

MUSICWEB INTERNATIONAL Recordings Of The Year 2017

This is the fourteenth year that Musicweb International has asked its reviewing team to nominate their recordings of the year. Reviewers are not restricted to discs they had reviewed, but the choices must have been reviewed on MWI in the last 12 months (December 2016-November 2017).

The 136 selections have come from 27 members of the team and 68 different labels, the choices reflecting as usual, the great diversity of music and sources.

Of the selections, seven have received two nominations:

- Iván Fischer's Mahler 3 on Channel Classics
- Late works by Elliott Carter on Ondine
- Tommie Haglund's Cello concerto on BIS
- Beatrice Rana's Goldberg Variations on Warner
- Unreleased recordings by Wanda Luzzato on Rhine Classics
- Krystian Zimerman's late Schubert sonatas on Deutsche Grammophon
- Vaughan Williams London Symphony on Hyperion

Two labels – Deutsche Grammophon and Hyperion – gained the most nominations, nine apiece, considerably more than any other label.

MUSICWEB INTERNATIONAL RECORDING OF THE YEAR



In this twelve month period, we published more than 2700 reviews. There is no easy or entirely satisfactory way of choosing one above all others as our Recording of the Year. In some years, there have been significant anniversaries of composers or performers to help guide the selection, but not so in 2017.

Johann Sebastian BACH Goldberg Variations - Beatrice Rana (piano)
rec. 2016 **WARNER CLASSICS 9029588018**

In the end, it was the unanimity of the two reviewers who nominated Beatrice Rana's Goldberg Variations – “easily my individual Record of the Year” and “how is it possible that she can be only 23” – that won the day. [Full Review](#)

ROB BARNETT (FOUNDING EDITOR)

What a captivating opera is Martinů's *Julietta*. I mention it because of the Georges Neveux book on which *Julietta* it is based. The full title is *Juliette, ou La clef des songes. The Key of Dreams* is an allusive title equating with another French literary monument, Alain Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*. I read *The Key of Dreams* not as a method of unlocking the meaning of dreams but because music serves as a liberating key to unlocking dreams or as the dream itself.

With that in mind I should mention the discs that regrettably had to be jostled out by my chosen six. In many cases it was "the nearest run thing you ever saw" (as Wellington said). Honourable mentions go to Skulte's symphonies 5 and 9 (Skani), Breton's violin concerto (Tritó), Falletta's typically vital Novak disc (Naxos), a rare Tomasi orchestral collection (Ad Vitam), Blumental's surging chamber music (Tyxart), Juon's *Rhapsodische Symphonie* (CPO), Falik's often touching orchestral music (Northern Flowers), Blyton's *Shoal of Fishes* (Sleeveless), the Delius/Bax choral music (Naxos) and Dett's piano music (Navona). Chandos gave us Rozhdestvensky's superb 1990s recordings of the three Enescu numbered symphonies and I hope this augurs well for the issue of a single boxed edition of their Järvi-conducted American series. Finally, from Lyrita, a bumper collection of British symphonies on 4 CDs and the sumptuous George Lloyd coupling of Symphonies 6 and 7 to complement the label's existing recordings of Lloyd's symphonies 4, 5 and 8. The Sixth Symphony is a stunner in this sparkling and virile performance.

It's no surprise that two items (not CDs), deserving of mention, have the word 'beauty' in their titles. They should not be lost in the m  le of reviews: Paul Moon's epic DVD *Samuel Barber: Absolute Beauty* and Robert Reilly's and Jens Laurson's book *Surprised by Beauty: A Listener's Guide to the Recovery of Modern Music*. I commend them to you.

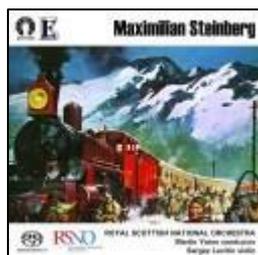
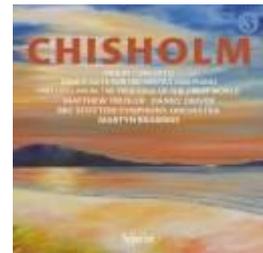


Louis GLASS Symphony No. 5, Fantasy - Marianna Shirinyan (piano) Staatsorchester Rheinische PO/Daniel Raiskin rec. 2013 **CPO 777 494-2**

The Fifth Symphony's indelibly memorable ideas have a Tchaikovskian refulgence. Time after time the music strikes home and convinces with searing and exultant sincerity. When this work is played 'on song', as it is here, nothing is better calculated to have you "air-conducting" with an abandon you may have doubted would ever return. Resistance is futile. [Full Review](#)

Erik CHISHOLM Violin Concerto, *From the True Edge of the Great World*, *Dance Suite* - Matthew Trusler (violin) Danny Driver (piano) BBC Scottish SO/Martyn Brabbins rec. 2016 **HYPERION CDA68208**

Chisholm ploughed a distinctive furrow, rejecting Victoriana and finding sustenance in European, Scottish and Indian sources. The Concerto switches, with mercurial swiftness, between haunting soliloquy, battering and scorching virtuosity and a singing Bergian intensity. More than an hour of Chisholm's unfamiliar and attention-grabbing music: rowdy, strange, exultant, dissonant and wheezily non-conformist. [Full Review](#)

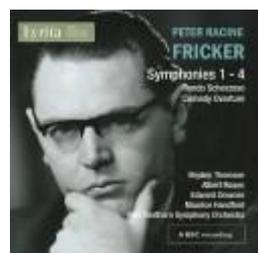
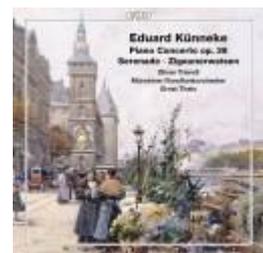


Maximilian STEINBERG Violin Concerto, Symphony No. 4 - Sergey Levitin (violin) Royal Scottish Ntl O/Martin Yates rec. 2016 **DUTTON CDLX7341 SACD**

Dutton continue their garlanded track record for letting the world hear neglected or forgotten treasures. Here is a composer who does not kick against the Russian nationalist musical legacy but works with its grain. The Violin Concerto sings richly and Levitin is commandingly placed in the sound-picture. The Fourth Symphony's coruscating Russian grandeur lacks neither pride nor confidence. The symphony in a luxuriantly populated crash that resounds across the hall and your loudspeakers. Ripe Russian nationalism vividly nostalgically re-imagined. [Full Review](#)

Eduard K  NNEKE Piano Concerto No.1, *Zigeunerweisen*, *Serenade* - Oliver Triendl (piano) Munich Radio O/Ernst Theis rec. 2015 **CPO 555015-2**

An amply proportioned and lushly late-romantic concerto. Its cut-glass and carillon-sweet writing is redolent of Grieg and Rachmaninov. For K  nneke a smile begets a smile. The ubiquitous and magnificently skilled Triendl, Theis and his Munich Radio band play no small part in this. A gently hypnotic, sultry and beckoning *Moderato* is followed by an operetta-inflected and populist ragtime strut of a *Finale*. Quite a discovery. Feel-good music crafted for easy-access pleasure. [Full Review](#)



Peter Racine FRICKER Symphonies 1-4, Rondo Scherzoso, Comedy Overture - BBC Northern SO/Bryden Thomson, Albert Rosen, Edward Downes, Maurice Handford **LYRITA REAM.2136**

Lyrta continues to flourish with its new injection of life fuelled by Richard Itter's collection of off-air tapes. This REAM release stands out: a remarkable Fricker double derived from broadcasts by the predecessor of today's BBC Phil. The music has a sturdy and intensely imaginative quality - not flamboyant but attractively serious. [Full Review](#)

A British Promenade Sandrine Chatron (harp) Ophélie Gaillard (cello) Michael Bennett (tenor) rec. 2016 **APARTÉ AP140**

Impressionist delicacy, grandly sweeping gestures, emotional pull, dewy pastoralism amid a poignantly sentimental tracery. The finest and most generously timed English harp music disc I know. [Full Review](#)



STEPHEN BARBER

There are several recordings which there is no need to list because they will find their own audiences anyway. These include the last works of Elliott Carter and Peter Maxwell Davies, Tiberghien's Bartók series on Hyperion and Poul Ruders' splendid new fifth symphony. For early music, it is enough for fans of the viol consort Phantasm to know that they have now recorded Dowland's *Lachrimae* and that this lives up to expectations. Ineligible, because not reviewed here, or anywhere else as far as I know, is the box set which finally gathers together the Takács Quartet's complete set of Beethoven string quartets (Decca), surely the benchmark reference set for our time. I have listed below recordings you might have overlooked the first time round.

