JACK MITCHENER, ORGANIST

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2026, AT 7:00PM

— PROGRAM —

"THEME AND VARIATIONS"

Litanies, JA 119 (from *Trois Pièces*)	Jehan Alain (1911-1940)
Variations on «Mein junges Leben hat ein End», SwWV 324	Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621)
Canonic Study in A flat Major, Op. 56, No. 4 *(*from *Six Pieces in Canonic Form)*	Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
Passacaglia & Fugue in c, BWV 582	Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Salamanca (from *Trois Préludes Hambourgeois*)	Guy Bovet (b. 1942)
Thème varié	J. Guy Ropartz (1864-1955)
Scherzo in E (from *10 Pièces*)	Eugène Gigout (1844-1925)
Prelude on an Old Folk Tune ("The Fair Hills of Eire, O")	Amy Beach (1867-1944)
Prélude et fugue sur le nom d'Alain, Op. 7	Maurice Duruflé (1902-1986)

Audio and video recordings of this performance in any capacity are strictly prohibited.

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ABOUT THE MUSIC

It is an immense pleasure for me to perform once again in the great city of Birmingham! And I am thrilled to play the magnificent Cathedral organ built by Noack. It is one of the finest instruments in the country.

My program includes works well known to many as well as pieces possibly only known to a few. I have entitled the recital "Theme & Variations" because each piece demonstrates how composers vary and develop thematic material. Some of these pieces are clearly sets of variations on a given theme, but other works show how composers weave melodies into the fabric of each composition. I hope you enjoy this display of intimate and majestic sounds produced by the "King of Instruments!"

Despite his short life of 29 years, **Jehan Alain** had one of the most original musical minds of the 20th century. Born in a western suburb of Paris in 1911, Alain studied composition and organ at the Paris Conservatory. Shortly after the occupation of France, he was on a reconnaissance mission for the French army when he was killed by German soldiers on June 20, 1940, in Saumur, France. *Litanies*, the last of the composer's *Trois Pièces*, was composed in August of 1937 and quickly became a favorite of organists worldwide. By the 1970s, *Litanies* was so popular that the English rock band *Renaissance* used the melody and part of the piece as the introduction to a song, "Running Hard." My former teacher, the celebrated French organist and younger sister of Jehan, Marie-Claire Alain, told me that she remembered hearing fragments of the melody and rhythmic patterns that would eventually become part of *Litanies*. The omnipresent chant-like melody is the litany, and the jazzy rhythm is Alain's recollection of the jagged train rides to Paris from his home in Saint-Germain-en-Laye. The work was composed and completed around the time Jehan's beloved sister, Marie-Odile, was killed in a mountain-climbing accident. Since a litany is a repeated prayer, it seems appropriate that Alain first used the title, *Supplications*, for this piece. At the top of the title page of *Litanies*, Alain includes the following inscription: "When the Christian soul no longer finds new words in its distress for imploring the mercy of God, it repeats incessantly the same prayer with a fervent faith. Reason reaches its limit. Faith alone follows its ascension." Jehan Alain wrote to Bernard Gavoty (the eventual biographer of Alain) saying *Litanies* is an ardent evocation in which "the prayer is not a complaint, but an irrepressible hurricane that overthrows everything in its path. It is also an obsession: one must fill the ears of men and of the Good Lord!"

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621), known as the "Orpheus of Amsterdam," was a famous virtuoso harpsichordist and organist who served the Oude Kerk (Old Church) in the Dutch capital for 44 years. He was also a municipal musician and played many concerts for the public. Equally known as a great teacher, he attracted students from other parts of Europe, especially Germany. *Mein junges Leben hat ein End* (My young life is coming to an end), SwWV 324, is a set of 6 variations on a folk song of German origin that was probably brought to him by his students. The harmonic language, the passages of parallel thirds and sixths, and the cadential formulas are all hallmarks of Sweelinck's style. This piece can be played successfully on any keyboard instrument, but the organ offers changes in sound that demonstrate the character of each variation.

