichord works, including the extraordinary **Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue**, a brilliant virtuoso piece probably dating from the Cöthen period. With its dramatic flourishes and chords, expressive recitatives, colourful harmonic progressions, and wide dynamic range, this music, in this unfamiliar guise, is perhaps closer to Reger's own organ style than to Bach's, but the result is still authentic in a surreal kind of way. The 19th and 20th century additions to the Amorbach organ, which have previously been silent during Nicolas Kynaston's recital, are here given free rein, and they provide a perfect vehicle for the realisation of Reger's cosmic conception of Bach as "the Alpha and Omega of all music".



NICOLAS KYNASTON

Nicolas Kynaston was born in Devon, England and was a student of both Fernando Germani and Ralph Downes. He was organist of Westminster Cathedral from 1961 to 1971 prior to his career as a full time concert organist. Nicolas is Organist to The Athens Concert Hall and a professor at the Royal Academy of Music.

He has recorded for HMV, Phillips, Decca, EMI Classics, Unicorn, Hyperion, Carlton and numerous other labels. Amongst the many awards he has received are the EMI Award for sales of over 100,000 discs and the coveted Deutscher Schallplattenpreis. His Liszt CD from Ingolstadt (Guild) was nominated in *Gramophone* magazine successively as Editor's Choice, Soundings Choice and Critics' Choice.

THE ORGAN

The organ in the Abbey church of Amorbach was completed in 1782 by the brothers Johann Philipp (1705-1776) and Johann Heinrich (1715-1788) Stumm of Rhaunen-Sulzbach, Hunsrück. Consisting of three manuals and 46 speaking stops the organ was rebuilt at various times during the 19th and 20th centuries by the organ builders Steinmeyer & Co. In 1981-1982 the organ was comprehensively restored by Steinmeyer & Co and Johannes Klais Orgelbau. Manuals I-III were returned to their original specification and the additions of later periods were incorporated into a new IVth manual Schwellwerk.

The recordings were made during the evenings of May 24th, 25th and 26th 1994 as a host of young birds were hatching in their nests amidst the beautiful gardens of the Abbey Church. Whilst the birds sang and fed their hungry offspring, turboprop aeroplanes droned overhead making the food and medicine runs to Bosnia. At one point, air traffic controllers decided to place a holding pattern of large commercial jet airliners over Amorbach, a very small 13th century Bavarian town with more organ pipes than inhabitants, and in the midst of all this we tried to record. I believe we missed the aircraft by judicious editing and the deliberate spacing of takes but the birds are quite definitely to be heard in quieter passages singing their own jubilant evensong accompanied by the quarter hourly chimes from the churches of beautiful Amorbach.

SPECIFICATION

Echowerk (I) C-g³

1. Hohlpipeife	8'
2. Flaut	4'
3. Gämsenhorn	4'
4. Oktav	2'
5. Quint	1 1/2'
6. Flageolet	1'
7. Krummhorn Baß Hautbois Diskant	8'
8. Vox Humana Tremulant	8'

Hauptwerk (II) C-g³

9. Prinzipal	16'
10. Bourdon	16'
11. Oktav	8'
12. Gedeckt	8'
13. Viol di Gamba	8'
14. Quint a Töne	8'
15. Super Oktav	4'
16. Klein Gedackt	4'
17. Quint	3'
18. Oktav	2'
19. Cornet 5f, ab c ¹	8'
20. Mixture 6f	2'
21. Cymbal 3f	1'
22. Trompet Baß/Diskant	8'
23. Vox Angelica C-h	2'

Positiv (III) C-g³

24. Prinzipal	8'
25. Grob Gedackt	8'
26. Flaut travers ab c ¹	8'
27. Salicional	8'
28. Oktav	4'
29. Rohr-Flaut	4'
30. Quint	3'
31. Super Oktav	2'
32. Terz	1 ³ / ₅ '
33. Mixture 4f	1'
34. Krummhorn	8'
35. Vox Humana	8'
36. Glockenspiel c ¹ - f ³ Tremulant	

Schwellwerk (IV) C-g³

37. Bourdon	16'
38. Geigenprinzipal	8'
39. Bourdon	8'
40. Flûte harmonique	8'
41. Viola di Gamba	8'
42. Vox coelestis ab A	8'
43. Geigenprinzipal	4'
44. Konzertflöte	4'
45. Piccolo	2'
46. Sesquialtera 2f	2 ² / ₅ '
47. Plein jeu 5f	2'
48. Basson	16'
49. Trompette harmonique	8'
50. Hautbois	8'
51. Clarion	4'
52. Grobmixtur 12-16f	2'

External

Pedal C-f1

53. Offner Baß	16'
54. Subbaß	16'
55. Violinbaß	16'
56. Oktavbaß	8'
57. Cello	8'
58. Super Oktavbaß	4'
59. Flötenbaß	4'
60. Mixturbaß 6f	2'
61. Posaune	32'
62. Posaunebaß	16'
63. Fagotbaß	16'
64. Baßtrompete	8'
65. Klarinetbaß	4'
66. Concertbaß	2'

Couplers I/II, III/II, IV/II, IV/I, II/P, IV/P, IV/III

Credits:

Executive Producer L. Carrick-Smith

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Design: Hugh O'Donnell

Booklet cover photo: © Jenny Setchell

Special Thanks to The Royal House of Leiningen, D. Friedrich Oswald the Court Administrator, Curator Professor Klemens Schnorr and Wenzel Hübner the distinguished Abbey Organist who turned pages, tuned the organ, calmed the birds and became a good friend indeed.

Recorded in The Abbey Church, Amorbach May 24th-26th 1994

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