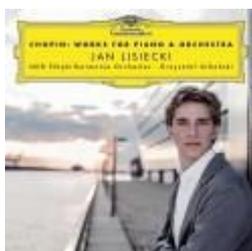
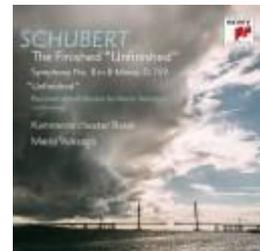


Ludwig van BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 9 - Krassimira Stoyanova (soprano) Lioba Braun (alto) Michael Schade (tenor) Michael Volle (bass) Bavarian RSO & Ch/Mariss Jansons rec. 2007 **BR KLASSIK 900156**

This is a reissue of a 2007 live performance, not part of a cycle but a historic occasion when the symphony was played at the Vatican in the presence of the then Pope. Great occasions do not always make for great recordings but this one deserves the accolade, because Jansons has a clear vision of the symphony, as achieving triumph despite confronting darkness. His team do him proud. The soloists and chorus cover themselves with glory. There is slight congestion in the sound from the difficult venue, but don't let that put you off. [Full Review](#)

Franz SCHUBERT *The Finished "Unfinished"* - Basel CO/Mario Venzago rec. 2016 **SONY 88985431382**

I prefer unfinished works to be completed, as far as possible. In the case of this symphony Venzago argues that Schubert probably did complete it, but cannibalized the last two movements for his *Rosamunde* incidental music when he was in a hurry. He left a draft of the scherzo which needs filling out, and the finale has here been reconstructed by Venzago from the *Rosamunde* music. Others have done something along these lines before, but this is the most convincing yet, and offers a light and flowing approach to the completed work, closer to the early symphonies than the usual rather portentous interpretation. [Full Review](#)

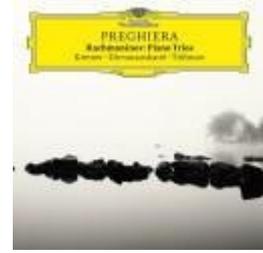


Frédéric CHOPIN Works for piano and orchestra - Jan Lisiecki (piano) NDR Elbphilharmonie O/Krzysztof Urbański rec. 2016 **DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 4796824**

Recordings of the two concertos are plentiful but it is a long time since we have had a new one of the four short piano concertante works. They are all early and none of them the greatest Chopin, but they are both delightful in themselves and full of hints of what is to come. Lisiecki's playing is full of imagination, poetic in the dreamy passages and with wit and caprice in the fast and brilliant ones. Krzysztof Urbański does what he can with the orchestral part. The recording places the piano rather more forward than one would want with, say, a Mozart concerto, but in these works that is reasonable. [Full Review](#)

Sergei RACHMANINOV Piano Trios - Daniil Trifonov (piano) Gidon Kremer (violin) Giedrė Dirvanauskaitė (cello) rec. 2015 **DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 4796979**

Rachmaninov's second trio *élégiaque* (the first is a short student work) is a big work, melancholy in tone but not in the least depressing. The veteran Gidon Kremer, his trusty cellist Giedrė Dirvanauskaitė and comparative newcomer Daniil Trifonov make, slightly to my surprise, an excellent team. This is a magical performance. As a bonus there is a violin and piano arrangement by Kreisler of part of the slow movement from the second piano concerto, titled *Preghiera*, of which this is the only currently listed recording. [Full Review](#)

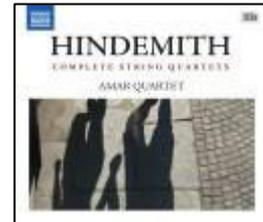


Karol SZYMANOWSKI & Mieczysław KARŁOWICZ Violin Concertos - Tasmin Little (violin) BBC SO/Edward Gardner rec. 2017 **CHANDOS CHSA5185 SACD**

The Szymanowski concertos are now recognized as twentieth century classics. The first is in the composer's most luxuriant impressionist mood, while the second is rather harder-edged, showing the influence of folk music. Tasmin Little is in complete command and the orchestra under Gardner show themselves thoroughly familiar with the idiom. The coupled Karłowicz concerto is of less interest but also receives a fine performance. [Full Review](#)

Paul HINDEMITH Complete string quartets - Amar Qt rec. 2009/10 **NAXOS 8.503290**

Hindemith's cycle of seven string quartets have been somewhat neglected compared to those of Schoenberg and Bartók, but they deserve comparable exposure. This Amar quartet is Swiss-based and named after the quartet in which Hindemith himself played the viola. For them this is core repertoire and they play with confidence and swagger. The recording is excellent. [Full Review](#)



DAVID BARKER



Johann Sebastian BACH Goldberg Variations - Beatrice Rana (piano) rec. 2016 **WARNER CLASSICS 9029588018**

Far and away my Record of the Year, this is a quite astonishing recording from someone so young. It may not be a reading to please the purists as Rana does apply a light touch of Romantic spirit to her playing, but it is totally and utterly convincing and provides a wonderful counterpoint to my previous references of Hewitt and Perahia. [Full Review](#)

Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918) Sonatas & Trio - Renaud Capuçon (violin) Bertrand Chamayou (piano) Edgar Moreau (cello) Emmanuel Pahud (flute) Gerard Caussé (viola) Marie-Pierre Langlamet (harp) rec. 2016/17 **ERATO 9029 577396**

A star-studded lineup is no guarantee of success in chamber music, but Capuçon and colleagues give us wonderful performances of these works. The under-appreciated (in my opinion) piano trio is exceptional. [Full Review](#)



Trios From Our Homelands Piano trios by Babajanian, Clarke & Martin - Lincoln Trio rec. 2015 **ÇEDILLE CDR90000165**

Three underappreciated works from the piano trio canon, one from each of the homelands of the players, given performances that are unlikely to be bettered any time soon. The Babajanian is an unsung gem, and the Lincoln Trio bring out the melancholy in the slow movement and the dance rhythms in the final wonderfully. [Full Review](#)

Gustav MAHLER Symphony No. 3 - Gerhild Romberger (alto), Cantemus Children's Ch, Bavarian Radio Ch, Budapest Festival O/Iván Fischer rec. 2016 **CHANNEL CLASSICS CCSSA38817 SACD**

In 2008, I was privileged to hear this orchestra and conductor perform the Mahler 3 in the glorious acoustic of the Salle Pleyel in Paris. It is an experience that I will never forget, and I have been waiting these nine years for their recording of the work. This is not a drama-laden reading of this most sunny of Mahler's symphonies; Fischer takes a more gentle and genial view. Dan Morgan, in his review, uses adjectives such as delicate and limpid to describe the atmosphere to which I will add ethereal. Like Beatrice Rana's Goldbergs, this is a performance that provides a glorious and compelling contrast to other loved versions the work you may have. [Full Review](#)



Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS A London Symphony, *Sound Sleep*, *Orpheus with his Lute*, Variations for Brass Band - RCM Brass Band, BBC SO/Martyn Brabbins rec. 2016 **HYPERION CDA68190**

Irrespective of version, this is a very fine performance of the wonderful symphony, but for me the other three works, new to me, are as interesting. In particular, *Sound Sleep* is quite glorious and has the same sense of rapture as *Serenade To Music*. [Full Review](#)

NICK BARNARD

This year's choices seem mainly to be revisiting further releases in cycles of recordings previously admired, which either means I am getting more set in my ways or these are consistently excellent performances. However, my criteria for a disc of the year remains unchanged; stimulating repertoire superbly performed with exemplary engineering and high quality presentation. For me this was not a year over-endowed with stand-out discs but another Doyen offering *Gods & Kings* only just missed the final cut in favour of the Gregson disc. The Fricker Symphonies released as part of the Lyrita/Itter Recorded Archive struck me as one of the most valuable additions to the British music catalogue as well. In no particular order, my final six are:

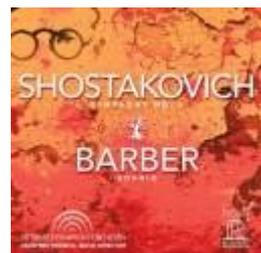


Tommie HAGLUND *Flaminis Aura*, *Il Regno degli Spiriti*, *Sollievo*, *Serenata per Diotima* - Ernst Simon Glaser (cello), Julia Kretz-Larsson (violin), ZilliacusPerssonRaitinen, Gothenburg Symphony/David Afkham, Malmö SO/Joachim Gustafsson rec. 2012/15 **BIS BIS-2025 SACD**

Haglund is rapidly establishing himself as one of the major original voices of contemporary music not just in Scandinavia but worldwide. The centre-piece of this diverse and beautiful disc is the remarkable concertante work *Flaminis Aura* performed with ecstatic fervour by Ernst Simon Glaser and his colleagues in the Gothenburg SO. This is unique, powerful, complex yet deeply humane music of the highest order. Even by their own exalted standards the BIS engineering is quite stunning and all praise to them for producing the premiere commercial recordings of music of such value. My single disc of the year without doubt. [Full Review](#)

Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH Symphony No. 5 **Samuel BARBER** Adagio - Pittsburgh SO/Manfred Honeck rec. 2013 **REFERENCE RECORDINGS SACD FR-724**

More of a controversial choice this - personally I find this interpretation of a so-familiar symphony to be as convincing as it is revelatory. The Pittsburgh Symphony show themselves to be in inspired and virtuosic form under conductor Manfred Honeck who makes unconventional but inspired interpretative choices. Reference Recordings provide a recording of superb natural clarity and detail. Buyer beware!: my colleague Dan Morgan referred to this same disc as: "Remarkably dull performances of both works; the engineering is sub-par, too." [Full Review](#)

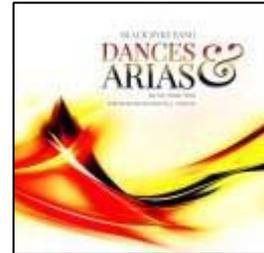




Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH Concertos - Lukas Geniušas, Dmitry Masleyev (piano) Sergey Dogadin, Pavel Milyukov (violin) Alexander Buzlov, Alexander Ramm (cello) Tatarstan Ntl SO/Alexander Sladkovsky rec. 2016 **MELODIYA MELCD1002465**

An unexpected surprise in terms of artistic excellence. Also, a rare set in that it features one conductor and orchestra accompanying different artists in each of the 6 concerti. All the soloists are Tchaikovsky Competition award winners which just underlines the depth of artistic talent there is today. This is a very coherent set presenting these great works as some of the finest concerti of the last century. Performances to match the finest in the catalogue from any era. [Full Review](#)

Edward GREGSON *Dances & Arias* - Richard Marshall (cornet) Black Dyke Band/Nicholas Childs, Edward Gregson rec. 2016 **DOYEN DOYCD369**



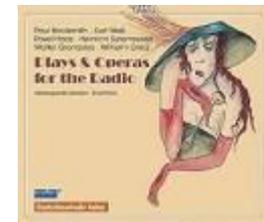
A Doyen disc seems to make it into my end of year list nearly every time. They have the art of recording massed brass off to a tee - this is a sumptuous recording of thrillingly engaging music played with jaw-dropping elan and virtuosity by the Black Dyke Band. In my original review I said; "these will surely be deemed the reference recordings for Gregson's remarkable music for brass band for years to come". [Full Review](#)



