

ORGAN RECITAL

Kola Owolabi

FEBRUARY 18, 2024 • 2:00 PM

“Introduction et Allegro risoluto” from Sonata. No. 8 in A major, Op. 91 (1906)

Alexandre Guilmant
(1837–1911)

“Adagio” from Symphony No. 6 in G minor, Op. 42, No. 2 (1878)

Charles-Marie Widor
(1844–1937)

Sweelinck Variations (2020)

Rachel Laurin
(1961–2023)

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Three Organ Pieces (1966)

I.
III. Toccata

Mark Fax
(1911–1974)

Four Chorale Preludes

Ride On, King Jesus from Three Spirituals for Palm Sunday
Choral Prelude on “Rockingham” from Seven Chorale Preludes, Set 1
“Picardy” from Six Short Preludes on English Hymn-Tunes
Prelude on the Passion Chorale

Robert Greenlee (b. 1954)
Hubert Parry (1848–1918)
John Joubert (1927–1919)
Alan Reesor (1936–2022)

“Finale” from *Sonntagsmusik* (1958)

Petr Eben
(1929–2007)



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About the Artist

Kola Owolabi is Professor of Organ at the University of Notre Dame. There he teaches the graduate organ performance majors in the sacred music program, as well as courses in hymn playing and improvisation. He previously held faculty appointments at the University of Michigan from 2014 to 2020 and at Syracuse University from 2006 to 2014.

Dr. Owolabi has had an active career as a solo recitalist, including performances at St. Thomas Church Fifth Avenue in New York, St. James Episcopal Church in Los Angeles, The Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester, NY, St. Paul's Anglican Church in Toronto, Cornell University, Pacific Lutheran University and Yale University. International venues include Klosterneuburg Abbey, Austria, Holy Trinity Church in Gdańsk, Poland, Église du Bouclier in Strasbourg, France and the University of the West Indies in Mona, Jamaica. He has performed at the American Guild of Organists National Conventions in Boston in June 2014 and Seattle in July 2022. He also performed a concert for the Organ Historical Society Convention in Syracuse in August 2014. He has performed numerous concerts as organist and harpsichordist with the Grammy-nominated vocal ensemble Seraphic Fire and Firebird Chamber Orchestra, based in Miami, FL. His most recent solo recording, released by Acis Productions, features Georg Muffat's *Apparatus musico-organisticus*, performed on the C. B. Fisk and Richard, Fowkes & Company organs at Christ Church Cathedral in Cincinnati. He also has two solo CD recordings on the Raven label: "Sacred Expressions: Twentieth-Century Music for Organ" featuring works by Olivier Messiaen, Petr Eben and Calvin Hampton performed on the historic Holtkamp organ at Syracuse University; and Jacques Boyvin: Four Suites from the Second Livre d'Orgue (1700), performed on the 1732 Andreas Silbermann organ in Saint-Maurice Abbey, Ebersmunster, France.

Dr. Owolabi is a published composer and has received commissions from the Royal Canadian College of Organists and the Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto. His solo organ composition *Dance* was selected for the Royal Canadian College of Organists National Competition in August 2013, where all of the finalists performed this composition. His choral works have been performed internationally by ensembles such as the Santa Cruz Chorale, CA, Nashville Chamber Singers, Illinois Wesleyan University Choir and the Elmer Isler Singers in Toronto.

In 2002, Dr. Owolabi was awarded second prize and audience prize at the American Guild of Organists National Young Artists Competition in Organ Performance. He holds degrees in organ performance and choral conducting from McGill University, Montreal, Yale University and Eastman School of Music. His former teachers have included Bruce Wheatcroft, John Grew, Martin Jean, Thomas Murray, Hans Davidsson and William Porter.

Program Notes

Alexandre Guilmant (1837–1911) was one of the founders of the 19th-century French symphonic organ tradition, along with César Franck and Charles-Marie Widor. Guilmant and Widor studied in Brussels with the Belgian virtuoso organist, Nicolas-Jacques Lemmens, bringing to the French tradition an exacting performance technique based on absolute legato, careful control of staccato playing, clarity, and a conservative approach to organ registration that supported the musical form of a piece. Guilmant served as organist at La Trinité Church in Paris from 1871 until 1901. He was organ professor at the Schola Cantorum in Paris from 1894 and at the Paris Conservatory from 1896, holding both posts until his death in 1911. Guilmant's eight sonatas hold a prominent place among his concert works for organ. Composed in 1906, the opening movement of Sonata No. 8 in A major is a masterful exploration of sonata form with intricate relationships between the various themes. The beginning of the theme heard in the pedals during the slow introduction becomes the 3rd measure of the Subordinate Theme. The Tonic Theme at the beginning of the allegro is treated as a fugato, and is later transformed in different guises as the Bridge and Closing themes.

