

## Arts

### TOP STORY



## Musician Hopes Concert Series Will Help Change Image Of The Church Organ

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*A unique concert series starts this Sunday at an Upper East Side church, featuring a passionate musician who is helping to change the image of the church organ. NY1 Stephanie Simon filed the following report.*

The sounds of the church organ are very recognizable, but the organ and the organ player are usually out of site. Still, musician Gail Archer is helping to shine the spotlight on this unique instrument.

"The piano is getting a particular color all the way across the keyboard, but on an organ the color possibilities are virtually limitless because you will have at least two keyboards on most organs and this one at Heavenly Rest has five," said Archer. "So there are many, many, many color possibilities for the sound itself."

Archer began playing piano at age seven, but it was singing in the church choir that later attracted her to the organ.

"I played the organ from the time I was 13 or 14 when my legs were long enough to reach the pedals," she said. "It was a natural transition from piano to organ."

Today a foremost player and educator, Archer has organized a series of free organ concerts at churches around the city. She'll be playing the music of her favorite composer Olivier Messiaen. There will be six concerts in all. The first takes place at the Church of Heavenly Rest on Fifth Avenue with the final concert in May at Saint Patrick's Cathedral.

"People have played this music on a single organ here in New York, Riverside Church, St Ignatious, but no one has gone all the way around the town and I'm the only woman who's ever gone all the way around the town to do this," said Archer.

Archer will be playing all new or newly restored organs. While the church organ seems particularly old fashioned, Archer says today they're surprisingly high tech.

"The organ console is brand new and state of the art," she said. "It has a digital memory in it so I can program the sounds that I want digitally into the computer of the keyboards. I'll do that in the evenings this week and when I come back to play the concert, I'll just go bip bop bip bop on all these buttons and it'll be there."

Even though concert goers still won't have the best view of the organ or organ player, Archer hopes she's opened their eyes to the beauty of the sound.

- Stephanie Simon