Antonin DVOŘÁK & Josef SUK Piano Quartets - Josef Suk Piano Qt rec. 2016 **SUPRAPHON SU4227-2**

As I wrote in my review, tremendous performances of tremendous music. A fascinating and valuable coupling too - Suk's work written under the direct influence of the older composer. Playing of searing power and passion as well superhuman accuracy wrings every ounce of drama out of these wonderful works. [Full Review](#)

Plays & Operas For The Radio Works by Haas, Hindemith, Gronostay, Weill, Grosz & Sutermeister - O & Ch Staatsoperette Dresden/Ernst Theis rec. 2007-11 **CPO 777 839-2**



All 3 volumes of this series have been quite superb. A real musical treasure-trove of music and indeed a genre that was all but lost by the rise of the Nazis. Lovingly recreated by Ernst Theis and the Staatsoperette Dresden. Excellent engineering by Radio Deutschland backed up with superb presentation - another CPO release of exceptional worth. [Full Review](#)

MARC BRIDLE

For lots of reasons I have largely avoided reviewing CDs this year. Having lived with Tchaikovsky's *Manfred Symphony* for the past six months for a recording survey, one recording that is going to very narrowly miss this ROTY round-up is another Tchaikovsky symphony - the Sixth - by Teodor Currentzis (the best recording since Mravinsky). It will make it next year. Another very special set of recordings that could have made this year's list was Michiyoshi Inoue's electrifying live Shostakovich cycle - the first ever performed in Japan by a Japanese conductor - had it not been for the fact it appeared in the catalogue and then almost immediately sold out. As much as it's tempting to review something that is extraordinary it defeats the object of doing so if readers can't get hold of it. This leaves the one disc I most enjoyed reviewing this year, and thankfully it's one that now tops the list of recommendations for the work.

Philip GLASS Violin Concerto No.1 **Leonard BERNSTEIN** Serenade After Plato's Symposium - Renaud Capuçon (violin) Bruckner O Linz/Dennis Russell Davies rec. 2010/16 **ORANGE MOUNTAIN MUSIC OMM0114**

You either love or hate the Philip Glass Violin Concerto No.1. I fall very much into the first category and Renaud Capuçon (with the help of Dennis Russell Davies, the conductor on this disc) has gone back to the score and Glass' original tempos to give a performance that is just spellbinding and cathartic. There is no more beautifully played or exquisitely crafted performance than this one. The slow, second movement is especially unforgettable. [Full Review](#)



PETER BRIGHT



Antonín DVOŘÁK Piano Quintet No. 2, String Quintet - Pavel Haas Qt, Boris Giltburg (piano) Pavel Nikl (viola) rec. 2017 **SUPRAPHON SU4195-2**

The Pavel Haas Quartet has triumphed with their latest issue. With Boris Giltburg brought in on piano and founding member Pavel Nikl returning to the fold on 2nd viola, they have worked their magic on this wonderful, inventive and folk-inspired music. Superbly recorded, their performances here stand comparison with the very finest historical and modern offerings of these works.

[Full Review](#)

DOMINY CLEMENTS

The annual 'Recordings of the Year' ritual is a pleasant test for the memory. With so many recordings passing through every month, the ones which retain your affection rise to the surface at times like this. With many others qualifying in this regard, this is but a shortlist of those that impressed initially and have stood the test of time.

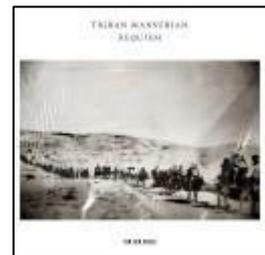


Tõnu KÕRVITS Moorland Elegies - Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Ch, Tallin CO/Risto Joost rec. 2015 **ONDINE ODE1306-2**

Elegance, beauty, inner strength and clarity of purpose combine to create a quiet masterpiece in Tõnu Kõrvits's response to the words of Emily Brontë. "...an artistic bridge that brings her words into our own time with a moving grace and ease that should spark the poet in all of us." [Full Review](#)

Tigran MANSURIAN Requiem - Anja Petersen (soprano) Andrew Redmond (baritone) RIAS Kammerchor, Münchner CO/Alexander Liebreich rec. 2016 **ECM NEW SERIES 2508**

We all need cathartic music to hand from time to time, and Tigran Mansurian's *Requiem* has been that work for me this year. Deeply moving and strikingly effective, this is music that sticks in the memory and renews its powerful message on each hearing. [Full Review](#)

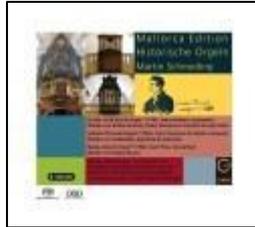


Johann Sebastian BACH French Suites - Murray Perahia (piano) rec. 2013 **DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 479 6565**

Sometimes you find a recording that you just know will be a lifetime lodestone, and Murray Perahia's Bach is a snug fit for this status in my book. With quiet expressiveness, ebullient joy and sublime expressiveness that feels 'just right', this is a transcendent set. [Full Review](#)

Minimal Piano Collection Vols XXI-XXVIII - Jeroen van Veen (piano) rec. 2015/16 **BRILLIANT CLASSICS95543**

Even for someone like me who pretends to have some knowledge of minimalism this set has been something of an eye-opener, and certainly an inspiration. 'Less is more' and 'slow is best' might sum up this music, which will stretch your perceptions and take you to new realms of the imagination. [Full Review](#)



Mallorca Edition Historic Organs Martin Schmeding (organ) rec. 2011 **CYBELE RECORDS 001404 SACD**

This stunning recording oozes the joy of a maestro in his element. Martin Schmeding drives instruments including the Jordi Bosch organ at Sant Abreu in Santanyi like a Formula 1 champion, and the result captured in luxuriant SACD is a jaw-dropping experience. [Full Review](#)

Johann Sebastian BACH Preludes, fantasias & minuets - Sandro Ivo Bartoli (piano) rec. 2016 **SOLAIRE RECORDS SOL1006**

The plucky Solaire label deserves plaudits for its presentation and programming, and if it hadn't been this then both the Erik Lotichius and two Jeffrey Roden releases might have taken its place. With its discovery in simplicity, Sandro Ivo Bartoli's Bach is, however, one for those special late nights when the kids have a sleepover and you owe yourself a special treat. [Full Review](#)



MICHAEL COOKSON

This year I have reviewed a reasonably wide range of music including several symphonies of the standard Austro/German repertory with some especially memorable recordings of Bruckner and Mahler. Nevertheless, this has been a year dominated by Blu-rays of opera productions and of the four that I have chosen Polish tenor Piotr Beczala sings the lead roles in three of them.



Jacques OFFENBACH *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* - Kerstin Avemo, Mandy Fredrich, Daniel Johansson, Vienna SO/Johannes Debus rec. 2015 **C MAJOR 735604 Blu-ray**

During a recent interview with German baritone Michael Volle he talked passionately to me about the new Stefan Herheim production of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* he had appeared in at the Bregenz Festival in 2015. The performance had been filmed and Volle urged me to look out for the release of the DVD/Blu-ray. Having watched this production, in which Volle stars, I can fully understand

his wholehearted enthusiasm. Herheim and his design team have successfully presented Offenbach's masterpiece by merging a lewd and near-decadent burlesque from 1920/30s Paris or Berlin, with a gleaming contemporary cabaret and drag show. I found it all totally captivating and Offenbach writes such memorable music! [Full Review](#)

Giuseppe VERDI *Un Ballo in maschera* – Piotr Beczala, George Petean, Anja Harteros, Bavarian State O/Zubin Mehta rec. 2016 **C MAJOR 739504 Blu-ray**

Budgets rarely allow traditional productions of operas with lavish sets these days. It seems that Verdi's *Un Ballo in maschera* (A Masked Ball) which I consider a masterpiece has been subjected to more than its fair share of directorial imagination over the years. This new 2016 Bayerische Staatsoper production by Johannes Erath had a mixed reception directorially but it contains some outstanding performances notably from Piotr Beczala and Anja Harteros. Erath displays his fertile and detailed concept with his staging, one that rewards greatly with repeated plays. Eminently enjoyable, this marvellous if underrated Verdi opera is compellingly performed with Piotr Beczala in masterly form. [Full Review](#)





Richard WAGNER *Lohengrin* - Georg Zeppenfeld, Piotr Beczala, Anna Netrebko, Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden/Christian Thielemann rec. 2016 **DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 073 5322 Blu-ray**

One of my most memorable nights at the opera house was in May 2016 at Semperoper, Dresden for the revival of Christine Mielitz's acclaimed production of *Lohengrin*. Piotr Beczala and Anna Netrebko were triumphant in the main roles; both making their Wagner debuts. Now I can relive that evening at Semperoper as Mielitz's traditional staging of *Lohengrin* has been accomplishedly filmed on DVD/Blu-ray. [Full Review](#)

Charles GOUNOD *Faust* - Piotr Beczala, Maria Agresta, Ildar Abdrazakov, Vienna PO & Ch/Alejo Pérez rec. 2016 **EUROARTS 2097034 Blu-ray**



Stage director Reinhard von der Thannen's concept which is high on symbolism, isn't too easy to decipher at first, but it does significantly improve with additional viewings. An outstanding cast is led by tenor Piotr Beczala in the title role, displaying his credentials as one of the most in demand tenors on the world stage today. Unless one is steadfastly loyal to a traditionally staged *Faust* Thannen's imaginative and insightful production from the 2016 Salzburg Festival makes spectacular entertainment. [Full Review](#)



