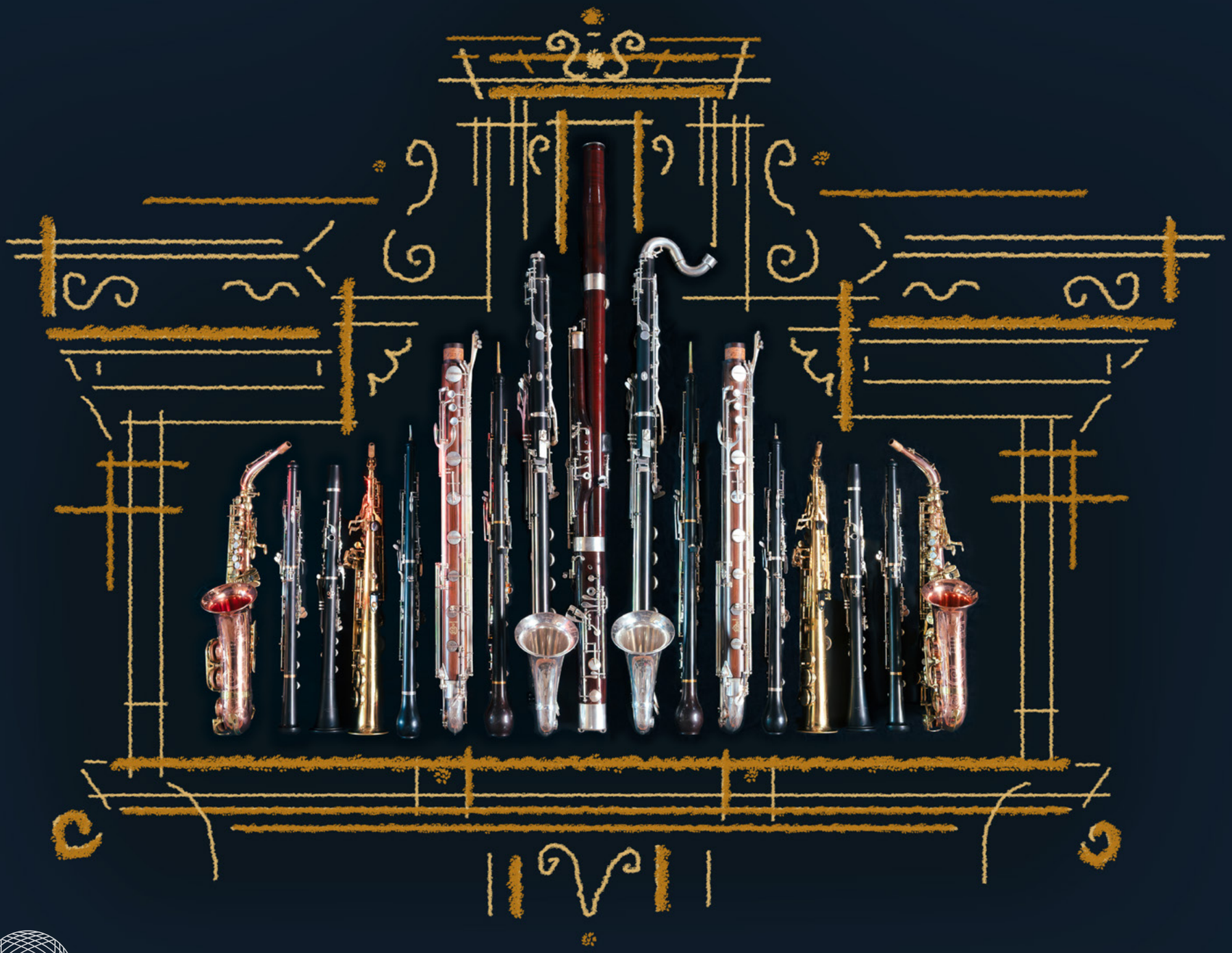
ORGANISMS



cadefax

ORGANISMS

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Fantasia and Fugue in G Minor, BWV 542 (arr. Jelte Althuis)

