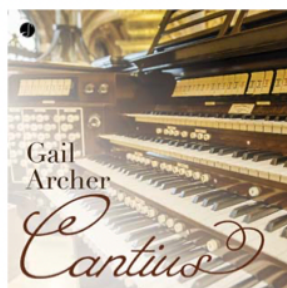


THE DIAPASON

AUGUST 2022

New Recordings



Cantius

Cantius. Gail Archer plays the Casavant organ at Saint John Cantius Catholic Church, Chicago, Illinois. Swan Studios, Meyer Media, LLC, MM22051. Available as a compact disc or download from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or [prestomusic.com](https://www.prestomusic.com).

Improvisation on a Polish Hymn, Mieczysława Surzyńskiego; *Pastorale in F-sharp Minor*, Wincenty Rychling; "Meditation-Elegy" from *First Suite for Organ*, Felix Borowski; *Triptych for Organ*: "Souvenir I," "Offertorium," "Icon," Paweł Łukaszewski; *Kantata for Organ*, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki; *Symphony Number 8 for Organ*, Feliks Nowowiejski; *Esquisse for Organ*, Grażyna Bacewicz; *Triptychon for Organ*: "Introduction," "Meditation," "Toccata," Tadeusz Paciorkiewicz.

Gail Archer is university organist of Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, and director of the music program at Barnard College, Columbia University, New York, New York. She specializes in Eastern European music and has concertized in Poland practically every year since 2003, during which she has familiarized herself with much of the Polish organ repertoire from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. She made this recording in July 2021 on the "Tina-Mae Organ" of Saint John Cantius Catholic Church in Chicago, Illinois. This instrument is 1926 Casavant Frères Opus 1130, a four-manual organ described extensively in "A history of the organs of Saint John Cantius Catholic Church, Chicago, Illinois," by Stephen Schnurr, in the January 2022 issue of THE DIAPASON, pages 12–19.

Mieczysława Surzyńskiego (1866–1924) was professor of organ at the Music Institute of Warsaw. His *Improvisation on a Polish Hymn* commences with an upbeat theme-and-variations section before transitioning to a dark, dirge-like section that builds to a slight climax before ending softly. The next composer is Wincenty Rychling (1841–1896), who was organist of Wawel Cathedral besides teaching at the local conservatory. His *Pastorale in F-sharp Minor* was one of 100 works for organ posthumously published in 1906. It is a gentle, harmonically rich piece that lasts a mere two minutes.

With Felix Borowski (1872–1956) we move to a composer whom many will have heard of since he lived on both sides of the Atlantic in Poland, England, and the United States, spending the last sixty years of his life in Chicago. His *Meditation-Elegy* is an excerpt from his *First Suite for Organ*, published in 1900, shortly after he had moved to Chicago. It commences with a haunting and ethereal melody, which transitions into a central section composed of rather dense chords that build up to a minor climax before dropping down again for the recapitulation of the first section.

Paweł Łukaszewski (b. 1968) is a faculty member at the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw. The three movements of his *Triptych for Organ* begin with "Souvenir I," which starts as a rather dark, gloomy piece with a series of open fifths, and then becomes brighter and somewhat agitated before fading away into a whisper. The "Offertorium" is a warm and gentle movement of a somewhat wistful character. The final movement returns more to the feeling of the first movement, rising to a climax before ending in more open fifths in the pedal.

Henryk Mikołaj Górecki (1933–2010) studied at the Academy of Music in Katowice, where he later became a faculty member and eventually rose to be rector in 1975. His music was highly controversial, and his *Third Symphony* of 1976 was both praised and reviled. His *Kantata for Organ* consists of dramatic bursts of sound separated by moments of silence. Gail Archer describes it as "a mighty piece" that is "entirely distinctive in modern organ literature."

Feliks Nowowiejski (1877–1946) was something of an international character. Growing up in an impoverished family on the Polish/Prussian border, he began supporting his family by playing the violin in the Prussian Grenadier Band and playing the organ in his local church. He began composing and soon earned prizes for his compositions, enabling him to study in Berlin and Regensburg and to become a student of the celebrated Max Bruch. He wrote a total of nine organ symphonies. His *Eighth Symphony* consists of a single movement. Incorporating a dark, dirge-like section like the Surzyńskiego piece, it features constantly shifting harmonies, dynamics, and rhythmic figures.

Grażyna Bacewicz (1909–1969) was a noted player of the violin and piano who studied at the Warsaw Conservatoire and later moved to Paris to study under Nadia Boulanger. Bacewicz returned to Poland after the Second World War, where she became professor at the State Conservatory in Łódź. Her *Esquisse for Organ* is a brilliant piece that is full of humor and rhythmic interest. Her chordal progressions remind me of Messiaen.

The composer of the final suite on this compact disc is Tadeusz Paciorkiewicz (1916–1998). He studied organ at the Warsaw Conservatoire and composition at the State Higher Music School in Łódź, where he eventually became dean of composition. His *Triptychon for Organ* comprises "Introduction," "Meditation," and "Toccata." The rather virtuosic final movement is particularly interesting in demanding rhythmic accuracy combined with an energetic tempo. A gentle chromatic passage is inserted before the end, but this is only short, and the original tempo returns in the final section.

Gail Archer provides a lot to ponder with this recording. Not only is her excellent playing of this sometimes-difficult repertoire most enjoyable, but she has clearly only shown us the tip of the iceberg, and there is doubtless much more of this repertoire to be explored. Even as I was writing this I came across a recording on the internet of a quite extensive and interesting piece called *Sansara* by the Polish composer Marian Sawa (1937–2005). Perhaps Dr. Archer will introduce us to more composers in a subsequent recording. It would be interesting also to know how scores of these compositions might be obtained in North America.

John L. Speller, who has degrees from Bristol and Oxford universities in England, is a retired organbuilder residing in Port Huron, Michigan.