Ernst von DOHNÁNYI Piano Quintet No. 2, Sextet - Ens Raro rec. 2016 **SOLO MUSICA SM250**

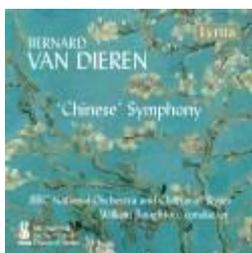
Ensemble Raro's album titled 'Being Earnest' comprises two compelling chamber scores from Ernst von Dohnányi the Piano Quintet No. 2 and Piano Sextet. Expertly performed, these two glorious works in a late-Romantic style are certainly underrated and make a refreshing change from the standard repertoire one usually encounters. [Full Review](#)

A Tribute to Gilbert Duprez Arias by Verdi, Donizetti, Berlioz & Rossini - John Osborn (tenor) Kaunas City SO & State Ch/Constantine Orbelian rec. 2016 **DELOS DE3532**



This quite outstanding new Delos recording sets the pulse racing and should win French Grand Opera and tenor John Osborn many new admirers. Renowned Parisian tenor Gilbert-Louis Duprez (1806-1896) had 'pop star' status in his day and is best remembered for heroically producing celebrated high C's from the chest voice. Osborn's album contains nine arias that are taken from seven operas written by renowned composers Verdi, Donizetti, Berlioz and Rossini. All the arias are from roles that Duprez created except for one that he gave its Italian première. [Full Review](#)

HUBERT CULOT

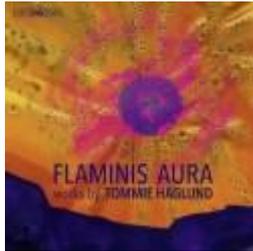
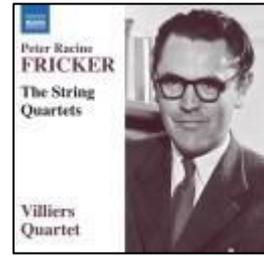


Bernard van DIEREN Symphony No.1, Introit, Elegie - Rebecca Evans (soprano) Catherine Wyn-Rogers (alto) BBC Ntl O & Ch Wales/William Boughton rec. 2016 **LYRITA SRCD357**

Bernard van Dieren has long been something of a mystery in the British musical world for he was admired by a handful of contemporaries and generally ignored by many others. His *Chinese Symphony* is a major and substantial work more discussed than performed and heard. So this recent recorded performance from Lyrita undoubtedly fills an important gap in that it allows for a better appreciation of a sizeable piece of music that will never become popular but that nevertheless needs and repays repeated hearings. The other works, though somewhat lighter and more accessible, are nonetheless most welcome too. [Full Review](#)

Peter Racine FRICKER String Quartets - Villiers Qt rec. 2015/16 **NAXOS 8.571374**

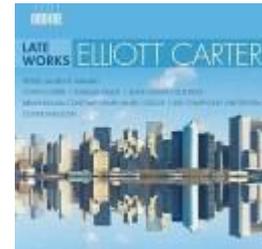
Although it was highly regarded until the mid-sixties, Fricker's highly personal and often beautiful music has been overlooked until recently when it made a most welcome come-back into the catalogue thanks to Lyrita's ongoing Itter Broadcast Collection that has seen the release of a disc coupling Fricker's imposing oratorio *The Vision of Judgement* and Fifth Symphony (REAM.1124) and of another one offering Fricker's preceding symphonies (REAM.2136) and thanks to Naxos' and the Villiers Quartet's recordings of the composer's three string quartets which are all three important milestones in the composer's musical development. These substantial works received strongly committed readings that serve the music well. [Full Review](#)



Tommie HAGLUND *Flaminis Aura, Il Regno degli Spiriti, Sollievo, Serenata per Diotima* - Ernst Simon Glaser (cello), Julia Kretz-Larsson (violin), ZilliacusPerssonRaitinen, Gothenburg Symphony/David Afkham, Malmö SO/Joachim Gustafsson rec. 2012/15 **BIS BIS-2025 SACD**

Tommie Haglund and his music were completely unknown to me before I listened to this disc that turned out to be a real and rewarding surprise. I am in no doubt that the main work here is the quite imposing and strongly communicative cello concerto *Flaminis aura* that in itself would justify the purchase of the disc: music of imagination and of intense lyricism in a very accessible though undeniably contemporary idiom. This impressive achievement almost overshadows the other works on the disc, were it not for the real, intrinsic quality of the music all throughout the disc. [Full Review](#)

Elliott CARTER *Late Works* - Pierre-Laurent Aimard (piano) Colin Currie (percussion) Isabelle Faust (violin) Jean-Guihen Queyras (cello) Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, BBC SO/Oliver Knussen rec. 2015/16 **ONDINE ODE1296-2**



Carter's longevity was quite remarkable and I find it still more remarkable that he composed till the very end of his long life. What is more, I think, is that his last works as recorded here never sound as an old man's music. In fact his music remained as strictly argued and crafted as before even if at times seemingly more accessible, which – I think – was due to a greater fluency gained from his long experience. Most works in this release are fairly short and compact but still packed with substance. The quality of the music and the strong commitment from the performers make this superb release a must for all admirers of Carter's sometimes exacting but always rewarding music-making. In short: this release is THE essential listen of 2017. [Full Review](#)

ROBERT FARR

Last year I noted only four recordings that I wished to give the imprimatur of *Recording the Year*, albeit one was of a collection of seventy five CD's of Verdi's music issued to mark the bicentenary of the greatest Italian opera composer's birth. I also pleaded guilty to advancing age for a reduction in my number of reviews alongside my personal prejudices in respect of the filmed staging of opera performances in Europe issued on Bluray and DVD. These productions often have a fixation with producer concept and Regietheater and thus, for me, perverting and ruining the composer's intentions. The latter prejudice has not changed in principle, however, I have become more tolerant except for the extreme of those practices and that is reflected in my selections. Age has only influenced my selection by being a year older. This year my selections are made from a mere sixteen reviews!



Gaetano DONIZETTI *Roberto Devereux* - Mariella Devia (soprano) Stefan Pop (tenor) O & Ch Teatro Carlo Felice/Francesco Lanzillotta rec. 2016 **DYNAMIC Blu-ray 57755**

This performance of the last of Donizetti's Elisabethan trilogy, and his fifty-third operatic composition staged in 1837, is from the Teatro Carlo Felice Genoa. It was staged to showcase the sixty eight year old Mariella Devia as the queen. Mariella Devia built her international reputation at all the major operatic addresses in the lyric and coloratura repertoire and at this later age I would have doubted her capacity in the role she sings here, albeit she had sung the eponymous *Norma* in previous recent years. Contrary to my expectation, she is outstanding in her interpretation both as actress and singer. The other principals, particularly Sonia Ganassi as Sara, are all more than adequate if not internationally known. The simple staging and the intimacy of the theatre made for the clarity that often defeats the concept producers who confuse the audience with their endeavours. [Full Review](#)

Baden-Baden Opera Gala 2016 Anja Harteros (soprano) Ekaterina Gubanova (mezzo soprano) Jonas Kaufmann (tenor) Bryn Terfel (bass-baritone) Badische Staatskapelle/Marco Armiliato rec. 2016 **SONY CLASSICAL DVD 88985371619**



Staged opera performances, with the right director, can be powerfully dramatic especially when the set and costumes match the story and the conductor draws the drama, or comedy, from the composer's music. Opera singers can sing notes or play roles interpreting, the composer's intentions to produce highly dramatic or comic situations. Take away the peripheries and it can be just music and the human voice. However, in some circumstances, and on occasions, a concert performance can generate a similar frisson given histrionic capability and good preparation. On this occasion four of the leading singer actors of our day, one a late substitute, produce an outstanding evening via voice, mutual interaction and body language alone in the historical and atmospheric Festspielhaus, Baden Baden, created from the town's railway station with its Neo-Renaissance style and elements of Baroque architecture. [Full Review](#)



Giacomo PUCCINI *Turandot* - Sun Xiuwei (soprano) Dai Yuqiang (tenor) China Ntl Centre Perf Arts Ch & O/Daniel Oren rec. 2013 **ACCENTUS MUSIC DVD ACC20338**

Recorded live in the China National Centre for the Performing Arts Beijing, with a cast of native Chinese, who show how they have accommodated to European operatic culture, magnificently so in this opera at least. [Full Review](#)

Gaetano DONIZETTI *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra* - Jessica Pratt, Eva Mei (sopranos) Dario Schmunck (tenor) O Donizetti Opera/Sebastiano Rolli rec. 2016 **DYNAMIC 37757 DVD**

This performance of Donizetti's rarely heard 43rd title gets an idiomatic performance from the Bergamo Festival in 2016, held in the composer's hometown, and which should put the work back on the operatic map. [Full Review](#)



GÖRAN FORSLING

As usual my pick of the year is dominated by vocal music, since that principally is my field. But some instrumental Music also now and then slip into my parcels and a couple of those remained until the semi-finals, where I reluctantly had to separate from some favourites. If you look up my reviews of the glittering coloratura soprano Katarzyna Dondalska (January), the violin recital with Nilla Pierrou (November) and the rare contralto tones of Sarah Laulan in a programme of French mélodies from the Fin-de siècle (also November) you will realise that they missed out from the finals with the smallest of margins. They remain in the category "Gems" that will always be at a convenient distance from the CD player. The following six constitute the finalists ...

