

## Reviews

### Book Reviews



*Organ Music in Bulgaria?!*

***Organ Music in Bulgaria?!*, by Pavel V. Madzharov, e-book, 223 pages, \$9.95. Available from: [imakemyownmusic.com/product-page/organ-music-in-bulgaria-heck-yeah](http://imakemyownmusic.com/product-page/organ-music-in-bulgaria-heck-yeah).**

Pavel V. Madzharov spent four years compiling information on the organs and organ literature of his native Bulgaria, publishing the results in his recent e-book, *Organ Music in Bulgaria?!* The research was undertaken as part of Dr. Madzharov's Ph.D. dissertation at the Bulgarian National Academy of Music.

The writer carefully documents twenty-four organs in Bulgaria, including photos and descriptions of each instrument, its condition, and the way in which the organ is used on a daily basis for teaching, study, service playing, or as a concert instrument. Organists in Western Europe and the United States are typically unfamiliar with the organ literature of Eastern Europe, so the inclusion of the 185 organ works by thirty-six Bulgarian composers, written between 1972 and 2020, is a valuable resource for organists in search of unique literature to add to their repertoire. The Bulgarian organ works are listed by genre: solo works, pieces for organ and voices, and pieces for organ with other instruments. Helpful graphs and diagrams make the musical search process easy for the interested reader.

The book is divided into three sections: Chapter 1: Bulgarian Pipe Organs; Chapter 2: Bulgarian Organ Pieces; and Chapter 3: Interviews. The Bulgarian faith tradition of Orthodox Christianity, which Bulgaria adopted in 865 A.D., is the first issue addressed in Chapter 1. The Eastern Orthodox Church celebrates a sung liturgy that does not include the organ or any other instrumental accompaniment. In my own travels in Russia and Ukraine, I discovered that there are many organs and organ series in these countries that flourish under the auspices of the local philharmonic orchestra. There is a hall for the orchestra and then a smaller chamber music hall that includes an organ. This is also the case for many of the organs in Bulgaria, and it is the reason that the organ culture to date has experienced modest growth.

However, there are some Western Christian churches. The first pipe organ built in Bulgaria was installed in the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Saint Ludwig in Plovdiv in 1868 and later replaced by a larger instrument in 1891. Sadly, this instrument was destroyed by a disastrous fire in 1931. Several new instruments were installed at the Sofia Cathedral in 1900, and then at the Catholic Church of

Saint Paul of the Cross in Ruse in 1907. The latter organ is the oldest instrument still in active use in Bulgaria today. The Bulgarian Hall in Sofia housed a four-manual Sauer organ believed to have been the largest organ in Bulgaria with seventy-two stops. Both the Sauer organ and the organ at Saint Ludwig in Plovdiv were destroyed by allied bombing raids in the spring of 1944 during World War II. The black and white photo of the orchestra of Sofia on the stage in front of the Sauer organ before the war is poignant and powerful.

The rest of Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the twenty-four organs in Bulgaria, organized in chronological order. The author includes a photo of each organ, the year of construction, the builder, the current condition, and the number of stops available on each instrument. For example, the two-manual organ at the Catholic Church in Ruse, built in 1907 by Heinrich Voit, has thirteen stops. While the instrument is used regularly for services, it is currently in poor condition. In contrast, the well-maintained Schuke organ, built in the restored Bulgaria Hall in Sofia in 1974, is a three-manual instrument with fifty-five stops, the largest organ in Bulgaria today. Schuke also installed large concert organs in Dobrich and Varna that are in good condition. At the other end of the spectrum, the Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts in Plovdiv has a small one-manual practice organ of five stops built by Werner Bosch, which was donated by a church in Switzerland. Fifteen of the twenty-four Bulgarian organs came to the country as donations from neighboring countries. Only five of these donated organs are still used for religious purposes, as most of the instruments are now used for teaching or as concert instruments. Another notable small instrument is the Jens Steinhoff organ at the Evangelical Methodist Church in Varna. Built in 2004, the two-manual, mechanical-action organ has fifteen stops and is used both for the worship services of the faith community and for local concerts. Should the author publish a revised edition of the book, it is suggested that the specifications of each organ should be included so that the reader knows the sonic possibilities of the instrument and the repertoire that may best be performed on each organ.