Charles Marie Widor (1844–1937) served as organist at St. Sulpice in Paris, from 1870 until 1933, and as professor of organ and later, composition at the Paris Conservatoire. The varied compositional styles of his students, who included Darius Milhaud, Arthur Honneger and Edgard Varèse, are a testament to Widor's open-mindedness as a teacher. A fascinating personality, Widor's social milieu included frequent participation in musical soirées at the homes of the Parisian elite, where he kept company with Victor Hugo, Hector Berlioz, Charles Bizet and Giacomo Rossini. As secretary for the Academy of Fine Arts, he oversaw the construction of several study-abroad centers for French musicians, including the Casa Velasquez in Spain and the Maison à Londres (London), as well as the conservatory at Fontainebleau, where American students such as Aaron Copland later studied. Widor's Symphony No. 6 in G minor was premiered in the series of 16 concerts that inaugurated the organ which Aristide Cavaillé-Coll built at the Salles de Fêtes in the Trocadéro Palace, a concert hall that seated 5000 people. The second movement is a lyrical movement featuring the string stops of the organ at the opening, the foundations in the central development, and the harmonic flute as a solo stop near the end.

Born in the village of St. Benoit, Quebec, **Rachel Laurin** (1961–2023) had a distinguished career as a concert organist, improviser and composer. A graduate of the Conservatory of Music in Montreal, she was assistant organist at St. Joseph's oratory in Montreal from 1986 to 2002, and then served as organist at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Ottawa from 2002 to 2006. She composed over one hundred pieces for various types of vocal and instrumental ensembles. Laurin's *Sweelinck Variations* were written in 2019 for the English concert organist, Thomas Trotter. This set of 10 variations culminates in a fugue and toccata. Laurin uses the theme from 16th-century Dutch composer Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck's "Ballo del granduca" and presents Sweelinck's harmonization at the opening of her piece. However, Sweelinck himself took the theme from a popular renaissance madrigal, "O che nuovo miracolo" composed in 1589 for the wedding celebration of Cardinal Ferdinando de Medici, Duke of Tuscany to Christine of Lorraine.

Mark Fax (1911–1974) studied at Syracuse University and Eastman School of Music and later held teaching positions at Paine College in Augusta, GA and Howard University. In the latter position, he was Professor of Composition and also served as Assistant to the Dean of Fine Arts and later Acting Dean. He was Minister of Music at Asbury United Methodist Church in Washington, DC for 20 years. His Three Organ Pieces were written in 1966. While only the last movement has a title, Fax wrote a brief note at the bottom of the first page of the score, giving the performer some sense of what he wanted to convey through the music. He describes the first piece as being "elemental but not quite primitive in nature" and the third piece as being "big city organ music."

Robert Greenlee (b. 1954) is Professor of Music Emeritus at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, where he taught courses in choral and instrumental conducting and choral literature. He previously studied the organ with Mildred Andrews at the University of Oklahoma and Anthony Newman at Indiana University. Three Spirituals for Palm Sunday won the Holtkamp-AGO Award in 1995–96 and as a result was published by Hinshaw Music and performed at the American Guild of Organists National convention in New York City in 1996.

Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry's (1848–1918) career was centered in London where he was professor of music history at the Royal College of Music. He collaborated with George Grove on the first edition of the *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1879–1890) which contains over 100 articles by Parry. As a composer, his prolific output includes three oratorios, four symphonies, and numerous chamber works. His two sets of Seven Chorale Preludes for organ were published in 1912 and 1916 respectively. The quiet lyricism of the chorale prelude on Rockingham reflects the profound imagery of the Lenten hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross."

John Joubert (1927–2019) was born in Cape Town, South Africa and received his early musical training there before emigrating to England at age 19 to study at the Royal College of Music in London and Durham University. He taught at Birmingham University for over 20 years before retiring in 1986 to devote himself fully to composition. His prolific output includes 8 operas, three symphonies, oratorios, chamber music and solo organ music. Joubert wrote Six Short Preludes on English Hymn Tunes, Op. 125, for the inauguration of a new 5-stop chamber organ built by Kenneth Tickell and Company, for Peterborough Cathedral in England. As the instrument had no pedalboard, all six of these pieces are written for manuals only. They were premiered by Nicholas Danby in 1990. The Prelude on “Picardy” is a short scherzo which makes extensive use of parallel fourths and tritones.

Canadian composer **Alan Reesor** (1936–2022) worked as Organist and Choirmaster at St. Peter’s Cathedral in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island from 1971 to 2015. He also served as Chair of the Music Department at the University of Prince Edward Island. His Prelude on the Passion Chorale was commissioned by the Royal College of Canadian Organists as part of *Te Deum Laudamus*, a collection of 20 pieces by Canadian composers, published in 2004 in memory of Gerald Bales, a prominent church musician who held positions in Toronto, Ottawa and Minneapolis.

Petr Eben (1929–2007) is the foremost internationally recognized contemporary Czech composer. He is known primarily for his numerous organ works, including several pieces for organ with other instruments. However, he has also written song cycles, choral music, chamber music and orchestral works. Eben’s music is profoundly influenced by his Roman Catholic faith, his experiences as a prisoner in the Buchenwald concentration camp during World War II, and the hardships of living in Communist Czechoslovakia. He has had firsthand experience of human beings’ ability to overcome suffering and therefore has used his music to bring hope to his audiences, offering a spiritual message that often could not be spoken in a climate of political censorship. Eben’s four-movement cycle, *Sonntagsmusik* (Sunday Music) was composed in 1958. The last movement, cast in sonata form, depicts “a battle cry meant to summon all of the positive forces in humanity” with prominent trumpet fanfares in the opening theme, contrasting with a soft, expressive theme that incorporates the Kyrie from the Gregorian chant Mass I. At the conclusion of this 12-minute work, the Salve Regina chant (Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy) is quoted, in canon between the highest voice and the pedal.

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