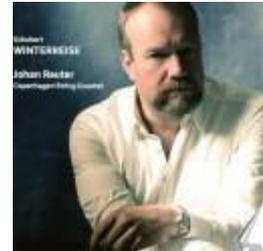


Joyce DiDonato (mezzo) *In War and Peace* - Il Pomo d'Oro/Maxim Emelyanychev rec. 2016 **ERATO 9029 592846**

Marvellous music, some of it standards, some never before recorded. Everything sung with Joyce DiDonato's unique combination of expressivity and sensitivity – and Beauty of tone. NO lover of great singing can afford to be without this disc. [Full Review](#)

Franz SCHUBERT *Winterreise* - Johan Reuter (bass-baritone) Copenhagen String Qt rec. 2014 **DANACORD DACOCD759**

This is not just the umpteenth version of a much-recorded work. It is a brand new concept with accompaniment of a string Quartet. Unauthentic perhaps but very efficient – and Johan Reuter's Wagner-size bass-baritone sits marvellously well. I urge every Schubert enthusiast to give this a listen. [Full Review](#)



Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART *Whispering Mozart* - Marianne Beate Kielland (mezzo) Nils Anders Mortensen (piano) rec. 2014 **LAWO CLASSICS LWC1111**

The great Norwegian mezzo-soprano invites us into a concert venue of the size Mozart would have recognised, with an intimacy where you literally can whisper the songs. The result is enticing and this is now a first recommendation for a single CD with Mozart songs. [Full Review](#)

Camilla Tilling (soprano) *Loves me ... loves me not* - Musica Saeculorum/Philipp von Steinaecker rec. 2015 **BIS BIS-2234 SACD**

Now in her mid-40s Camilla Tilling has reached a stage where she can illuminate and colour words and convey the feelings of the various Mozart and Gluck heroines in this wholly engrossing Collection. Her razor-sharp enunciation is a further asset in her vocal armoury. This is a marvellous disc! [Full Review](#)



Giacomo MEYERBEER (1791-1864) *Grand Opera* - Diana Damrau (soprano) Ch & O l'Opéra National de Lyon/Emmanuel Villaume rec. 2015 **ERATO 9029584899**

This tour-de-force through Meyerbeer's operatic works not only gives us new insights in his World – a couple of the arias are World premiere recordings – but also allows us to wallow in the gorgeous melodies of his better-know works and admire Diana Damrau's technical wizardry and the Beauty of her voice. Not

to be missed! [Full Review](#)

Between the Seasons Works by Kraggerud & Vivaldi - Henning Kraggerud (violin) Arctic Philharmonic CO, Knut Johannessen (harpsichord) Petter Richter (guitar, theorbo) rec. 2016 **SIMAX PSC1356**

This is not just another version of *The Four Seasons*. Firstly it is possibly the most dramatic reading we have heard, mirroring the fact that the climate in northern Italy around 1725 was extremely cold – more like the climate in present day Norway. But "Between the Seasons" also implies that Henning Kraggerud has created bridges between the Vivaldi concertos with compositions of his own, that tie together the whole cycle seamlessly. Kraggerud's music is marvellous *per se* but is even more remarkable in Connection with Vivaldi. Things couldn't be better! [Full Review](#)

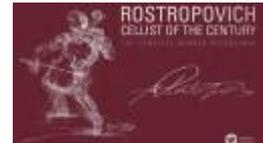


STEPHEN GREENBANK


Johann Sebastian BACH Keyboard works - Rafał Blechacz (piano) rec. 2012-15
DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 4795534

Bach playing doesn't get much better than this; Blechacz is a natural. The performances evince a fusion of intelligent musicianship, formidable technical command, refinement and meticulous attention to detail. His superbly voiced piano and DG's stunning sound and balance all add up to a match made in heaven. I hope he will go on to record more of the composer, maybe the

Partitas. [Full Review](#)

Rostropovich: Cellist of the Century The Complete Warner Recordings
WARNER CLASSICS 9029589230 CD/DVD


This mammoth collection was released by Warner to mark the tenth anniversary of Rostropovich's death. He was the most recorded cellist in history, and this sumptuous and impressive retrospective gives some indication of his wide-ranging repertoire. Both live and studio recordings, the sheer scope of his achievements is astonishing. It's given me many hours of pleasure. [Full Review](#)

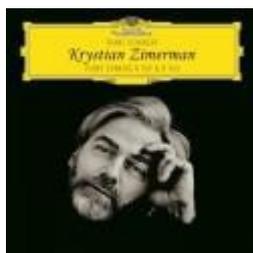

Wanda Luzzato (violin) Unreleased Recordings - rec. 1955/79 **RHINE CLASSICS RH-002**

The metaphor about the two buses definitely applies here. Until this year I'd never heard of the violinist Wanda Luzzato, probably because she never made any commercial recordings. Then, in the space of two months, two sets of live airings come along: a 2-CD set from Meloclassic and this more substantial 8 CD box from Rhine Classics. For violin aficionados like myself, this is a rare treat.

[Full Review](#)

Irma Kolassi (mezzo) *The Decca Recitals* - rec. 1952/56 **ELOQUENCE 482 4637**

I was overjoyed when this box set featuring the Decca legacy of the Greek mezzo-soprano Irma Kolassi appeared this year. I've long been a fan, and have painstakingly collected her recordings over the years. I hope Eloquence's welcome efforts will help bring this wonderful singer to the attention of many more people. [Full Review](#)


Franz SCHUBERT Piano Sonatas D959 & D960 - Krystian Zimerman (piano) rec. 2016 **DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 479 7588**

As he reached his sixtieth birthday, Zimerman made a return rare visit to the studio to record Schubert's last two piano sonatas. These works he has been performing for thirty years, but only now does he feel the time is right to set down his interpretations on disc. All the pianist's qualities are in evidence: immaculate technique and refined and intelligent musicianship. My only regret is that he didn't include the other part of the trilogy, the C minor, D 958. [Full Review](#)

Roger Sacheverell COKE Piano Concertos Nos 3, 4 & 5 - Simon Callaghan (piano)
 BBC Scottish SO/Martyn Brabbins rec. 2016 **HYPERION CDA68173**

Simon Callaghan follows up his pioneering accounts of Roger Sacheverell Coke's solo piano music on the Somm label in 2015 with this compelling recording of Coke's three surviving piano concertos, this time on Hyperion, as part of their Romantic Piano Concerto series. Callaghan's commitment to Coke's cause is to be lauded. Although many will be drawn to the generously lyrical Third Concerto, it is his Fourth that particularly attracts me. It doesn't reveal itself as easily, but on closer listening the rewards are immense. All are first recordings. [Full Review](#)



MICHAEL GREENHALGH



Frédéric CHOPIN *Late Works* - Maurizio Pollini (piano) rec. 2015/16 **DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 4796127**

Taking the Nocturne, op. 62 no. 1, Pollini lets the opening melody flow with poise but also clearly points the density of the texture. All is so unruffled until you're shocked by the sudden dramatic outburst. Here then is a narrative of various moods: now a chilling parade of trills, now a graceful coda, all presented with unassuming mastery. [Full Review](#)

Joseph HAYDN Symphonies Nos 12, 60 and 70 - Il Giardino Armonico/Giovanni Antonini rec. 2016 **ALPHA 674**

In Symphony 60, *Il Distratto*, you can marvel at the exquisitely gentle cantilena of its fifth movement *Adagio* and think it's taming the brutal martial pomp that cuts in from time to time, until the final bars! Antonini is unflappable in all the twists and turns, proving he's the true heir to Goberman, with the greater piquancy of period instruments. [Full Review](#)



Franz SCHUBERT (1797-1828) String Quartet No. 14 **Pyotr Il'yich TCHAIKOVSKY** String Quartet No. 3 - Kopelman Qt rec. 2003 **NIMBUS NI5962**

Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden' quartet is passionately presented by the Kopelman Quartet in this 2003 live performance, yet always maintains a clear exposition and appreciation of the music, urgently and seamlessly delivered. The beauty lies in the raw emotion conveyed, not, abstractly, in the notes. This makes for compelling listening. [Full Review](#)

Shakespeare Songs Ian Bostridge (tenor) Sir Antonio Pappano (piano) Elizabeth Kenny (lute) Michael Collins (clarinet) Lawrence Power (viola) Adam Walker (flute) rec. 2016 **WARNER CLASSICS 9029594473**

The highlight is Finzi's 'Fear no more the heat of the sun', owing to the clarity and sensitivity of the word setting, the pathos and yet firmness with which tragedy is faced and the synergy of Bostridge and Pappano. Almost equally fine, with lutenist Elizabeth Kenny, is Johnson's 'Full fathom five', hovering between wonder and playfulness. [Full Review](#)



Silence & Music British Part Songs - Robert Murray (tenor) Neal Davies (baritone) Tim Roberts (harmonium) Gabrieli Consort/Paul McCreesh rec. 2016 **SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD490**

Here's the brief flashing of Stanford's blue bird across the stillness of lake and sky, Elgar's owls answering 'Nothing' to every question, but these prove to be shatteringly significant questions. Bax gives us a cuckoo actively in flight, Dove a cacophony of birdsong, all realized by McCreesh in vivid performances which

savour every detail. [Full Review](#)

Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS A London Symphony, *Sound Sleep*, *Orpheus with his Lute*, Variations for Brass Band - RCM Brass Band, BBC SO/Martyn Brabbins rec. 2016 **HYPERION CDA68190**

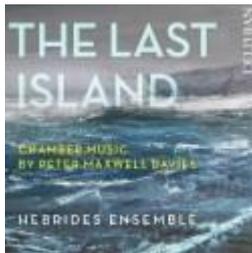
In the slow movement of *A London Symphony* Brabbins achieves a magical suspension of time to appreciate every nuance, in particular the late passage after the reprise of the opening cor anglais solo in this 1920 version when muted strings return more subtly, delicately scored. Brabbins convinces me RVW was wrong to ditch it. [Full Review](#)



RICHARD HANLON

At the end of my first hugely enjoyable year of contributing to this august site it has been a real ear-opener to be exposed to a fair chunk of repertoire I would perhaps have overlooked before I got this gig. And so having heard some 300 new recordings during this time I actually found it surprisingly easy to narrow down my choices firstly to ten discs, then to six, and finally to one. On this occasion the four that just missed the cut were Hyperion's spectacular (and wholly unexpected) recording of Dimitar Nenov's exotic Piano Concerto featuring an explosive contribution from Ivo Varbanov, Naxos' penultimate instalment of their revelatory Villa-Lobos Symphony cycle and two discs I myself was privileged to critique, Arturo Fuentes' String Quartets on Kairos and Harriet Mackenzie's superb Nimbus Alliance anthology of 21st Century Violin Concertos *An Eventful Morning in East London*.

