

# THE BLADE

## Ohio-bound organist travels world to discover unknown gems

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by [HEATHER DENNISS](#)

You could say organist **Gail Archer** is the flesh and blood Dora the Explorer of organists, traveling to various places around the world to uncover little-known pieces written for the instrument by lesser-known composers.

“Many organists will play Bach, and they’ll play French romantic music,” Archer said by phone. “Of course, all that music is beautiful, but there is so much more to discover. So I’m discovering it. I’m going out searching actively for music from other parts of Europe that are unknown.”

Archer is director of music at Barnard College Columbia University, the women's college of Columbia University, where she directs the choirs, the Barnard-Columbia chorus, and the chamber singers. She also teaches music history, advises students, and is the organist at Vassar College.

In addition to all of that, she is an active performer, giving about 50 concerts nationally and internationally a year, she said.

Her most recent discovery is the organ literature of Eastern Europe.

"I traveled a great deal there and discovered that the Eastern European organ literature is fascinating, and it is music that Western Europe and the United States does not know at all," Archer said. "I'm trying to shed light on the wonderful work that's being done in Eastern Europe that many people are unaware of."

The performer and educator has among her recordings organ literature from Russia, Ukraine, and most recently, Poland.

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She will travel to Zoar Lutheran Church on Nov. 12 to perform some of the gems she has discovered, including some of the Ukrainian pieces she has recorded for her CD *Chernivtsi: Contemporary Ukrainian Organ Music*.

"I've been able to play a number of concerts with my entire Ukrainian program here in New York, down at the Ukrainian Cathedral in Philadelphia, up in Winnipeg, Canada," she said. "I've been traveling a great deal playing the Ukrainian program, and in many cases for benefit concerts with foundations that are working in Poland with Ukrainian refugees.

"People are very, very aware of this horrible conflict, and the idea of supporting and shedding light on the artists in Ukraine seems particularly appropriate programming choice right now," Archer added.

"I've traveled in both Russia and Ukraine frequently in recent years and there are wonderful kind people on both sides of the border who love music," she said. "They are not the reason for this horror, and I'm sure they are suffering terribly from all of this. It's a grave situation and somehow the world has to find a way to resolve it."

Gail Archer performs Nov. 12 at 7:30 p.m. at Zoar Lutheran Church, 314 N. Indiana Ave. Perrysburg. The concert is free. For more information, please visit [ZoarLutheran.com](http://ZoarLutheran.com) or call 419-874-4336.