

Preview**Paul Jacobs to open Stambaugh organ series with a solo recital on September 22**

by Daniel Hathaway



American organist Paul Jacobs will be featured in the opening recital of this season's organ series at Stambaugh Auditorium in Youngstown. On Sunday, September 22 at 4 pm, Jacobs will offer an eclectic program on the E.M. Skinner organ, originally installed at Stambaugh in 1926 and recently and wonderfully restored to its original condition.

Jacobs deserves a place in the *Guinness Book of Records* for prodigious feats of organ playing, including an 18-hour marathon concert of Bach's

complete organ works in Pittsburgh in 2000 celebrating the composer's 250th birthday, and eight cycles of the complete *oeuvre* of Olivier Messiaen in different American cities, each presented in a nine-hour, non-stop concert. And all of that from memory.

Jacobs is a celebrated performer but is equally dedicated to teaching. He joined the faculty at the Juilliard School in New York in 2003 in his mid-twenties, one of the youngest appointees in the history of that distinguished institution. As chairman and the sole member of the organ department, Jacobs is responsible for the nurture of the eight young organists in his studio. "That's about the limit for our facilities and the size of the school," he said in a phone conversation earlier this month on the first day of classes. "Perhaps a few more or a few less, but eight is the sweet spot. I see each of them once a week for a lesson and every Thursday for organ class, but they can access me at any time. A good teacher is meant to have a greater relationship with a student than just teaching fingering and pedaling."

As one would expect from one of the top professional conservatories, Jacobs has had some phenomenal talent to work with. Among those who have passed through his studio are Isabelle Demers, Daniel Sullivan, Cameron Carpenter, Chelsea Chen, Christopher Houlihan and Benjamin Sheen. Houlihan has emulated his teacher with multi-city marathons of Vierne's symphonies. Sheen just won the Longwood Gardens competition "fair and square," Jacobs says, even though he was on the jury (he offered to recuse himself). As a mentor, Jacobs has enjoyed engaging with powerful intellects and "contrary streaks" alike. He actively encourages his students to develop their own ideas and opin-

ions. “Not nearly enough musicians display critical thinking and they need to be challenged to do this.”

Jacobs has tailored his Youngstown program carefully. “I think it's ideally suited to the instrument and its reputation, and will be attractive to the audience.” He'll begin with Bach's D-Major prelude and fugue (with its daunting opening scales in the pedal), then go on to Schumann's *Canon No. 4 in A-flat* and a John Stanley voluntary (op. 5, no. 8 in d). Three infrequently played pieces by the famous French mentor Nadia Boulanger will follow, then Elgar's best-known *Pomp and Circumstance March*, Mozart's charming little *Adagio*, K. 616, for a mechanical organ, ending with Alexander Guilmant's *Sonata in d, op 42*.

Jacobs finds the Boulanger works particularly fine. Two weeks before we talked, he recorded music by Nadia Boulanger and her sister Lili with soprano Christine Brewer at the Jesu Church in Milwaukee for a forthcoming recording — “some spectacular singing,” he says, “especially Lili's *Pie Jesu*.” He also notes that the Guilmant should be a crowd-pleaser. “As a virtuoso organist-composer, he was immensely popular with American audiences, and you can see why in this piece. It's sturdily constructed, brimming with beautiful melody and harmonic development — an altogether alluring sonata.”

As is his long-standing practice, Jacobs will play his program from memory. “I enjoy a feeling of liberation in playing without a score. It ultimately doesn't matter to the audience, but it's great for the performer. It's been expected of me from my student years. I had to work diligently at it in the past but it's now much easier to do. I take a piece apart so I can concentrate on each part of the whole — looking at the pedal part and the manual parts separately — and studying the score away from the keyboard.”

For those who are otherwise occupied on September 22 or who would like to enjoy his artistry again, Paul Jacobs will return to Northeast Ohio for a recital at Central Presbyterian Church in Canton on October 13. Future recitals in the Stambaugh Organ Series include Nathan Laube on November 17 and Ed Moore on March 30, all on Sundays at 4 pm. Tickets required.

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