My five 'runners-up' then, in no particular order are ...

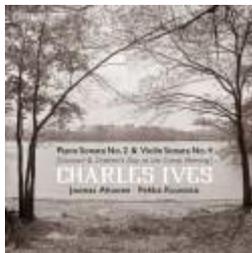
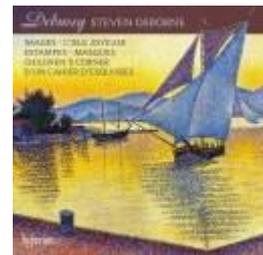


Peter MAXWELL DAVIES *The Last Island* - Hebrides Ens rec. 2017 **DELPHIAN DCD34178**

These works are oddly cool, direct and superbly performed here - as a regular visitor to Orkney I find it impossible not to be moved by them. [Full Review](#)

Claude DEBUSSY *Images, Estampes, Children's Corner* - Steven Osborne (piano) rec. 2016 **HYPERION CDA68161**

Steven Osborne's compelling disc of Debussy's two books of *Images*, the *Estampes* and a stunning account of *L'Isle Joyeuse*, clothed in Hyperion's ideal sound. [Full Review](#)

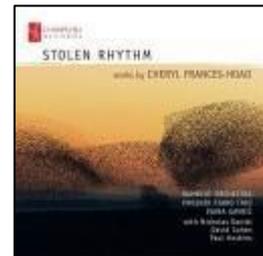


Charles IVES *Concord Sonata, Violin Sonata No. 4* - Joonas Ahonen (piano) Pekka Kuusisto (violin, viola) Sharon Bezaly (flute) rec. 2016 **BIS BIS-2249 SACD**

The brand new recording of Charles Ives' *Concord* sonata on BIS by young Finn Joonas Ahonen, a penetrating interpretation which to my ears clarified this perpetual 'work-in-progress' to an unprecedented degree. [Full Review](#)

Cheryl FRANCES-HOAD *Stolen Rhythm* - David Cohen (cello) Nicholas Daniel (oboe) Ivana Gavrić (piano) Phoenix Piano Trio, Rambert O/Paul Hoskins rec. 2015 **CHAMPS HILL RECORDS CHLCD119**

Next is Champs Hill's third recording of the intriguing music of Cheryl Frances-Hoad, one of British music's brightest stars. There is absolutely nothing forbidding about her work and the two concertos featured on this generously filled disc are outstanding. [Full Review](#)



Salvatore SCIARRINO *Un' imagine de Arpocrate, Giorno velato presso il lago nero* - Tamara Stefanovich (piano) Carolin Widmann (violin) Bavarian RSO/Susanna Mälkki, Jonathan Nott rec. 2013/14 **NEOS 11626**

It's always good to welcome a new Sciarrino disc; NEOS obliged this year with the second recording of what I feel is his masterpiece, the huge, haunting *Un' imagine de Arpocrate* for piano, voices and orchestra – I have to stop myself using the word 'concerto'. This is a magisterial live performance by Tamara Stefanovich and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Susanna Mälkki. [Full Review](#)

Johann Sebastian BACH Goldberg Variations - Beatrice Rana (piano) rec. 2016
WARNER CLASSICS 9029588018

But my disc of the year was pretty well decided months ago when I heard a brief excerpt on Record Review on Radio 3. I don't mind admitting that there are a few accepted 'masterworks' that have consistently eluded both my understanding and appreciation, and in most cases it isn't as though I haven't repeatedly made the effort. I am thrilled to say that Beatrice Rana's glowing, uninhibited and supremely musical account of the Goldberg Variations has finally unpicked this particular lock for me. I am frequently re-assured that this is a work one grows into. That Ms. Rana was but 23 when she made this recording passeth all understanding. It is a disc for the long haul. Thank you Beatrice!! [Full Review](#)



NIGEL HARRIS



An Eventful Morning in East London 21st Century Violin Concertos - Harriet Mackenzie, Philippa Mo (violin) English String O, English SO/Kenneth Woods rec. 2014/17 **NIMBUS ALLIANCE NI6295**

A stimulating sequence of highly imaginative and approachable new works, eloquently performed. [Full Review](#)

Johann Bernhard BACH Overtures - L'Achéron/François Joubert-Caillet (bass viol) rec. 2016 **RICERCAR RIC573**

Gracious, melodious and inventive music performed with verve and polish; an exciting discovery. [Full Review](#)

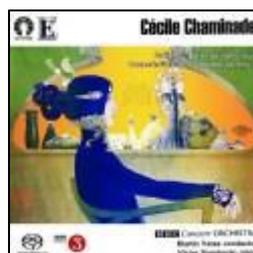


Mieczysław WEINBERG (1919-1996) Chamber Symphonies Nos 1-4, Piano Quintet - Kremerata Baltica/Gidon Kremer (violin), Mirga Grazinyte-Tyla rec. 2015 **ECM NEW SERIES 2538/39**

Some supremely accomplished and surprisingly recent music, given ideal advocacy. [Full Review](#)

IAN LACE

I must preface my choice by including a mention of the collection of scores for the films of Audrey Hepburn released on the Milan label. This was a very welcome return to mid 20th century classic film scores by Mancini, Auric, Villa Lobos, Rota, Waxman, Tiomkin, Alex North and Frederick Hollander with music by Gershwin. But to my 2017 choices ...



Cécile CHAMINADE *Callirhoë*, Concertstück - Victor Sangiorgio (piano), BBC Concert O/Martin Yates rec. 2016 **DUTTON EPOCH CDLX7339 SACD**

Chaminade's charming music for the ballet, *Callirhoë* is captivatingly melodic while the eclectic Concertstück is great fun especially in trying to identify the many Romantic music influences. [Full Review](#)

Mario CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO Piano works - Mark Bebbington (piano) rec. 2003 **SOMM SOMMCD0172**

Castelnuovo-Tedesco was an American immigrant, who escaped the Fascist Europe of the 1930s. Like Korngold, he settled in Hollywood. Here he taught film music and his students included Henry Mancini, Andre Previn, Nelson Riddle, Jerry Goldsmith and John Williams. His piano music, brilliantly played by Mark Bebbington on this SOMM release, is very colourful and evocative and cinematic. [Full Review](#)

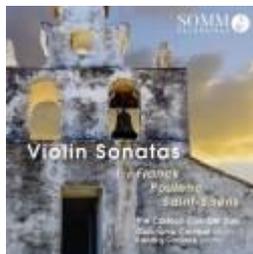


Hector BERLIOZ *Béatrice et Bénédicte* - Stéphanie d'Oustrac, Paul Appleby, Glyndebourne Ch, London PO/Antonello Manacorda rec. 2016 **OPUS ARTE Blu-ray OABD7219D**

Berlioz's *Béatrice et Bénédicte* is a specific realisation of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. It concentrates only on the sparring love/hate relationship between the shrewish Béatrice and the cynical, proudly independent Bénédicte. Stéphanie d'Oustrac's Béatrice is superb: a wild virago spitting defiance and venom at Bénédicte. Paul Appleby as her Bénédicte gives as good as he gets. He is waspish, street-wise and witheringly contemptuous. This Glyndebourne production is a very worthy production of a comic opera that is seldom performed and little known except for its overture. [Full Review](#)

Thousands of Miles Lieder by Korngold, Alma Mahler, Weill & Zemlinsky - Kate Lindsey (mezzo) Baptiste Trotignon (piano) rec. 2016 **ALPHA 272**

An enterprising collection of songs assembled by the singer and her pianist. Kate Lindsey has the most juicy mezzo timbre and riveting delivery, colouring her voice most convincingly to the story line of the songs while pianist Baptiste Trotignon's inspired accompaniments - in themselves, arrangements that enhance texts by Bertold Brecht, Maxwell Anderson and others - often comment on or suggest extra meanings to lift the whole experience. Marvellous. [Full Review](#)



César FRANCK (1822-1890), Francis POULENC (1899-1963) & Camille SAINT-SAËNS (1836-1921) Violin sonatas - Carlock-Combet Duo rec. 2016 **SOMM SOMMCD0169**

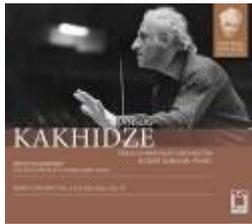
An imaginative and intelligent programme this, all three works performed with style, panache and polish. Perhaps the most interesting is the 1943 Poulenc Sonata. Rather than aiming at Nazis, Poulenc prefers to concentrate, with great effect, on the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s and to eulogise the great Spanish poet, Federico Garcia Lorca, a fatality of that conflict. [Full Review](#)

Sergei RACHMANINOV Piano Concerto No. 3 **Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791)** Piano Concerto No. 23 - Grigory Sokolov (piano) Mahler CO/Trevor Pinnock, BBC Philharmonic/Yan Pascal Tortelier rec. 1995/2005 **DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 4797015 CD/DVD**

My final choice has to be my recording of the year. Sokolov's performance of Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto is one of the most hair-raising ever to appear on disc. It is comparable to the readings of Horowitz and Rachmaninov himself. As Marc Bridle says, "This is a fabulous and absolutely essential release that demands to be heard." [Full Review](#)



ROB MAYNARD



Pyotr Il'yich TCHAIKOVSKY *The Nutcracker*, Piano Concerto no. 1 - Nodar Gabunia (piano) Tbilisi SO/Djansug Kakhidze rec. 1996 **CUGATE CLASSICS CGC034-2**

