



The Armenian Catholic Church of the Holy Apostles in Chernivtsi, which also serves as the city's organ hall

THE ARTISTIC HEART OF UKRAINE

By Gail Archer

This article was written one month after the beginning of the war in Ukraine.

In recent weeks, we have all turned our attention to the tragedy unfolding in Ukraine, as Russian military forces attempt to level cities and break the will of the people. My experiences as a concert organist

in Ukraine have shown me that the Ukrainians are a proud and cultured people who will courageously defend their country. The arts in Ukraine are developed and intricate, from the choreography of dance to architecture, painting, music, and even embroidery—a high art among the women there.

It is notable that all the musicians who helped me arrange the recitals I have played

in Ukraine are women organists. Veronika Struck, organist of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Paul, Odessa, arranged for me to play at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Katherine in Kyiv, the Lutheran Church of Belaja Zerkowj, and her own parish in Odessa in June 2015. Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, is a beautiful city of about three million people. I visited the year after the Maidan Revolution, which took place in February 2014 and successfully ousted then-president Victor Yanukovich. The German pastor of St. Katherine's vividly described the suffering during the revolution. He turned the church sanctuary into a hospital, as the building is located near the main city square. The members of the parish served around the clock to feed, house, and care for those who were injured in the conflict. One could still see the damage to buildings and monuments in the central city a year after the violence.

Classical music is very important in Eastern Europe. For organ recitals, churches and concert halls are often packed to overflowing, and audiences are knowledgeable about the music. While my first programs in Ukraine took place at churches in Kyiv and Odessa, I later performed at the organ halls in Lviv, Rivne, Khmelnytsky, and Chernivtsi. Organ recitals in these cities are under the auspices of philharmonic orchestras.

One of the most interesting organ halls is in Chernivtsi. Located in the western part of the country near the Romanian border, the city is known as "Little Vienna" for its distinctive architecture, such as the Residence of Bukovinian and Dalmatian Metropolitans, a UNESCO World Heritage site designed by Josef Hlávka, which is now part of Chernivtsi University. The Armenian Catholic Church of the Holy Apostles in Chernivtsi was also designed by Hlávka, in 1875. The red brick building has marvelous turrets and a distinctive shape. The interior sparkles with gold leaf, and there are intricate, colorful patterns in the brickwork of the walls. About ten years ago, the Chernivtsi Philharmonic paid for a new three-manual Rieger-Kloss organ to be installed in the church. The congregation uses the instrument for its worship services, and the philharmonic uses the space for organ recitals and chamber music concerts.

In summer 2018, I received grants from Barnard College and the Harriman Institute, Columbia University, to return to Chernivtsi and record a program of contemporary Ukrainian organ literature. A colleague in Odessa, 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



The Rieger-Kloss in Chernivtsi's organ hall



The interior of the organ hall



Bohdan Kotyuk, Gail Archer, and Olenka Matseliukh



rhythmic and harmonic gestures in this music, making it a challenge for the performer and a joy for the listener. My *Chernivtsi* CD includes a Chacona by a woman composer from Kyiv, Svidana Ostrova, available on the Musforum site (Musforum.org) for anyone to download.

As I write this article, thousands of refugees are finding shelter in the western city of Lviv, near the Polish border. The organ culture there is strong, as there is a four-manual instrument in the organ hall, a large building that was formerly a Roman Catholic church. Olenka Matseliukh is the organist for both the hall and the Lviv Philharmonic. In summer 2019, she and I both played organ concertos with the orchestra, and I gave a solo recital with the Ukrainian repertoire from my *Chernivtsi* CD in the Roman Catholic cathedral. This special program was narrated by Bohdan Kotyuk, who composed several of the works on the disc. In Eastern Europe, it is typical for a narrator to describe the piece to the audience before it is performed. It was such an honor to have Bohdan describing the music of his own nation to a large, enthusiastic audience.

The intellectual rigor and audacious creativity of the Ukrainian people are the foundation of the strength and courage that the world is now witnessing every day. The political and artistic leaders in Ukraine inspire their nation and all the world with their courageous defense of liberty, freedom, and peace.

The passion and dedication shown by the people of Ukraine are a strong testament to the deep motivation they feel to safeguard the beauty of their country and heritage. They take great pride in their music, their architecture, and their culture. It should come as no surprise then that the Ukrainian people are fighting so hard right now and are willing to stand their ground against one of the largest military forces in the world, to protect the place they know and love.

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