

Cantius
Gail Archer
Swan Studios MM22051
(meyer-media.com)



➤ The pipe organ has been a vital part of musical history for centuries, and there are a small number of countries that have made tremendously impactful

contributions to its physical construction and musical lineage, including the German Baroque composers (culminating in the works of J.S. Bach) and the 19th- and 20th-century French school, which led to the development of the organ symphony. With a heritage dominated by musical monoliths, it is easy to forget that there is worthwhile organ music written by composers in other countries not immediately considered synonymous with the pipe organ, including the Baltic States, Russia and Poland.

It is this latter country that receives organist Gail Archer's full focus on *Cantius*, a recording which presents highlights from two centuries of Polish composers and their works, ranging from Romantic symphonies to avant-garde masterpieces. Highlights include Felix Nowowiejski's *Symphony No. 8* which, although written in one movement, is in three distinct sections, including a solemn funeral march, and Henryk Górecki's *Kantata*. Górecki is perhaps Poland's most famous 20th-century composer, whose *Third Symphony* - "*Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*" achieved international recognition and established his place as one of the most important contemporary composers of the time.

Although many consider the pipe organ to be an old instrument that plays old music, there is still new material being written today, and it is wonderful to encounter a variety of 20th- and 21st-century composers and their works on *Cantius*, expertly interpreted by Archer. It is not an easy feat to achieve convincing performances of high-density modern scores, but she does so with apparent ease and undeniable success.

Matthew Whitfield



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