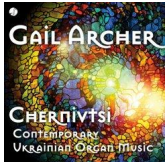


Gail Archer – Chernivtsi: Contemporary Ukrainian Organ Music (2020)

Written by bluesever (Bogdan Marszałkowski)
Sunday, 03 January 2021 11:53 -

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Bohdan Kotyuk 1.Fanfare 5:20 2.Benedictus 4:54 Tadeusz Machl 3.Piece in Five Movements: I. Largo 1:24 4.Piece in Five Movements: II. 2:58 5.Piece in Five Movements: III. 2:03 6.Piece in Five Movements: IV. 3:20 7.Piece in Five Movements: V. 2:01 Viktor Goncharenko 8.Fantasia 4:57 Mykola Kolessa 9.Passacaglia 7:20 Svitlana Ostrova 10.Chacona 3:02 Iwan Kryszanowski 11.Fantasie 17:14 Gail Archer - organ

Organist Gail Archer is the first American woman to perform the complete Messiaen cycle. Witnessing her play some of the best of it on the mighty Kilgen organ at St. Patrick's Cathedral back in 2008 was a visceral thrill. But Archer's passion seems to be rescuing the work of obscure composers. In the ensuing years, she turned her attention to American composers, then to little-known Russian works. Her latest album, *Chernivtsi, A Recording of Contemporary Ukrainian Organ Music* – streaming at Spotify – celebrates an even lesser-known part of the repertoire.

While just about every Western European city is filled with pipe organs, the instrument is much harder to find in Russia and even more so in Ukraine. But Archer went to the well and came up with a fascinating playlist of mostly short works, the majority by contemporary composers. Interestingly, she had to go outside the Russian Orthodox tradition for the organ she performs on here, a Rieger-Kloss model in the Armenian Catholic Church in Chernivtsi with particularly strong, French midrange colors.

The first piece is Bohdan Kotyuk's *Fanfare*: Archer plays this decidedly ambiguous piece with steadiness but also restraint, rather than trying to make it a fullscale celebration, which it definitely is not. The second Kotyuk work here is *Benedictus: Song of Zachariah*. It's an interesting piece of music, beginning as a similarly enigmatic fanfare and warming to a chuffing rondo requiring precision as pointillistic as it can possibly get on this instrument: Archer rises to

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the challenge.

Tadeusz Machl's Piece in Five Movements begins with a rhythmically dissociative introduction with prominent pedal work, grows steadier with a more airy, meditative midrange passage and then morphs into a pavane. Archer follows the brief, robust processional third part with more of a defiantly unresolved fugue, with some lusciously austere tremolo. She wraps it up with a brief, emphatic chorale and some well thought-out echo effects: this obviously isn't just a piano piece shifted to the organ, as one might expect coming from this part of the world.

The Fantasia, by Viktor Goncharenko echoes the off-kilter rhythms of the album's opening piece, but with many more stops out, at least until a rather desolate passage and then a coolly insistent conclusion. Mykola Kolessa, who died in 2006 at age 103, is represented by an allusively chromatic, waltzing, artfully crescendoing and often outright suspenseful Passacaglia: what a discovery!

Svitlana Ostrova's Chacona makes a good segue, a blend of swirling old-world grace and modern austerity. Archer closes with Iwan Kryshanowskij's hauntingly symphonic Fantasie, its variations on stairstepping riffage and a long build to macabre resonance. Although the music calms, the theme continues to circle around a foreboding center until an anthemic variation on the introduction. At last, Archer takes those steps all the way down into the abyss, only to rise to a guarded triumph. ---lucidculture.wordpress.com

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