Evgeny Mravinsky is said to have greatly admired Kakhidze's way with Tchaikovsky and, on the basis of this recording, one can easily see why. This *Nutcracker* oozes theatrical atmosphere, is idiomatically - and superbly - played and has been recorded in first class sound. Among the many sound-only versions, this has now become one of my top choices. [Full Review](#)

Pyotr Il'yich TCHAIKOVSKY *1812 Overture* & works by Sibelius, Liszt, Berlioz & Weber - Philharmonia O/Berlin PO/Herbert von Karajan rec. 1958-60 **MINUET RECORDS 428420**

Here's a desirable selection of delectable Karajan bon-bons, all but one recorded with London's Philharmonia Orchestra in the late 1950s. The exception, a roughly contemporaneous track with the Berlin Philharmonic, confirms that while the conductor was already producing distinctly different results in Germany, his earlier London recordings were just as distinctive in their own way and in no way inferior. [Full Review](#)

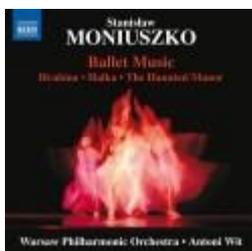


Sergei PROKOFIEV *Romeo and Juliet* - Maria Kochetkova, Davit Karapetyan, Pascal Molat, Luke Ingham, San Francisco Ballet & O/Martin West rec. 2015 **C MAJOR Blu-ray 739104**

This Blu-ray disc is a fitting tribute to star dancer Davit Karapetyan who retired from San Francisco Ballet earlier this year. He and Maria Kochetkova give convincingly moving performances in the leading roles and are strongly supported by the rest of a very accomplished company. Helgi Tomasson's accomplished choreography offers a genuine alternative to other, more familiar versions and this release showcases it in exemplary sound and pin-sharp picture quality. [Full Review](#)

Ignacy Jan PADEREWSKI *The Very Best of Paderewski* rec. 1996-2010 **DUX 1300**

The Polish label Dux has released a great deal of Paderewski's music and here offers a skilfully chosen selection ranging pretty comprehensively across the composer's output. It's a useful opportunity to explore some less familiar yet very enticing byways that may well inspire anyone with a taste for late Romantic repertoire to investigate the full versions of some of the excerpted material. [Full Review](#)



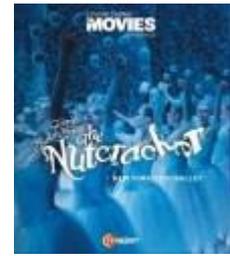
Stanisław MONIUSZKO Ballet music - Warsaw PO/Antoni Wit rec. 2011 **NAXOS 8.573610**

An unexpected delight with track after track of unfamiliar yet engagingly tuneful material, all expertly and idiomatically delivered by Antoni Wit and the Warsaw Philharmonic. Not everything here is strictly "ballet", by any means, but all of it - even a funeral march - is addictively foot-tapping stuff. The dance music that Moniuszko interpolated into Nicolai's *The merry wives of Windsor* is a particular hoot. [Full Review](#)

Pyotr Il'yich TCHAIKOVSKY *George Balanchine's The Nutcracker* - New York City Ballet O/Clotilde Otranto rec. 2011 **C MAJOR Blu-ray 738704**

Ending where I began, here's a good choice for a video or Blu-ray *Nutcracker*. This New York City Ballet production has been revived annually for more than 60 years and it's easy to see its appeal. Balanchine's inventive choreography, high production standards and expert performances from both principals and the *corps de ballet* make this a recorded performance to treasure - and not just at Christmas.

[Full Review](#)



RALPH MOORE

My selections this year are predominately and unashamedly Big Band/High Romantic in taste; indeed, in a year replete with fine recordings of Bruckner from Russell Davies, Haitink, Ballot, Boston and Fischer, and the re-release of Giulini's recording of Bruckner's Second Symphony with the VPO, and new Strauss and Mahler by such as Jansons, van Zweden, I could have included more recordings of this type. I would like, too, to cheat a little by exceeding my quota of six and put in a word for a recording of a completely different type, the Tetzlaff Quartet's Schubert and Beethoven on Ondine, but we are already well served by recordings of those quartets.

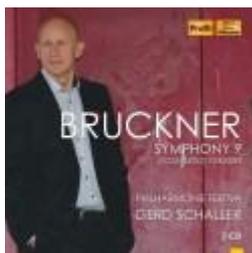


Anton BRUCKNER *Symphony No. 4* - Staatskapelle Dresden/Christian Thielemann rec. 2015 **PROFIL PH16064**

A blazing live performance of a seminal Bruckner symphony in phenomenal sound by arguably the greatest orchestra performing today under a conductor thoroughly immersed in, and sympathetic to, the Brucknerian idiom. [Full Review](#)

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN *Symphonies 1-9 & Overtures* – Gewandhaus O Leipzig/Franz Konwitschny rec. 1959-1961 **EDEL CLASSICS 0002672CCC**

The sheer elan of Konwitschny's conducting in combination with the virtuosity of the Gewandhausorchester impart new life to these perennially fascinating symphonies and overtures. These are traditional but never stodgy accounts on a par with Cluytens' famous BPO set. [Full Review](#)



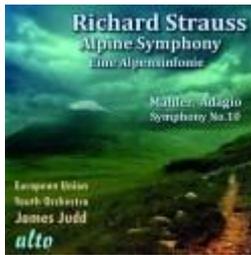
Anton BRUCKNER *Symphony No. 9* - Philharmonie Festiva/Gerd Schaller rec. 2016 **PROFIL PH16089**

Gerd Schaller continues to surprise and delight committed Brucknerians with his series of live recordings made at the Ebrach Musiksommer festival, this time conducting a powerful and convincing Ninth culminating in his own completion of the last movement. [Full Review](#)

Maria Callas – Live Remastered Live Recordings 1949–1964 **WARNER CLASSICS 9029584470**

For all the sometimes justified complaints about whether Warner really did make the greatest effort to obtain the best tape sources and always made the best selection of live recordings, the quality of the remastering and the value of this set make it invaluable to Callas aficionados; she is heard here, sometimes through the veil of poor recorded sound, in her pomp and prime as the greatest singing actress of the 20C. [Full Review](#)





Richard STRAUSS Eine Alpensinfonie **Gustav MAHLER** Symphony No. 10 Adagio
European Union Youth O/James Judd rec. 1991/2 **ALTO ALC1346**

A superlative performance in first-rate sound at a super-bargain price from an unexpected source, presenting a cohesive narrative and supplemented by a riveting performance of the Adagio. [Full Review](#)

Samuel BARBER Adagio for Strings **Anton BRUCKNER** String Quintet -
Konzerthaus CO Berlin rec. 2014/15 **CUGATE CLASSICS CGC013-2 SACD**

A lush indulgence of a recording, beautifully played and presented in rich, deep sound. Both works are orchestral arrangements of the original chamber pieces for strings, providing an alternative way of enjoying and appreciating the composers' melodic gifts. [Full Review](#)



DAN MORGAN

Even though it's not been a vintage year, I still agonised over my final choices. Among the more rewarding releases in 2017 were two from Toccata: Ferenc Farkas's *Music for Wind Ensemble*; and Volume 2 of their Ernst Krenek concerto cycle, with pianist Mikhail Korzhev and the English Symphony under Ken Woods. And then there was Gianandrea Noseda's analogue-sourced Mahler 2 from Turin (Foné); *Recurrence*, a selection of contemporary music from Iceland (Sono Luminus); the original version of Copland's Third Symphony, with Leonard Slatkin and his doughty Detroiters (Naxos); and Ádám Fischer's Düsseldorf Mahler 4 (C-Avi). Among the albums on my shortlist were pianist Romain Descharmes, with Marc Soustrot and the Malmö Symphony, in Saint-Saëns (Naxos); the last of Joseph Nolan's Widor cycle (Signum); and Bernard Haitink's Bruckner 6 with the BRSO (BR Klassik). My half-dozen, in order of publication, are:



Carl NIELSEN The Organ Works - Bine Bryndorf (organ), Torsten Nielsen (baritone) rec. 2016 **DACAPO 6.220635 SACD**

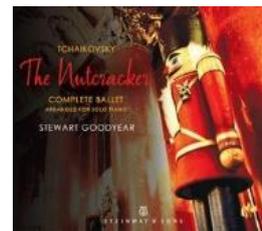
This album may have arrived too late for Nielsen's 150th birthday bash, but it was well worth the wait. These are remarkable pieces, played with authority and style by the Danish organist Bine Bryndorf. As ever, Dacapo's production values are sky high, and that means good documentation and superior sonics.

[Full Review](#)

Pyotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY *The Nutcracker* - Stewart Goodyear (piano) rec. 2015 **STEINWAY & SONS STNS 30040 SACD**

What a thrill it was to hear Stewart Goodyear's masterly transcription of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*. He's true to the spirit of the original, and he plays with breathtaking virtuosity throughout. As for the Sono Luminus recording – for Steinway – it has all the verve and vitality one could wish for. Sheer magic.

[Full review](#)



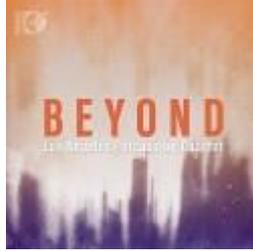
Gustav MAHLER Symphony No. 3 - Gerhild Romberger (alto), Cantemus Children's Ch, Bavarian Radio Ch, Budapest Festival O/Iván Fischer rec. 2016 **CHANNEL CLASSICS CCSSA38817 SACD**

In general, Iván Fischer's Mahler strikes me as somewhat variable. That said, his compelling take on the Third Symphony could be one of the finest things he's ever done. His re-evaluation of a familiar and much-loved score won't please everyone, but I found it both challenging and uniquely rewarding.