An important independent organ-building project is now in progress for the Earth and Man Museum in Sofia under the guidance of organbuilder Rosen Draganov. When completed, the two-manual instrument will have thirty-one stops. Draganov studied organbuilding in Germany and is a driving force in the contemporary organ culture of Bulgaria. The instrument will be the first native-built organ and will be realized by Draganov alone, without any workshop to assist him.

The central chapter of the book investigates the organ literature of Bulgaria from 1972 to the present. The international organ community will find a rich variety of works created in this period, with the majority of the pieces written between 1990 and 2009. Four composers contributed a large share of the 185 works: Sabin Levi, Rosen Draganov, Velislav Zaimov, and Neva Krysteva. Levi, age 50, and Draganov, age 40, are young men in the hearts of their careers, and the author rightly singles them out as vital to the growth of a distinctive Bulgarian school of composers and performers. Levi edited and published twelve volumes of organ music by Bulgarian composers, while Draganov is the only

organbuilder in Bulgaria. Both men are skilled players and are recording Bulgarian organ literature. Velislav Zaimov principally wrote his fifteen pieces with the technique of specific colleagues in mind. He serves as professor of composition at the National Academy of Music and as vice-president of the Union of Bulgarian Composers. Neva Krysteva studied organ at Moscow Conservatory and is a professor of polyphony and organ at the National Academy of Music. An active concert organist, she has written fourteen organ works. Overall, 132 of the existing Bulgarian organ works are for solo organ, but some of the collaborative works are unique. Neva Krysteva's *Organum* calls for two female folklore singers, a traditional soprano soloist, percussion, and organ, while Simo Lazarov writes his *Modulations* for organ and electronic playback of sea waves.

The concluding chapter consists of interviews with sixteen composers, organists, and organbuilders who are currently active in Bulgaria. The author poses a series of questions delving into the reasons for an individual's interest in the organ and in their interest in writing new compositions for the instrument. He sheds light on the information needed to successfully create new organ literature: technical features, keyboards, pedals, and stop combinations. The interlocutor prompts the professionals to reflect on the reasons that some organ works are only performed once, that too many Bulgarian composers write a single organ work, and that creative inspiration is needed to establish a strong tradition of Bulgarian organ music.

Dr. Madzharov is passionate about his subject, including many detailed graphs and charts that cross-reference the information he provides about the organs and the organ music. He hopes to stimulate a nation-wide conversation about the growth of interest among young people to study the organ and to compose new works for the instrument. There are clearly cultural, economic, and political obstacles to overcome in Bulgaria in order to firmly establish a well-supported organ culture in the country. This volume is a fine first step in that direction. Should the author consider a revised edition in future, it is respectfully suggested that a more formal, objective

prose style be adopted so that the wonderful information he provides may stand out in high relief.

—Gail Archer  
New York, New York

Gail Archer is director of music at Barnard College, Columbia University, New York City, where she conducts the Barnard-Columbia Chorus and Chamber Singers. She is a member of the faculty at the Harriman Institute, Columbia University, the Slavic studies center of the university. She also serves as college organist at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York.

### Choral Music Reviews: New Music for Challenging Times

Publishers are endeavoring to bring forward voices of those who have been repressed and under-represented and also present music with timely topics. The reader will find all that and more in the selections highlighted below. Now that choir members have largely been immunized, it is refreshing to look at repertoire that can once again unite hearts and voices around themes of peace, unity, and action to rebuild our communities ravaged by hatred and violence.

***How Firm a Foundation*, by Tom Trenney. SATB and organ with optional assembly, Morning Star Music Publishers, MSM-50-5180, 2020, \$2.25. Duration: 3:00.**

This is a five-verse arrangement of the hymntune FOUNDATION, refreshing as it has an extensive, bright part for organ accompaniment with registration guidance. It is clear that the composer loves this American folk hymntune. Trenney serves as the dedicated minister of music at First-Plymouth Church of Lincoln, Nebraska. There is much joy in the YouTube performance of this piece recorded with Trenney playing the organ and conducting his large choir. Verse four is set up as a three-part canon. Verse five has sopranos and tenors singing the descant, with the organist providing interjections that add to the power of the text. This provides fun for the organist, choir, as well as assembly! The range reaches to G5 for sopranos, G4 for tenors.

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Scattered leaves ... from our Scrapbook

“To me,  
the high point of art  
is the expression  
of great emotion  
with great simplicity.”

Lotte Lehmann

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