

Ukrainian Organ Literature

A Brief Survey

Gail Archer

Over the course of the past year, the attention of the world has been drawn to the tragedy unfolding in Ukraine, as Russian military forces attempt to level cities and break the will of the people. Having traveled to Ukraine as a concert organist, I have witnessed firsthand that the Ukrainians are a proud and cultivated people who have the strength and courage to defend their country. Ukrainian arts are well-developed and intricate, from choreography to architecture, painting, music and even embroidery, which is a high art among the women there.

Notably, all the musicians who helped me to play organ recitals in Ukraine are women organists. Veronika Struck, organist at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Paul, Odesa, arranged for me to present recitals at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Katherine in Kyiv, the Lutheran Church of Belaja Zerkowj, and her own parish in Odesa in June 2015. My visit took place the year after the Maidan Revolution of February 2014 which successfully ousted then-president Victor Yanukovich. The German pastor of St. Katherine's vividly described to me the suffering during the revolution. He turned the church sanctuary into a hospital, as the building is located near the center square of the city. Parish members worked around the clock to feed, house and care for those injured in the violence. One could still see the damage to buildings and monuments in central Kyiv a year after the insurrection.

Classical music is important in Eastern Europe. When one plays a concert there, the churches

and concert halls are often full to overflowing, and the audiences are knowledgeable about the music. While my first programs in Ukraine took place in churches in Kyiv and Odesa, I later performed at organ halls in Lviv, Rivne, Khmelnytsky and Chernivtsi. In these cities, the organs are found in chamber music halls under the auspices of the local philharmonic orchestra.

Perhaps the most interesting of these organ halls is in Chernivtsi. The city is located near the Romanian border in the western part of the country and to date, has been spared destruction in the current war. Known as "Little Vienna" for its distinctive architecture, the most distinguished building is the Residence of the Bukovinian and Dalmatian Metropolitans, a UNESCO World Heritage site designed by Joseph Hlavka, which is now part of the University of Chernivtsi. The Armenian Catholic Church of the Holy Apostles in Chernivtsi, also designed by Hlavka, was built in 1875. The red brick church has a distinctive shape and unique turrets. The brick patterns on the interior walls almost appear to be tapestry designs and the sanctuary sparkles with gold leaf. A partnership between the Armenian Catholic Church and the Chernivtsi Philharmonic provided for the installation of a new Rieger-Kloss organ in the church, which is used for worship services but also serves as a venue for the summer organ recitals and chamber music concerts sponsored by the orchestra.

In summer 2018, I received grants from Barnard College, Columbia University and the Harriman

Institute, Columbia University to return to Chernivtsi and record a program of contemporary organ literature. A colleague in Odesa, Elena Udras, and a colleague in Lviv, Olenka Matseliukh, with the help of composer Bohdan Kotyuk, sent me many scores written by their circle of musicians. Some of the music is published, but other works were made available directly from the composers. There is a marvelous irregularity to the rhythmic and harmonic gestures in this music, making it a challenge for the performer and a joy for the listener. My Chernivtsi CD, released in 2020, includes works by six Ukrainian composers, whose works are fine examples of the intellectual rigor and unique creativity of the Ukrainian people. A brief survey of the composers and their music follows as a guide to the reader's further exploration of Ukrainian organ music.

Bohdan Kotyuk (b. 1951) comes from a family of distinguished Ukrainian religious leaders and philosophers, including Archbishop Samuel Cyrill Stefanowicz (1755-1858), Julian Tselevych (1843-1892). Trained at the Lviv Conservatory, Kotyuk combined his interests in religion and philosophy with musical analysis and composition. Many of his pieces, published by Edition Collegium Musicum in the Lviv publishing house of AFISHA are directly influenced by the Mass and bear titles that suggest their appropriate use in a service of worship: *Benedictus*, *Alleluia*, *Laudatis*. *Sanctus*. The *Benedictus* is an introspective and reflective piece which is inspired by the Song of Zechariah in Luke 1: 67.

In this passage, Zechariah praises God for the birth of his son, John the Baptist, who will become the prophet foretelling the coming of the Messiah. The subtle dialogue between hands and pedals is comprised of brief, unexpected gestures that create a light, crisp texture.

Cathedral in Lviv. After the Second World War, he moved to Szczecin, and then to Cracow, Poland. In the 1950's, Machl received a scholarship that allowed him to travel to Paris to study the work of French contemporary composers. His organ works include seven organ concertos and 22 solo organ

part of the performer in order to bring out the spare beauty of these musical miniatures.

Viktor Goncharenko (b. 1959) hails from the city of Dnipro. He studied composition with Vitaliy Keiyko at the Kyiv Conservatory from which he graduated in 1983. Today, he is active as a music editor and a computer modelling specialist for publishers in Kyiv, including Music Ukraine, SAN, Kovydav and Careta. His interest in organ music dates to his student years, but more recently, he has composed Antifons, two Fantasias, a Prelude and Fugue, Dialogues for Piano and Organ and a Chaconne. The second Fantasia has an ABA structure and an entirely irregular metric scheme. The inner accompaniment, built of fourths and fifths, gives both an ancient and modern sound to the opening and closing sections. The central section moves twice as fast as the rest of the piece and has a thick texture with chordal clusters. Both the first and last sections conclude with a charming staccato melody which is doubled two octaves lower with legato articulation in the left hand.

