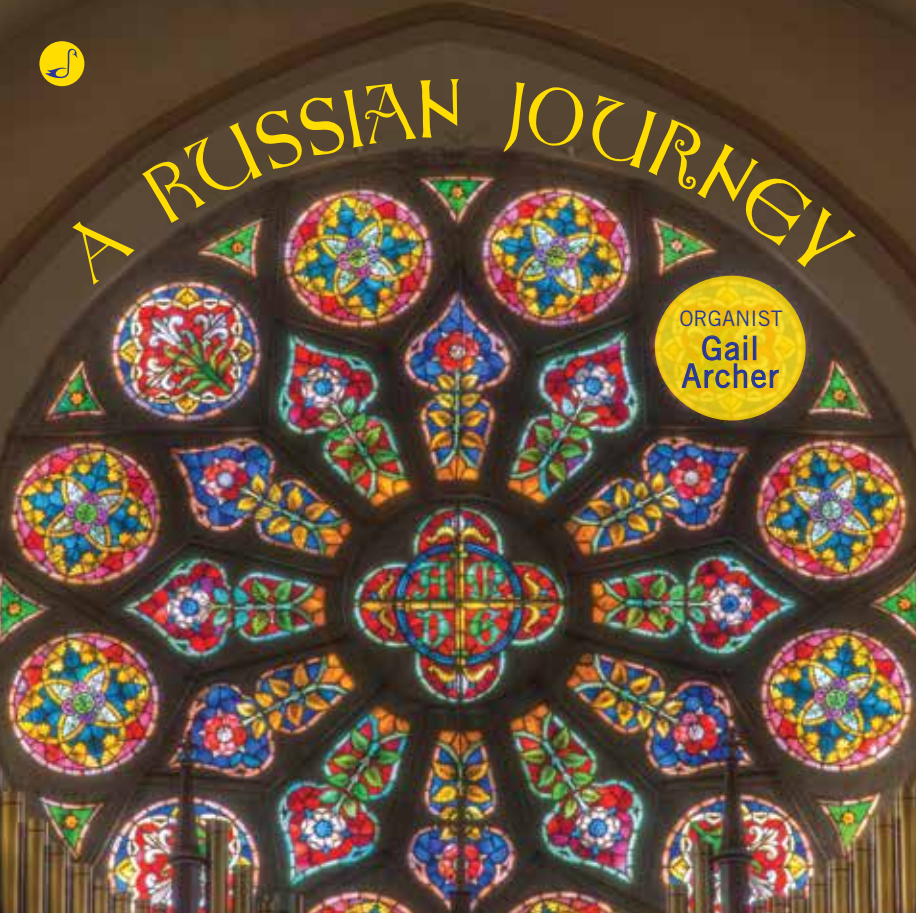




A RUSSIAN JOURNEY

ORGANIST
**Gail
Archer**



IN THE SUMMER

of 2013, I traveled to Russia for the first time in my life in order to play five organ recitals in Irkutsk, Krasnoyarsk, Tomsk and Perm. My colleague, Daniel Zaretsky, organ professor at St. Petersburg Conservatory, obtained grant funding from the Russian government to bring organists from many countries to Russia that summer in anticipation of the Winter Olympics in Sochi in 2014. I traveled from Moscow by plane to Irkutsk and then traveled back to Moscow on the Trans-Siberian Railroad—a journey I will never forget, as I had the privilege of seeing the whole country from the window of the train. The concert organs, all built by German firms, are placed in small halls associated with the philharmonic orchestra in each city rather than in churches or university settings. The audience for every concert was full to overflowing and the devotion and respect for classical music in Russia is utterly remarkable. I visited Russia again in summer 2016, where I played in Kislovodsk and Essentuki, and had the same experience. My trips sparked an interest in the music for organ by Russian composers with which I was unfamiliar. The CD program includes 19th and 20th century composers, several of them members of the *Russian Five* or *Might Handful*, Cesar Cui and Modest Moussorgsky and their student, Sergei Ljapunow. Alexander Glasunov had an independent career as a symphonic composer with an international reputation while Sergei Slonimsky comes from a brilliant family of mathematicians and scholars. Alexander Shaversaschvili was a notable composer from Georgia.

In the late nineteenth century, a group of Russian composers, the Russian Five, sought to create a distinctive Russian idiom inspired by Russian poetry and literature, Russian Orthodox chant and folk melodies. Their objective was to distance themselves from Western European counterpoint and formal musical designs in order to create a unique Russian musical style. Mily Balakirev, Alexander Borodin, Cesar Cui, Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Modest Mussorgsky created a large body of symphonic, keyboard, opera, song, and chamber music literature celebrating Russian national culture, which had wide-ranging influence both in Russia and abroad.

Cesar Cui, (1835-1918) was trained as a military officer, an expert in fortifications. He had an alternate career as a music critic and studied the piano from his earliest years in Vilnius, Lithuania, then a part of the Russian Empire. The premier of his first notable orchestral composition came in 1859, *Scherzo, Op.1*, conducted by the famous pianist Anton Rubenstein and supported by the Russian Musical Society. Later, from 1896-1904, Cui would serve as director of the society in St.Petersburg. Cui's operas and art songs are among his finest music. He composed over 200 solo songs with piano accompaniment all with Russian texts. The two organ works on the program, the *Prelude in G Minor* and *Prelude in A Major*, are "songs without words," a term often used to describe the brief character pieces for piano of the nineteenth century. Elegant melodies rise well above the range of the human voice in both pieces, but have the lyrical quality of an art song.

