18 October, 2026

The first Pro Organo concert of 2026 held on October 18 at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church featured Thibault Fajoles, titular organist at Notre Dame de Paris, in the midst of his first Canadian tour. Fajoles presented a varied program well suited to St. Andrew's instrument to an eager crowd of 93 people.

The program opened with the appropriately nicknamed *"Great" Praeludium in e minor* by Nicolaus Bruhns. Fajoles captured the attention of the audience immediately with his artful understanding of stylus phantasticus, flying through the opening section. For the first fugue, the characteristically German Quintadena was selected as a very effective contrast to the opening plenum. This listener was impressed by the clarity of lines in each fugal passage. The final fugue and flourish of the piece were executed with sensitivity, and each pause felt charged with momentum.

Next on the program was J. S. Bach's *Piece d'orgue in G major BWV 572*. Written in three sections, this piece is often thought of in stages of life (childhood, adulthood, end of life), and Fajoles' rendering of the opening section in the tempo of an all-out sprint, certainly captured the childish energy required. The much longer middle section unfolded deliberately, with impressive attention to voicing and a very well paced crescendo throughout. Fajoles' use of chorus reeds in this crescendo added the characteristically French sound Bach implied with his French-language titling, and built to a much more full climax than a standard German plenum could achieve. The third section was accurate and distinct, though this listener found himself wishing for a few more seconds of pause between the second and third sections.

Mendelssohn's third *Organ Sonata Op. 65* stood out as a particularly excellent choice for the organ at St. Andrew's, and was diligently prepared. The opening section was strong and full, and the thick registration chosen for the fugue was characteristic, yet contrasted well with the first section. Pacing and voice independence stood out in this performance, though the pedal registration seemed to over-power the other voices at times. The first movement ended with an exciting crescendo, and masterfully articulated passagework. The 2nd movement of this sonata is an unusual contrast in the genre given how restrained it is in comparison with the first movement, and it was equally well prepared. Fajoles made great use of the enclosed divisions on this instrument to make this movement quite expressive.

The lull of intermission was gone immediately when the first few chords of the Reger *Introduction and Passacaglia in d minor* rang out. Chorus reeds were used very effectively, providing the fire required for this piece yet not overpowering the fundamentals. Fajoles' rendering of the introduction was stylistically sensitive, and accurate. The meandering bass line of the Passacaglia began immediately, and again

some more time between these contrasted movements would have been welcome. The principal and quintadena were here used to great effect, capturing the ideal German Romantic sound. Pacing throughout the Passacaglia was excellent, and the many polyrhythms were always coherent. The enclosed divisions were used skillfully to achieve the echo effects in the middle of this piece, and the pacing and execution remained deliberate right to the end. Even amidst such a strong program, Fajoles' interpretation of this piece truly stood apart.

Following the Reger, the audience was treated to the contemplative *Choral Dorien* by Jehan Alain. The performer exhibited a palpable sense of familiarity with this piece, and the next two pieces, also by Alain. The continuous crescendo was paced effectively, and registrations were stylistically sensitive. The reserved, acoustically thin character of this piece was a lovely contrast to the Reger. Fajoles led immediately to the first of Alain's *Deux Fantasies*, ringing out with a very bright registration in the opening chordal section. The sense of pacing throughout this largely unmeasured piece felt organic and deliberate, with the registration always emphasising the contrasts in the score. The second *Fantasie* was performed with equal command and sensitivity. This listener really appreciated the contrast between this flowing, dissonant set and the more measured, harmonically-stable first half of the program.

Next on the program was an arrangement of Béla Bartók's *Six Romanian Folk Dances*, another brilliant contrast and a surprising title to see on an organ concert. Unfortunately the arranger was not listed in the program (unless it was done by Fajoles himself), and the arrangement was masterfully executed. Each dance had a unique registration that enhanced the characteristics of all six. Fajoles was able to maintain the strict rhythmic nature of the piece on this large instrument, and the result was a lively, energized performance.

Last on the program was an improvisation on the hymn tune "Old 100th", in which the audience was invited to sing along. The following improvisation was imaginative and varied, beginning with thin, dreamy chords and a sparkling larigot flute poking through the texture; this section gave the impression of a night sky, littered with stars. Fajole's harmonic progressions were exciting yet logical, often using extended harmonies. One could hear some influence from Thierry Escaich in a rapid staccato texture, and those opening flute "sparkles". The improvisation built with an impressive crescendo, and ended with the audience being invited to sing once again. An exciting and personal touch to end this excellent program.