1	I. Fantasia	4. 54
2	II. Fugue	5. 01

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1561-1621)

3	**Fantasia Chromatica (arr. Jelte Althuis)**	7. 35

Nicolaus Bruhns (1665-1697)

4	**Preludium in E Minor "Big" (arr. Jelte Althuis)**	7. 07

Sebastián Aguilera de Heredia (1561-1627)

5	**Obra de 8o tono alto: Ensalada (arr. Jelte Althuis)**	5. 46

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

3 Chorale Preludes (arr. Raaf Hekkema)

6	O Welt, ich muß dich lassen (Op. 122/No. 11)	2. 14
7	Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen (Op. 122/No. 8)	1. 31
8	O Welt, ich muß dich lassen (Op. 122/No. 3)	2. 32

César Franck (1822-1890)

9	**Chorale No. 2 in B Minor (arr. Jelte Althuis)**	12. 01

Jehan Alain (1911-1940)

10	**Litanies (arr. Raaf Hekkema)**	4. 31

Maurice Duruflé (1902-1986)

Prélude et Fugue sur le nom d'Alain (arr. Jelte Althuis)

11	I. Prélude	5. 46
12	II. Fugue	5. 18

Florence Beatrice Price (1887-1953)

Suite No. 1 for Organ (arr. Jelte Althuis)

13	I. Fantasy	3. 14
14	II. Fughetta	1. 59
15	III. Air	2. 47
16	IV. Toccato	2. 10

Total playing time: 74. 38

CALEFAX

Oliver Boekhoorn, oboe, oboe d'amore & cor anglais
Bart de Kater, clarinet
Raaf Hekkema, alto & soprano saxophone
Jelte Althuis, bass & contrabass clarinet
Alban Wesly, bassoon

The monster that never draws breath!
Igor Stravinsky

The tradition of organ-building goes back at least one thousand years. While more primitive examples do exist, the first organs – wonders of technology – date from around the 10th century. Since that time, the instrument's capabilities have only grown, with every aspect – the range, registers, manuals, and pedals – gaining in beauty and variety. Aesthetically, too, organs became ever more elaborate. In addition to the imposing bellows and pipes, local displays of woodcarving and painting also served as regional calling cards. Beautiful organs attracted admirers, who would sometimes travel for days to view, hear, and even play them. Over time, the names of organists employed by a church or city that boasted a prestigious organ became synonymous with their instrument, granting them high esteem.

Organs are the physical embodiment of musical life in the church. They support communal singing, and immerse the congregation in God's grandeur, conveyed through a similarly rich – and occasionally thunderous – palette of sound. Many people are not partial to this latter form of organ music, however. Or worse: some music lovers even have a profound aversion to the organ, because of associations with the enforced religiosity of their youth. But the organ also came to serve as a social meeting point, similar to a musical bell tower or, later, the organ-grinder in the town square. This album features primarily non-religious works, selected from a range of countries and time periods.

The organ's continued growth in both scope and strength was, of course, reflected in the repertoire for the instrument. Organ music was originally rooted in the vocal tradition, and the accompaniment thereof. But organists were also asked to improvise, often to bridge gaps in the liturgy while churchgoers moved in and out, or to meditate on the transitions between choral elements, as a liturgically appropriate embellishment to a part of the service. Over the centuries, these improvisations took on an increasingly prominent role, and the skill became an art unto itself. The next logical step for many such extemporisations was preservation in musical notation: gradually solidifying over time, improvisations became *compositions*. Organ repertoire ultimately grew into a monumental canon of works by the greatest composers the world has ever known. It will come as no surprise to note that many of the greatest classical composers were also seasoned organists, such as Bach, Handel, Purcell, Couperin, Mozart, Beethoven, Bruckner, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Franck, Liszt, Brahms, Schoenberg, Elgar, Puccini, Ives, Hindemith, Barber, Messiaen, Nørgård, Ligeti, Berio, and Xenakis.

