

Angel Accordionists Grace Top of National Cathedral

By Pamela Tom, Accordionist

Accordions can be found everywhere in the world...even gracing the top of the Washington National Cathedral (WNC) located in Washington, D.C. Jay Hall Carpenter, who earned his reputation during 20 years as sculptor for the WNC was commissioned to design all of the models for the west towers including the angel musicians located on the pinnacles of the two west towers as “music is one of the glories of WNC.” (Fallen, 2003) Among the 8 great pinnacles, there are 8 small angels each holding an accordion. The accordion angels are located “about 210 feet off the ground and are of a size that they are difficult, if not impossible, to see, even with powerful binoculars” (Harman, 2014).



Mr. Carpenter sculpted the angel musician models in Plasticine, which were then cast in plaster, then carved in limestone by the carvers. The photo on the left (from Mr. Carpenter’s personal collection) shows the angels being set during construction of the towers in 1989. In the left photo, starting from the left, the angels are holding an accordion, concertina and drum respectively. On the lower right photo, is a solo angel with an accordion.

Most of the angels hold an instrument (“The Angel Band”) or are singing. Mr. Carpenter chose instruments for their suitability as sculptures. As a singer in a quartet at the time, he also depicted all of the quartet members singing. In addition to the accordion, other instruments held close to the body include: bagpipes, French horn, Sousaphone, hand bells, guitar, xylophone, violin, balalaika, glockenspiel, portable, tambourine, harmonica and bugle. Mr. Carpenter notes that “They were each designed for their specific location for best effect. There are also angels representing different aspects of serving God (prayer, art, teaching, charity, etc.) on the smaller pinnacles, bringing the total number to 320.” He designed 32 angels with instruments.



Source of left photos: **Guide to Gargoyles and Other Grotesques** with enlarged photo on the right with a closer view of the angel with accordion. (Photographer: Robert Llewellyn. Source: Fallen, 2003.)



Guitar (left) and bugle (right) angels are also shared by Mr. Carpenter. For more information about Jay Hall Carpenter, Sculptor, visit his Facebook page or website "JayHallCarpenter.com." For a brief write up on stories behind some of the angels and their instruments, and other work that Jay Hall Carpenter designed for the WNC read "Guide to Gargoyles and Other Grotesques".



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References:

1. Jay Hall Carpenter, Sculptor. 2014. Personal Communication.
2. Anne-Catherine Fallen, Editor. 2003 **Guide to Gargoyles and Other Grotesques**. Published by Washington National Cathedral, Washington, DC.
3. Anne James Harman, Visitor Programs Manager, Washington National Cathedral. 2014. Personal Communication.