

Pro Organo

Aaron James

Monday, June 15, 2026

Paroisse St. Clements

Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit, BWV 669 J. S. Bach (1685–1750)
Christe, alle Welt Trost, BWV 670
Kyrie, Gott Heiliger Geist, BWV 671

Cinq versets sur le “Veni Creator” (2012) Jean-Baptiste Robin (b. 1976)
I. Ciel éternel
II. Flamboiement
III. Le temps qui danse
IV. Au-Delà
V. Veni Creator Spiritus

Communion sur “Ecce panis angelorum” Alexandre Guilmant (1837–1911)

Prélude, Adagio, et Choral Varié sur “Veni Creator,” op. 4 Maurice Duruflé (1902–1986)

Aaron James is the Director of Music at the Toronto Oratory of St Philip Neri, and a sessional lecturer in organ at the University of Toronto. An alumnus of the Eastman School of Music, he holds both a PhD degree in musicology and a DMA degree in organ, along with the Performer’s Certificate in organ. He was the 2011 winner of the National Organ Playing Competition of the Royal Canadian College of Organists, and has won numerous other prizes for his organ playing, including first place in the Florence and Stanley Osborne Organ Competition and the Howard Fairclough Organ Competition; he was also a finalist in the 2012 Franz Schmidt International Organ Competition (Kitzbühel, Austria). He is a Fellow of the Royal Canadian College of Organists, and a past president of RCCO Toronto Centre; he currently serves the College as national Chair of Examinations. Most recently, he is the editor of the *Parish Book of Motets* and the newly released *Parish Book of Motets for Three Voices* (CMAA, 2022 and 2026); these two books, with their accompanying online resources, are designed to provide an accessible repertoire of liturgical polyphony for small parish choirs. His writing has been published in various scholarly and general-interest publications in print and online, including the *Journal of the Alamire Foundation*, *Early Music*, *Antiphon*, *New Liturgical Movement*, *Organ Canada*, *Sacred Music*, *The Lamp*, *Oxford Bibliographies Online* and *Grove Music Online*. In the 2024-25 season, he performed the complete organ works of J. S. Bach in a series of sixteen recitals on the newly restored Kney/Gober organ at Holy Family Church.

PROGRAM NOTES

Maurice Duruflé's triptych on the famous chant melody *Veni Creator Spiritus* is one of the great works of the French organ literature, and has been one of my favourite organ pieces since my early years as an organ student. On tonight's program, Duruflé's work is presented as the conclusion to a program of works inspired by Gregorian chant, and revolving around the feast of Pentecost and the feasts that succeed it in the liturgical calendar, Trinity Sunday and Corpus Christi.

Bach's three settings of the Kyrie were published in his *Clavierübung vol. III*, a collection of organ music intended to demonstrate Bach's contrapuntal skill and his mastery of a broad range of historic styles. These three Kyries belong to an ancient tradition of presenting Gregorian chant melodies in strict contrapuntal texture, derived particularly from the Italian composer Girolamo Frescobaldi; they are based on a melody known to Bach as a German chorale but which had originated as the Gregorian melody *Kyrie fons bonitatis*. The chant melody appears in the right hand in the first Kyrie, in the left hand in the *Christe*, and in the pedal in the final Kyrie. The three preludes, which build from relative simplicity to great richness and grandeur, are dedicated to the three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Jean-Baptiste Robin is one of the most respected French organists and composers of the present day, serving as organist at the Royal Chapel at the Palace of Versailles and professor of organ and composition at the Conservatoire à Rayonnement Régional in Versailles. Through his recitals and his recordings of organ works by Couperin, Jehan Alain, and others, he has been a familiar name in North America for many years, and his compositions are being taken up by performers more and more frequently. His *Cinq versets sur le Veni Creator* continues the French tradition of alternatim verses based on Gregorian hymn melodies, as initially developed by Baroque composers like Grigny and Titelouze. The five verses are inspired by particular phrases from the *Veni Creator* text and by images associated by the Holy Spirit: *Ciel éternel* portrays the image of the Spirit descending like a dove from heaven, while *Flamboient* features rapid swirling and rippling figuration to represent the Spirit as a living water or a divine fire. *Le temps qui danse* shows the energetic activity of the Spirit in defeating evil, while *Au-Delà* is a slow, lyrical movement representing the purity and simplicity of the Spirit. The final verse brings together musical material from the four earlier verses, tying them together into a virtuosic finale.

Alongside a busy career as a teacher, performer, and editor, Alexandre Guilmant was an incredibly prolific composer, writing eight organ sonatas and hundreds of other shorter pieces for the instrument. Today, however, only a handful of these pieces are regularly heard in recitals, leaving many lesser-known works ripe for rediscovery. The Communion on "Ecce panis angelorum," from his ten-volume collection *L'organiste liturgiste*, demonstrates his style of incorporating plainchant into an organ composition. The theme of the chant *Ecce panis angelorum*, the sequence for Corpus Christi, is heard in long notes in the style of a cantus firmus, weaving in and out of the texture in dialogue with a lush Romantic theme devised by Guilmant.

Maurice Duruflé was known for his perfectionism as a composer, leaving behind only fourteen opus numbers at the end of his long career. His *Veni Creator* had a characteristically long gestation period: Duruflé wrote a set of variations on *Veni Creator* in the late 1920s, and returned to the work later to add the opening Prelude and Adagio. The complete work is a stunning tour de force of organ composition, in which the chant melody gradually emerges from fragments in the opening prelude, is heard more clearly in the Adagio, and is presented in its full glory in the final variations.

Donors to the Pro Organo Recital Series 2025-26

The RCCO, Ottawa Centre, gratefully acknowledges the generous support of these donors for the 2025 - 2026 Pro Organo Recital Series:

Benefactor: \$2,500–\$4,999

The Godfrey Hewitt Memorial Fund

Patron: \$1,000–\$2,499

Ross Jewell
Don and Suzanne Marjerrison

Sponsor: \$500–\$999

Robert Dunlop
Frances Macdonnell
Deirdre Piper

Donor: \$250–\$499

Karen Holmes
Robert and Lynn Jones
Rev. Christine Piper
Keith White

Supporter: \$100–\$249

Mai-yu Chan
Kevin James
Laurence C. Kempffer
Antonio Lechasseur
Gilles Leclerc
Marion Miller

Contributor: \$50 - \$99

Heather Rice
Josette Vermette