Strangely enough, it would be a long time before Calefax began arranging organ music for reed quintet. Piano repertoire – perhaps even exceeding that of the organ in scope and variety – has always enjoyed the constant and devoted attention of Calefax's arrangers. Our bass clarinettist, Jelte Althuis, played organ alongside clarinet as a child. He was familiar with much of the present repertoire, and so had a clear notion of the wealth of music awaiting arrangement for reed quintet.

But even within the ensemble, he encountered ongoing resistance due to the prejudices surrounding the organ, and the repertoire lay dormant. These preconceptions have now vanished without a trace. For Jelte has demonstrated the logic of transforming the often multi-layered textures of the organ – essentially also a wind instrument – into a work for five individual wind players.

This process gives added definition to polyphonic music, since each voice is assigned to a separate instrument and can therefore be individually embellished with subtle dynamic variations and vibrato. In this way, Calefax metamorphoses into a *human* organ – one that does, indeed, draw breath.

One famous example of a fossilised improvisation is that of the G Minor Fantasia and Fugue by **Johann Sebastian Bach**. Bach applied for a position in Hamburg, as successor to the organist of Dutch descent, Johann Reincken. As a tribute, Bach improvised a fugue on a traditional Dutch tune, *Ik ben gegroet van*. The post went to someone else, but Bach seemed to have impressed Reincken nonetheless, who was heard to remark: 'I thought that this art was dead, but I see that it lives in you.' Preludes and fugues are an age-old couple: a fugue, a strict form based on rigid principles, was often preceded by a somewhat freer prelude. The Fantasia that was later appended to this fugue fits the bill perfectly – rarely did Bach compose anything as turbulent or as harmonically adventurous. Most of Bach's fantasias date from his early and middle period, when he worked as a composer of primarily instrumental music in Weimar and Cöthen. These works often bear the stamp of his experiences as a young man in Lübeck, when he walked 400 kilometres to see and hear his great idol, Dieterich Buxtehude, perform in the last years of his life – one of the last living practitioners of this *stylus phantasticus*.

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck was principal organist at the Oude Kerk (the 'Old Church') in Amsterdam for forty-four years. During that time, organs were the property of the city, which made Sweelinck a public servant. His post put him in a position to teach, and he eventually built up a reputation as a teacher that rivalled his fame as a composer. His students numbered several Germans, including Heinrich Scheidemann and Samuel Scheidt, who would later influence the North-German organ school – the very tradition that ultimately shaped Bach. Sweelinck was also known as the 'Orpheus of Amsterdam', and it was not uncommon for the city council to ceremoniously escort foreign dignitaries to the Oude Kerk to hear him improvise. This was the origin of the *Fantasia Chromatica*, for example, which is based on a melody opening with six chromatically descending tones: first slowly, then gradually gaining in momentum.

Nicolaus Bruhns, who tragically died very young, was a brilliant representative of the North-German organ school, whose main exponent was none other than his teacher, Dieterich Buxtehude. Buxtehude saw Bruhns as his most talented pupil. Bruhns' 'Big' prelude in E Minor (there is also a 'Little' one in the same key) features a highly diverse array of musical ideas, including two fugues. An elaborate and sumptuous work, it is a prime example of this 'fantastical' style.

Sebastián Aguilera de Heredia was an organist and priest. Much of his oeuvre was exported to Mexico during colonial times, and precious little has survived. Of his organ compositions, only eighteen are extant. Nevertheless, he is regarded as one of the pre-eminent Spanish organ composers of his generation. His *Ensalada* is an extravagant potpourri of musical ideas, interrupted here by a *Batalla* – a battle scene – with an improvisation on the clarinet by Bart de Kater. Another version of the *Ensalada* can be found on Calefax's album *On the Spot* (2014), featuring trumpeter Eric Vloeimans.

The eleven chorale preludes by **Johannes Brahms** are, as the title suggests, preludes based on church chorale melodies. This practice is in line with liturgical tradition, whereby the organist invites

the congregation to sing via an inspiring introduction. Written during the final months of his life, they can be viewed as a kind of spiritual testament: Brahms was suffering from liver cancer, and knew that he did not have long to live. In all likelihood, the notes of *O Welt, ich muß dich lassen* (O world, I now must leave thee) were the last that Brahms ever composed. Two versions of this chorale tune flank the optimistic Christmas hymn *Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen* (Lo, how a rose e'er blooming), which Brahms embellished to such an extent that its presence here easily evades the inattentive listener.