Celebrated as one of the greatest 19th-century composers of piano literature as well as symphonic and chamber works, **Robert Schumann** (1810-1856) also wrote Six Fugues on BACH (the motif B flat-A-C-B natural) for the organ as well as Four Sketches and Six Canonic Studies for the pedal piano, a piano that has a full pedal keyboard like an organ. Schumann's interest in these works stems from his obsession, along with his wife, Clara Wieck Schumann, and Johannes Brahms with the works of J. S. Bach. The piece heard this evening, *Canonic Study in A flat Major*, Op.

56, No. 4 was conceived for the pedal piano but works beautifully on the organ. The heartfelt melody heard at the beginning on one stop will be repeated in canon (like a round) soon after by another sound on the organ. The middle section is slightly more agitated as the energy increases. A return to the opening thematic material occurs in the closing section.

The works of **Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685-1750) represent the epitome of composition for the organ. Bach's mastery of harmony and counterpoint is unparalleled, and he continues to be an inspiration to performers and composers today. He wrote for every genre known in his day except opera, but the overwhelming majority of his works were for his instrument, the organ. A type of piece that was popular in the earlier part of the baroque era was the passacaglia. It may have originated as a sort of street procession in early 17th-century Spain in which performers improvised over a simple chord progression. The genre evolved and became a favorite of keyboard composers throughout the 17th and early 18th centuries. Most pieces of this style are in triple meter and involve the repetition of a bass line. Bach's Passacaglia opens with the theme in the pedals while chords and figuration accompany on the manuals. The work demonstrates an extraordinary architecture with 21 statements of the theme followed by a magnificent fugue, the subject (or main theme) of which is derived from the first half of the passacaglia theme. The fugue also has a secondary theme, a counter-subject, that is heard immediately upon the statement of the fugue subject. The concluding measures that constitute a glorious resolution in C major are among the most moving and memorable in the history of western music.

Guy Bovet was born in Switzerland in 1942 and is one of the most colorful and creative organists of our time. He is known especially as a great performer and teacher but has penned a few works for the organ. The *Trois Préludes Hambourgeois* (Three Hamburger Preludes) began as improvisations that Bovet wrote down after performances. The first of the set of three preludes is based on a popular tune known in the area around Salamanca, Spain, and it originated as an improvisation by Bovet on the great baroque organ in Salamanca Cathedral. Bovet directs the performer to create the sound of a drum by playing a cluster of bass tones while the melody is played on a high-pitched sound in imitation of a fife. The work evolves from the gentleness of flutes at the beginning to the fiery reeds (trumpets) at the end. The driving rhythm evokes the flare and excitement of Spanish culture.

J. Guy Ropartz (1864-1955) was born in Brittany in northwestern France. There he studied music but prepared primarily for a career in law. After moving to Paris, he studied composition with César Franck and later composed numerous works including five symphonies, chamber music, choral and vocal music, and 17 pieces for the organ and two volumes of pieces for the harmonium that can be played on the organ manuals. His career was spent as a conductor, composer and administrator of conservatories. The *Thème varié* (theme and variations) was written in 1896 and is part of the *Six Pièces*. The theme is original but evokes the mood and spirit of a folksong from Brittany. The treatment of the theme in the variations and some of the harmonic language show the influence of Franck. The minor mode that is used for most of the piece is abandoned at the end when there is a beautiful shift to G major.
Unlike Ropartz, **Eugène Gigout** (1844-1925) spent most of his life playing and composing for the organ. Originally from Nancy in Alsace-Lorraine in eastern France, Gigout studied in Paris with Camille Saint-Saëns. He served as organist at the Parisian Church of St. Augustin for 62 years and succeeded Alexandre Guilmant as professor of organ at the Paris Conservatory. He taught there from 1911 until his death in 1925. One of the *Ten Pieces*, the *Scherzo in E Major*, is a jaunty and spirited dance that is characterized by two memorable melodies, arpeggios, scalar passages, manual changes, and delightful humor indicative of a playful jest as the word *scherzo* suggests.