The Ukrainian work that has become a part of my personal standard repertoire is the *Passacaglia* (1929) by Mykola Kolessa (1903-2006). Born in Sambir, near Lviv to a musical family, he taught at Lviv Conservatory and later served as Rector. There are just two organ works, the *Prelude and Fugue* (1978) and the *Passacaglia*, but they both show an imagination and technical mastery that makes one wish he had written additional organ works. The *Passacaglia* is a tonal piece, but the composer stretches the palette to extremes, using all three keyboards and increasing the subdivision of the beat and the thickness of the chords as the piece gathers strength and speed. One must register the piece colorfully in order to bring out all the lines and lose none of the harmonic color. At the conclusion,



Image 1 | Pedal dialogue in *Benedictus* by Kotyuk

In sharp contrast, Kotyuk's *Fanfare* demands a full registration for the alternating duplet and triplet figures in conversation with one another from alternating keyboards of the organ. Kotyuk uses no key signature at all for his pieces, but rather depends on a rich vocabulary of accidentals and chords often built in fourths to create the spacious atmosphere of the *Fanfare*.

Born and trained in Lviv, Tadeusz Machl (1922-2003) was both an organist and composer who served as organist at St. Elizabeth

pieces, as well as a *Requiem* for mezzo-soprano, baritone, mixed choir and organ (1981). The *Piece in Five Movements* is a late work influenced by the organ improvisational techniques Machl observed in Paris. There is freedom in these short pieces that allows for creative interpretation while balancing the duplet against triplet figures that appear in both hands and pedal passages. While the movements conclude with major or minor harmony, the ambiguity of Machl's harmonic language demands acute listening on the



Image 2 | Manual changes in *Fanfare* by Kotyuk

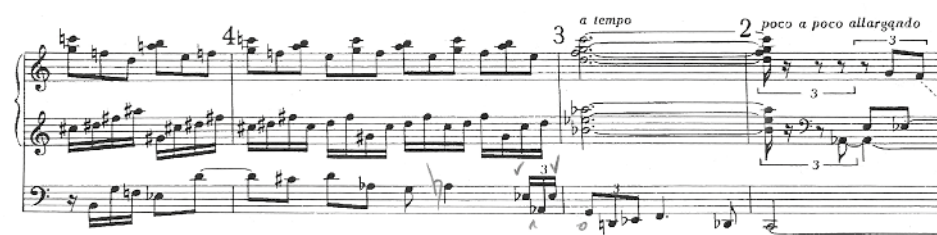


Image 3 | Triplets against duplets in the first movement of *Piece in Five Movements* by Machl



Image 4 | Final phrase in *Passacaglia* by Kolessa

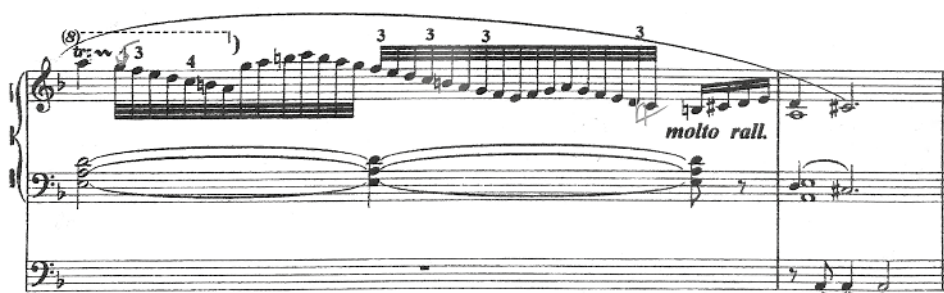


Image 5 | Ornamental flourish at the end of *Chacona* by Ostrova

the piece relaxes to a whisper and the harmony may be described as that of modern jazz.

Music written by women is one of my interests and it is a particular pleasure to draw attention to the work of Svitlana Ostrova (b. 1961). Ostrova studied choral conducting, composition and organ at the Music Academy in Kyiv, where she was born and raised. An author of methodological texts and a devoted music educator, she teaches at children's music schools and directs the vocal ensemble Shchedrivochka, which promotes both traditional Classical music and music by contemporary composers. Her organ works

include the *Symphony of Creation*, *Dyptych: Golgotha and Eucharist* and *Chacona*. Written in four short sections, *Chacona* begins with a simple presentation of the theme in block chords followed by a variation in sixteenth notes, a triplet version of the theme, and a final chromatic version with an elegant flourish to the top of the keyboard at the conclusion. The score of this piece is available on the Musforum site for anyone to download: www.musforum.org

An influential composer from the nineteenth century is Iwan Kryschanowskij (1867-1924). A native of Kyiv, he studied both music and medicine and was

successful in both careers. He completed studies with Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, a member of the Russian Five, at the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1909. Rimsky-Korsakov was Igor Stravinsky's teacher, as well, but Stravinsky left us no organ music. Kryschanowskij's *Fantasie*, gives the organist an opportunity to explore the dense chromaticism, rhythmic complexity and constantly shifting texture and color of early twentieth-century Eastern European orchestral music.

The richness and variety of the Ukrainian organ literature deserves international attention, as the beauty and vital creative spirit of this music inspires and rewards the performer as well as the listener. It is my sincere hope that many people will take the musical journey to Ukraine and come away refreshed, renewed and ever more curious about the musical arts in Eastern Europe today.

Gail Archer is college organist at Vassar College, director of the music program at Barnard College, Columbia University, where she conducts the Barnard-Columbia Chorus and Chamber Singers and a faculty member of the Harriman Institute, Columbia University. She is artistic director of the organ recital series at Central Synagogue, New York City. Ms. Archer was the first American woman to play the complete works of Olivier Messiaen in 2008: Time Out New York recognized the Messiaen cycle as "Best of 2008" in classical music and opera. She is the founder of Musforum, a network for women organists.