Europe was a very different place in the mid-nineteenth century, with far stricter national boundaries. **César Franck** grew up in his home town of Liège, which was then part of the vast Kingdom of the Netherlands (it did not fall under Belgium until 1830).

The region was still very Franco-centric, however, and so it is no surprise that Franck's father turned to Paris for his talented son's musical education.

There, Franck received private tuition from renowned pianist and composer Anton Reicha. Moving on to the Paris Conservatoire proved impossible, however, as Franck was not a French citizen – a setback foreshadowing the obstacles that would shape the rest of his life. Despite a series of distinguished posts as principal organist at various eminent churches in Paris, his star as a composer seemed destined not to rise. He did, however, have a devoted following of listeners who came to admire his improvisations, which often grew into compositions. The striking element of Franck's works – certainly for an improviser – is their highly meticulous construction. Franck had certainly earned his reputation as the 'nineteenth-century Bach.' Franck titled the present work *Chorale* even though – unlike Brahms – he did not employ any existing church hymns, instead using his own original melodies and accompanying harmonies as the basis. The three *Chorales*, the second of which Jelte has arranged for Calefax, can be viewed as Franck's final farewell to the church and the organ, both of which had been so essential to his creative output. They were composed only months before his death, and constitute the pinnacle of his oeuvre for the organ.

'When the Christian soul no longer finds new words in its distress to implore God's mercy, it repeats incessantly the same invocation with a vehement faith. Reason has reached its limits. Only faith pursues its ascension.' These are the words preceding the *Litanies* of **Jehan Alain**. The work is a testament to a passionate soul, not one given to making things easy for himself, but still cherished by many. His commentary on the work continues: 'You must create an impression

of passionate incantation. Prayer is not a lament but a devastating tornado, flattening everything is its path. It is also an obsession. You must fill men's ears with it, and God's ears too! If you reach the end without feeling exhausted you have neither understood it nor played it as I would want it.' So unparalleled was Alain's improvisational skill that he was always placed at the end of any organ concert – nobody was willing to perform after him. His life ended tragically in the Second World War, on the Saumur front, where he supposedly killed sixteen Germans before perishing himself on the battlefield. He was 29 years old.

Maurice Duruflé was a good friend of Alain's; they studied together under Paul Dukas. Duruflé honoured Alain shortly after his valiant death by incorporating his name into a major work for organ: after some alphabetic acrobatics, ALAIN can be transformed into ADAAF. This string of notes constitutes the principal theme of the prelude, which also repeatedly paraphrases the main theme from Alain's *Litanies*. As a transition to the ensuing (double) fugue, again on the ADAAF theme, Duruflé even cites the *Litanies* verbatim.

Florence Price is one of the greatest discoveries in classical music in recent years. Not until 1933 did she become the first black female composer from the United States to have her work performed by a professional orchestra, the Chicago Symphony. By that time, she had already led a life of disadvantage due to her sex and skin colour. At the age of fifteen, for example, she enrolled at the Boston conservatoire as a Mexican, in order to avoid racial difficulties.

Price received early piano lessons from her mother, but was also adept at the organ, which she began to study from her early years in Boston. She quickly became a favourite organ pupil, and worked as an organist throughout her musical career in churches, theatres, and the cinema, where she accompanied silent films. Her Suite No. 1 for organ was premiered in 1942, most likely by Price herself. Her notes on the third symphony, composed at around the same time, describe it as follows (using the terminology of the period): 'It is intended to be Negroid in character and expression. In it no attempt, however, has been made to project Negro music solely in the purely traditional manner. None of the themes are adaptations or derivations of folk songs.' The same can be said of the Suite No. 1. The striking aspect of Price's work is that it blends the richness of traditional black musical culture with the romantic compositional tradition. Calefax's previous album, *An American Rhapsody*, presents Price's *Sonata in E Minor*.

Raaf Hekkema
Translation: Brent Annable

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