Amy Cheney Beach (1867-1944) was an American composer and pianist and the first female composer to attain a level of prominence in American classical music. She also was one of the first major composers in America to become successful without the benefit of a European education. Beach's output includes symphonies, chamber music, choral works, numerous piano pieces, vocal chamber music, and one opera. Some of her choral music includes organ parts, but the *Prelude on an Old Folk Tune* is her only solo organ work. Written in 1943, this fantasy on the Irish tune "The Fair Hills of Eiré, O!" was a revision of an earlier work for piano from 1922. The quiet opening of the piece makes way for a subtle crescendo from the organ as the harmony intensifies. The simplicity of the ending marks a return to a gentle whisper provided by the organ's softest stops.

Despite his relatively small number of compositions, **Maurice Duruflé** (1902-1986) remains one of the most important French composers of organ and choral music in the 20th century. Born in Louviers, France, Duruflé attended the Choir School at nearby Rouen Cathedral from the age of 10 to 16. There he studied piano and organ and was highly influenced by the plainsong tradition of Gregorian chant. When he moved to Paris at the age of 17, he studied organ with Charles Tournemire and assisted him at the organ of the Basilica of St. Clotilde from 1919-1927. He studied at the Paris Conservatory from 1920-1928 and won first prizes in organ in 1922 (as a student of Gigout) and composition in 1928 (as a student of Paul Dukas). He served briefly, from 1927-1929, as assistant organist to Louis Vierne at the Cathedral of Notre Dame. In 1929, Duruflé was appointed titular organist at the Church of St. Étienne-du-Mont (near the Panthéon and Luxembourg Gardens) in Paris. Before composing his famous *Requiem*, op. 9 of 1947, Duruflé composed in 1942 the *Prélude et fugue sur le nom d'Alain* in memory of his fallen friend and colleague, Jehan Alain, who died in 1940 at the beginning of the Second World War. To devise the theme for this piece, Duruflé used the same method as Ravel in his *Minuet sur le nom d'Haydn*. This process involves using the musical alphabet of A through H (the German equivalent to B natural) and then extending it (or starting over) so that the note of **A** will equal the letter **I**, B = J, C = K, D = **L**, E = M, F = **N**, etc.). The theme that results for ALAIN is A-D-A-A-F and it is the nucleus for the entire work. First these five notes serve as the basis for the fast-moving rhapsodic material played on soft flutes in the *Prélude*. A theme that shows the influence of plainsong appears three times on solo stops, the last of which is in canon. The *Prélude* ends with a meditative section which features the melody of Jehan Alain's *Litanies*. The first subject (theme) of the *Fugue* is the musical depiction of Alain's name (the notes A-D-A-A-F) with an extended melodic line for completion. This section of the Fugue is solemn and is played on the principals and flutes of the organ at 8-foot pitch. A second and faster fugue subject appears next. In it Duruflé carefully and ingeniously works out the material first on its own and then in combination with the first subject. As the compositional magic occurs, the sound of the instrument grows to full organ. The piece ends with exhilaration as the harmonic motion from D minor to D Major is fully solidified.

We end as we began, in France, with colorful music written within a five-year span. You have heard eight very different approaches to thematic expansion, some quite simple, some highly complex. And just as a writer develops a character, a composer develops a theme. Music is a treasured gift, and I feel privileged to share these great works of art with you. This has been an exploration of organ music through the centuries. I hope you enjoyed the journey!

—Notes by the recitalist

Jack Mitchener has been praised for playing that is technically brilliant, yet expressive and poetic. According to *The American Organist*, "Mitchener brings music to life with his supple rhythmic control, clear phrasing, energy, and sensitivity." In response

to his recording on the historic Salem Tannenberg organ entitled *Dulcet Tones*, a reviewer for the *International Record Review* of London asserted: "Superb…an impressive and rather moving listening experience."

Mitchener is Professor of Organ, University Organist, Chairman of the Keyboard Department, and Director of the Townsend-McAfee Institute of Church Music in the Townsend School of Music at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. He is also the newly appointed University Organist & Artist Affiliate in Organ at Emory University. In addition, he is Organist at Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta. Before Mercer, he was an organ professor at the Oberlin Conservatory, the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, Salem College, and the Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School.

