



MUSIC AT DUKE CHAPEL

ORGAN RECITAL SERIES



ALAN MORRISON

OCTOBER 5, 2025, AT 5:00 PM | DUKE UNIVERSITY CHAPEL

PROGRAM

Please reserve applause until the end of the recital.

PAGEANT

Leo Sowerby (1895–1968)

ELEGY

William Grant Still (1895–1978)

FIRST SONATA FOR ORGAN

Florence Price (1887–1953)

PRELUDE ON AN OLD FOLK TUNE

Amy Beach (1867–1944)

PARTITA ON VENI CREATOR

Mary Beth Bennett

MR. MISTOFFELEES OVERTURE

Rachel Laurin (1961–2023)

KATHLEEN UPTON BYRNS McCLENDON ORGAN (AEOLIAN, 1932)

PROGRAM NOTES

Today's program features music written by composers from North America. Specifically, five Americans and one French Canadian. All of the music in this program has been specifically chosen to showcase the historic Aeolian organ utilizing the vast colors available. American works on an American organ make for a perfect match.

The first three works featured are written by American composers who were contemporaries of each other and whose lives intertwined. **Leo Sowerby** wrote *Pageant* for the famed virtuoso Fernando Germani, well known as organist of the Vatican. On a more personal note, Germani also taught at The Curtis Institute of Music in the 1930s. He was known for a prodigious pedal technique and this work, a series of variations and cadenzas, exploits the possibilities of playing the pedals. Beginning with a brilliant solo passage for pedals on full organ, the manuals enter with fanfare-style chords. After this cadenza opening the jaunty theme is finally heard in the pedals accompanied by the manuals before the variations begin. After a few quiet variations the piece builds to a frenzy and remains super-charged through the end. **William Grant Still**, known as the Dean of African American Composers, and **Florence Price** both had ties to each other growing up in Little Rock, Arkansas, attending the same school and even having school teachers in common. They also both later studied composition with the formidable American composer George Chadwick. Price would also later study with Sowerby in Chicago. Still's *Elegy* is a powerful reflection of remembrance utilizing the full tonal palette of the organ while Price's *First Sonata for Organ* is a formidable concert work modeled after Guilmant's work of the same title. Key relationships, movement structures and musical/rhythmic gestures are strikingly similar. This is no doubt due to the fact that she had

played Guilmant's work by the same name for the composer and he was extremely complimentary of her skill and musicianship.

Another prominent American composer was formerly known as Mrs. H.H.A. Beach and later by her given name, **Amy Beach**. She was a prolific composer of very refined and accessible music and this work features a popular seventeenth-century Irish melody, "The fair hills of Eire, O!"

Mary Beth Bennett serves on the faculty at University of Richmond and is well known as a brilliant organist, composer, and church musician. Her many works for organ solo have been recognized with top prizes in the profession. This *Partita on Veni Creator*, a well known plainchant, is an early work and exploits the theme in various moods from mysterious and lush to quirky and virtuosic. Her harmonic language has a rather distinct French accent at times which unfolds into a typical toccata for the final variation with the theme body stated in the pedals.

Rachel Laurin is known as one of the most prolific composers for organ at the turn of the twenty-first century, who tragically lost her life to cancer in 2023. Her works are characterized by their creativity, wit, and difficulty. This piece is based on poetry by T.S. Eliot, specifically from his "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats" from 1939. The work could easily serve as a soundtrack to an animated film featuring Mr. Mistoffelees, "the original and conjuring cat" from Eliot's poem, who performs surprising illusions and can deceive you. I had the honor of playing the premier as the St. Cecilia Recitalist for the AGO National Convention in 2020.

—Alan Morrison

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

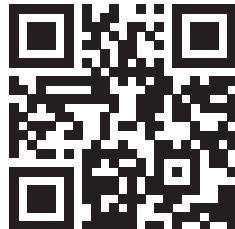


ALAN MORRISON, head of the organ department at the Curtis Institute of Music, is recognized as one of America's premier concert organists. His performances throughout North America, South America, Europe, and Russia have been received with enthusiastic praise for his quality programming, colorful use of the organ, and interpretive integrity. Reviewers of his numerous recordings have noted that "Alan Morrison knows something about igniting audience passions.... Morrison's playing is consummate and dazzling" (*Fanfare*) and that he "possesses a technique that could chew holes through solid concrete – and sensitive musicianship to boot" (*The Diapason*).



This program and the Organ Recital Series are part
of the 2025–2026 season of Music at Duke Chapel.
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