The harmonies are unexpected and written in widely spaced position, creating technical challenges in maintaining the legato accompaniment. Cui knew Franz Liszt, who admired Cui's opera, *William Radcliff* and chose to transcribe Cui's *Tarantelle Op. 12* for his last piano transcription. Cui returned the favor by dedicating his book *La musique en Russie* and *Suite pour Piano Op. 21* to Liszt.

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881) trained for a military career, but studied piano with his mother as a young child and continued musical studies parallel to his general education. As members of the Preobrazhensky Guard, a prestigious regiment, Mussorsky met Alexander Borodin, who would also become a member of the *Russian Five*. In quick succession in 1857, Mussorgsky met the prominent musicians of his day, Dargomizhsky, Cui and Mily Balkirev, who would instruct him in composition and musical analysis. In 1860, Mussorgsky considered writing an opera on the Gogol story, *St. John's Eve*. He modified the idea and combined it with another story about the Bare Mountain, *The Witch*, written by an army colleague, Baron Georgy Mengden. In the summer of 1867, Mussorsky completed the orchestral work *Night on Bald Mountain*, his only symphonic poem. Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov later re-orchestrated the work. It is this later version that Zsigmond Szathmary used in making the recent transcription for organ in 2012. Technically demanding from start to finish due to the speed and intricacy of the writing, the piece is a cornerstone of Russian program music.

Sergei Ljapunov, (1859-1924) the son of a mathematician and astronomer grew up in Nizhniy Novgorod, where Mily Balakirev lived. Ljapunov would meet Balakirev in 1883, after his graduation from the Moscow Conservatory and became one of his protégés. Notably, Ljapunov studied piano with Karl Klindworth, a Liszt pupil, and composition with Sergei Taneyev, a student of Tchaikovsky. A government grant from the Imperial Geographical Society permitted Ljapunov, Balakirev and another colleague, Lyadov, to collect 300 folksongs from Vologda, Vyatka, and Kostroma, which were published in 1897. A successful teacher, Ljapunov, worked at the Free Music School and taught theory and piano at the St. Petersburg Conservatory before moving to Paris in 1923. His keen interest in vocal music and sophisticated piano technique inform the *Prelude Pastoral Op. 24*. Written in 9/8 meter, the work has a gentle rhythmic flow which disguises the difficulties of the constantly changing key. Common tones subtly balance the shift from one key to the next, sometimes ornamented by chromatic scales which serve as episodes between sections. Both the harmonic complexity and technical demands show the influence of Liszt.

Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936) born in St. Petersburg, was a student of Rimsky-Korsakov. The *First Symphony*, premiered in 1882 under Balakirev's baton, heralded the successful international career that was to come. He began teaching at St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1899 and rose to head the institution in 1905. Unlike his contemporaries, Glazunov worked in the traditional structures of symphony, concerto and chamber music based upon Western European counterpoint and harmony.

Due to the patronage of a wealthy merchant, Glazunov traveled to Western Europe where he met Liszt and conducted his own works in Paris and London. There are three late works for organ by Glazunov, *Prelude and Fugue in D Major Op. 93* (1907-07) *Prelude and Fugue in d Minor Op. 98* (1914) and *Fantasy* (1934-35). *The Prelude and Fugue in d Minor* is written in three sections, the first is homophonic and chordal, followed by two short fugues, the first in duple meter and the second in 6/8 time. The piece concludes with a powerful codetta of block chords reminiscent of Russian Orthodox male choirs.

Sergei Slonimsky (b. 1932) comes from a family of writers and scholars in St. Petersburg; his uncle Nicolai Slonimsky, had a notable career in the United States as a musicologist. Best known for his operas and ten symphonies, his orchestral work *Petersburg's Visions* under the baton of Yuri Temirkanov, enjoyed eight performances in major cities in the United States in 1996. Like his predecessors, Slonimsky has done extensive research on the Russian folksong tradition in Novgorod, Pskov, Leningrad and Perm. The *Toccata* on the program is one of only two organ works, the other is *Chromatic Poem for Organ* (1969). The most attractive features of this piece are the angular, propelling rhythms and the fact that the piece is written in two keys simultaneously throughout the work. The player is constantly challenged to hear and think on two levels while executing the changes of keyboard and key. The tempo of the piece shows the composer's sense of humor and marvelous creativity as he uses very spare melodic components in ever new guises from section to section.

Alexander Shaversaschvili (1919-2003). There is virtually no information available on his life and work. *His Praeludium and Fuge* is included in the volume of organ works published by C. F. Peters in 1976, *Organ Music of the 20th Century from Russian and Eastern Europe*. The introspective and poignant opening melody attracted me, as well as the unexpected chromaticism of the harmony. The dynamic arch of the work begins at a quiet whisper and grows to a powerful final statement of the fugue subject with the full organ at the conclusion.



*“I invite you to take this Russian Journey with me,
as I am confident that you will be inspired by the depth
and beauty of this music, as I am.”*

- Gail Archer

www.gailarcher.com

A RUSSIAN JOURNEY



3:02	1. Cesar Cui - Prelude in g minor
4:05	2. Cesar Cui - Prelude in in A-flat Major
9:26	3. Sergej Ljapunow - Prelude Pastoral Op.54
8:36	4. Alexander Glasunow - Prelude and Fugue in d minor Op.98
4:12	5. Sergej Slonimski - Toccata
3:45	6. Alexander Schawersaschwili - Prelude
3:44	7. Fugue
14:07	8. Modest Mussorgsky - Night on Bald Mountain
58:11	Total Time

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