He has concertized throughout the USA, Europe, and Asia, and many of his performances have been heard in television and radio broadcasts such as American Public Media's "Pipe Dreams." He has performed in venues such as the Church of St. Sulpice and the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris; St. Thomas Church, New York City; Duke University Chapel; the Church of St. Augustine in Vienna; the Church of St. James (Jacobikirche) in Lübeck, Germany; and the Hong Kong Cultural Centre. He also has collaborated with musicians such as Nick Eanet (Concertmaster of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra), the Mendelssohn and Ying String Quartets, lutenist Paul O'Dette, and composer John Corigliano. He won the Music Teachers National Association and Philadelphia AGO Competitions and was a top prize-winner in the Dublin International Competition. He has recorded for the Gothic and Raven labels.

He has performed the complete organ works of J. S. Bach and also has given recitals, lectures, and master classes for national and regional conventions of the American Guild of Organists, the Organ Historical Society, the Music Teachers National Association, the Historical Keyboard Society in North America, the Society for Seventeenth-Century Music, the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada, the Association of Anglican Musicians, the Fellowship of United Methodist Musicians, and the Presbyterian Association of Musicians. He has been a guest performer and teacher at many institutions throughout the USA as well as in Hong Kong and Japan. He also has premiered works by Emma Lou Diemer, Dan Locklair, and Margaret Vardell Sandresky.

His major teachers include Marie-Claire Alain, David Craighead, David Higgs, John Mueller, and Russell Saunders (organ); Gerre Hancock (improvisation); James Cobb, Louise Leach, Kimberly Kabala, and Clifton Matthews (piano); and Arthur Haas and Huguette Dreyfus (harpsichord). He took three degrees (DMA, master's in organ and master's in harpsichord) as well as two *Performer's Certificates* in organ and harpsichord from The Eastman School of Music. During his studies at the Conservatoire National de Rueil-Malmaison, France, he was unanimously awarded the *Médaille d'or* (Gold Medal) in harpsichord and *Prix d'Excellence*, and *Prix de Virtuosité* in organ. His high school diploma and bachelor's degree are from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.

For the American Guild of Organists, Jack Mitchener has served as dean of the Atlanta and Winston-Salem, NC chapters and as a member of the Executive Committee for the Cleveland and Rochester, NY chapters. He also served for six years as a member of the National Committee on Professional Education. He has been an adjudicator for numerous competitions including those on the national level for the AGO as well as the Biarritz International Competition in France. He is a former President of the Board of Trustees of the Moravian Music Foundation and is a member of the Pi Kappa Lambda National Music Honor Society.

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The Anna Catharine Grace Memorial Pipe Organ

Noack Organ Company Opus 164

II - GREAT

Double Diapason	16'
Open Diapason	8'
Viola	8'
Harmonic Flute	8'
Chimney Flute	8'
Principal	4'
Open Flute	4'
Twelfth	2 2/3'
Fifteenth	2'
Seventeenth	1 3/5'
Fourniture II	1 1/3'
Mixture IV	1'
Cornet III	2 2/3'
Trumpet	8'
Tremolo	

I - CHOIR

Quintaton	16'
Diapason	8'
Gedackt	8'
Viola	8'
Unda Maris	8'
Principal	4'
Chimney Flute	4'
Nasard	2 2/3'
Fifteenth	2'
Nachthorn	2'
Tierce	1 3/5'
Larigot	1 1/3'
Mixture III-IV	1'
Clarinet	16'
Cornopean	8'
Cromorne	8'
Chamade (TC)	8'
Tremolo	

III – SWELL

Bourdon	16'
Diapason	8'
Harmonic Flute	8'
Gamba	8'
Celeste	8'
Stopped Diapason	8'
Prestant	4'
Traverse Flute	4'
Octavin	2'
Mixture IV	2'
Bassoon	16'
Harmonic Trumpet	8'
Oboe	8'
Vox Humana	8'
Harmonic Clarion	4'
Tremolo	

PEDAL

Subbass	32'
Contrabass	16'
Subbass (ext.)	16'
Bourdon (from SW)	16'
Open Bass	8'
Stopped Flute	8'
Octave	4'
Contre Bassoon	32'
Bombarde	16'
Trombone (ext.)	16'
Bassoon (from SW)	16'
Trumpet (ext.)	8'
Clarion	4'

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