

Gail Archer delivers on Casavant organ in CoC Temple in Independence

June 4, 2013

By: [Floyd Gingrich](#)

Independence, Missouri - Gail Archer, internationally acclaimed concert and recording artist, choral conductor and lecturer, played a memorable concert Sunday, June 2nd on the Casavant Frères pipe organ at the Community of Christ Temple here. Ms Archer is college organist at Vassar College, and is director of the music program at Barnard College, Columbia University, where she conducts the Barnard-Columbia Chorus.

Her recital began with works from the German Baroque period, *Praeludium in d*, BuxWV 140 by Dietrich Buxtehude and *Allein Gott in der Hoh sei Her*, BWV 662 and *Komm Heiliger Geist*, BWV 651 by J. S. Bach. In his youth, Bach received leave to walk from Arnstadt to Lübeck to hear Buxtehude; he overstayed his leave and remained for three months. The Buxtehude piece was a lovely introduction to the program, with variations demonstrating different voices from the Casavant organ. The Bach was played so sublimely that the ornaments did not even rise from the melodic lines, they just called attention to the highlighted landing note. These works provided traditional examples of the forms used by the composers of the rest of the program.



Gail Archer points out the fugue's chromatic statement in the Johanna Senfter, "Fantasie und Fugue." Credit: Floyd E. Gingrich

Fantasie und Fugue, Op. 30, by Johanna Senfter (1879-1961) used the same form common to Bach, but in a style that presents the best of 20th Century materials. The fully chromatic statement to the fugue was notice enough that it was not of Bach's invention. With Ms Archer's excellent skill, the imitative lines developed their own consonance. It was almost whimsical to hear the new wine in the old wineskin, and it did not burst.



Gail Archer at work on the great pipe organ built by Casavant Frères Limitée, of St.-Hyacinthe, Quebec.
Credit: Floyd E. Gingrich

Had it not been for lack of a sponsor, Ms Archer would have studied with the famed composer and teacher of nearly all notable composers of the latter half of the 20th Century, Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979). In honor of the lady who had accepted her many years ago, Ms Archer played most of Ms Boulanger's organ works, *Prélude*, *Petit Canon* and *Improvisation*; they were delightful, and, like the Senfter piece, they

demonstrated what the old forms can do when filled with newly developed sounds.

Composer, Alla Borzova (b. 1961) received a commission to express in music the *Chagall* and *Matisse* stained glass windows at Union Church, Pocantico, NY. In the hands of Ms Archer, the stark music of "And the greatest of these is love," the listener could hear the juxtaposed shapes and the rugged glass cuts that comprise the

revered thoughts expressed in modern idioms, graphic and aural; old sounds do not have the palette to describe the new windows.

For an appropriate concluding offering, Ms Archer chose Olivier Messiaen's (1908-1992) *Serene Alleluias* and *Transports de joie* from *L'Ascension*.

Demanding and relatively sonorous, the notes flew from the organ without calling attention to themselves, but featured the great melodious moods and holy expressions. The joy of the final piece created an exultant peace throughout the chamber. In the best of hands, auditors' concerns for the mechanics are relegated to just hearing the music.