Channel's engineering is top-notch, too. [Full Review](#)

Flux Ferio Saxophone Qt rec. 2017 **CHANDOS CHAN10987**

As something of a sax fiend, I rarely pass up the chance of a foursome. *Flux*, the Ferio Saxophone Quartet's debut album, is no exception. It's a varied programme, played with a grace and good humour that makes older, more experienced ensembles seem staid by comparison. Chandos's airy, engaging sound is an added attraction. [Full Review](#)

**Beyond** Los Angeles Percussion Quartet rec. 2016 **SONO LUMINUS DSL-92214 BD-A/CD**

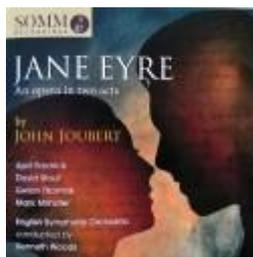
This has been the year of the DSD/DXD download, and *Beyond*, a collection of contemporary pieces played by the Los Angeles Percussion Quartet, is one of the most immersive recordings I've heard in ages. The passion and commitment of this group is beyond doubt, and Sono Luminus have done them – and the music – proud. [Full Review](#)

Kara KARAYEV *The Seven Beauties Suite; Don Quixote; Leyla and Mejnun* - Bournemouth SO/Kirill Karabits rec. 2017 **CHANDOS CHSA5203 SACD**

And finally, another Chandos release, this time of rarely heard ballet music by the Baku-born composer Kara Karayev. Featuring Kirill Karabits and the Bournemouth Symphony, it brims with delectable tunes, lovingly played and luminously recorded. Not only that, it's also delivered with a pleasing blend of generosity and good taste. As I said in my review sign-off, 'a real find'. [Full Review](#)

**JOHN QUINN**

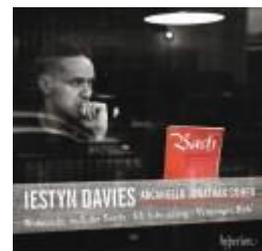
I've heard many terrific recordings in 2017, including several which were issued to celebrate the 90th birthday of John Joubert. Several releases nearly made it on to my list of six but, by fine margins, just missed the cut. Those included Semyon Bychkov's superb Tchaikovsky *Manfred*; Osmo Vänskä's very fine second recording of Sibelius' early *Kullervo*; the ear-opening and stunningly recorded album, *Beyond* by the Los Angeles Percussion Quartet; right at the end of the year, a masterly recital of English song from Roderick Williams and Susie Allan; and an enthralling disc of contemporary anthems by The Marian Consort. I nominate a Joubert birthday release as my personal Recording of the Year; the other distinguished recordings are listed alphabetically.

**John JOUBERT** *Jane Eyre* - April Fredrick, David Stout, English SO/Kenneth Woods rec. 2016 **SOMM SOMMCD263-2**

John Joubert's 90th birthday has been marked by several fine recordings but this account of his most recent opera has to receive pride of place. Recorded live in concert in 2016, the cast, led by April Fredrick as Jane and David Stout as Mr Rochester – both of them excellent – do a marvellous job while Kenneth Woods conducts with complete commitment to the score. This magnificent recording confirms that the neglect of this taut and dramatic opera has been a scandal. We should salute SOMM Records for their achievement in bringing this major recording project to fruition. This is my own Recording of the Year. [Full Review](#)

Johann Sebastian BACH Cantatas BWV54, 82 & 170 - Iestyn Davies (counter-tenor), Arcangelo/Jonathan Cohen rec. 2015 **HYPERION CDA68111**

This is an outstanding disc of Bach's cantatas for solo alto. I'm not sure I've heard Iestyn Davies do anything better than this, and that's saying something. His singing is expressive, nuanced and extremely stylish. He's expertly accompanied by Arcangelo and Jonathan Cohen. The music is, of course, wonderful. [Full Review](#)



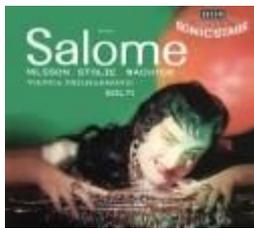
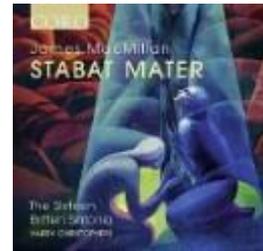


Franz Joseph HAYDN *The Seasons* - Carolyn Sampson (soprano), Gabrieli Consort & Players, Ntl Forum Music Ch, Wrocław Baroque O/Paul McCreesh rec. 2016 **SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD480**

This is another in Paul McCreesh's series of Anglo-Polish recordings and it's another winner. This performance of Haydn's oratorio is on a grand scale and, like the music, it is full of colour, invention and sheer *joie de vivre*. The singing and playing is consistently excellent, with Carolyn Sampson's contributions a particular delight. McCreesh and his colleagues really bring Haydn's life-enhancing music to life. [Full Review](#)

Sir James MacMILLAN *Stabat Mater* - The Sixteen/Britten Sinfonia/Harry Christophers rec. 2014 **CORO COR16150**

James MacMillan's 2016 setting of the *Stabat Mater* is a stunning achievement. This is a score that confronts the listener with the enormity of the events of Christ's crucifixion and the anguish of his mother, forced to look on. I found that each time I listened I was rocked back on my heels. The music grabs you by the throat and never lets go. This first recording by Harry Christophers with The Sixteen and the Britten Sinfonia is as visceral as it is accomplished. [Full Review](#)

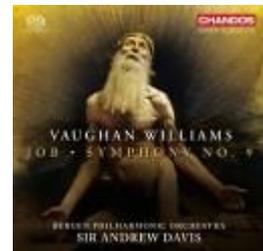


Richard STRAUSS *Salome* - Birgit Nilsson (soprano) Eberhard Wächter (baritone) Gerhard Stolze (tenor) Grace Hoffman (mezzo) Vienna PO/Sir Georg Solti rec. 1961 **DECCA 483 1498 CD/BD-A**

Can a recording made in 1961 qualify as a Recording of the Year in 2017? Yes, when Decca's reissue in Blu-ray Audio makes the recording sound as stunning and realistic as this. The performance is electrifying. It's a triumph for Birgit Nilsson while Solti conducts at times like a man possessed and the VPO play out of their collective skins. I can't believe this celebrated recording has ever sounded better. [Full Review](#)

Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS *Job - A Masque for Dancing, Symphony No. 9* - Bergen PO/Sir Andrew Davis rec. 2016 **CHANDOS CHSA5180 SACD**

Job is one of VW's greatest achievements and should be heard more often. Sir Andrew Davis leads a very fine performance, recorded in superb SACD sound by Chandos. The performance of the underrated Ninth Symphony is also very impressive. [Full Review](#)



MARC ROCHESTER



HILDEGARD von Bingen Choral works - Tiburtina Ens/Barbora Kabátková rec. 2015 **RICERCAR RIC383**

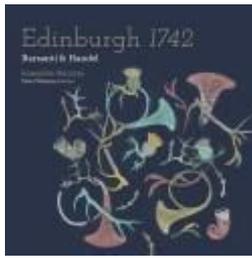
I have not a flickering of a doubt as to which disc goes at the very top of my list for 2017. Hildegard von Bingen may well have been a 12th century nun as distant from her own time as she is from ours, but when her music exudes such utter loveliness as the Tiburtina Ensemble revealed in their beautifully recorded disc for Ricercar, its timeless quality transcends all notions of time and place. [Full Review](#)

Maurice DURUFLÉ *Requiem* **Ottorino RESPIGHI** *Concerto Gregoriano* - Henry Raudales (violin) Bavarian Radio Ch, Munich Radio O/Ivan Repušić rec. 2017 **BR KLASSIK 900320**

Perhaps my favourite single piece of music from the year's crop of CDs was the Duruflé Requiem as performed by the Bavarian Radio Choir and Munich Radio Orchestra. I had never previously really been sold on the full orchestral scoring



of the work, but this was such a sumptuously delivered performance that I was totally won over. [Full Review](#)



Edinburgh 1742 Works by Barsanti & Handel - Alec Frank-Gemmill, Joseph Walters (horns) Ens Marsyas/Peter Whelan rec. 2016 **LINN CKD567**

I was even more won over – gobsmacked would be a better, if less elegant way of putting it – by a disc of Barsanti and Handel performed by Ensemble Marsyas and the French horn pair of Alec Frank-Gemmill and Joseph Walters. Its title – Edinburgh 1742 - was a trifle questionable, but the enormous insight given by Michael Talbot’s booklet notes into a largely forgotten aspect of British music making of the 18th century was more than worth the cost of the disc. In this instance wonderfully vivid playing of tremendous music was the icing on the cake. Lip-smacking stuff! [Full Review](#)

Organ Fireworks World Tour Christopher Herrick (organ) rec. 1984-2009 **HYPERION CDA68214**

Few organists in the age of digital recording have been as impressive as Christopher Herrick. A vast repertoire always beautifully delivered and immaculately presented is the hallmark of his personal discography, and after 25 years Hyperion have paid tribute to him and his iconic Organ Fireworks series. Celebrating this astonishing achievement, they have released a compendium with one track from each of the discs on a single disc which reminds us not only of great playing and brilliant engineering, but of the fabulous organs from around the world which have featured in the series. [Full Review](#)



Siècle Works by Dutilleux, Messiaen, Debussy, Ravel & Saint-Saëns - Leonard Elschenbroich (cello) Alexei Grynyuk (piano) BBC Scottish SO/John Wilson, Stefan Blunier rec. 2016 **ONYX CLASSICS 4173**

Cellist Leonard Elschenbroich and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra got together for an intriguing programme of French music, which looked at the *belle époque* through a couple of concertos (Dutilleux and Saint-Saëns), and assorted chamber works (Messiaen, Debussy and Ravel). The coherence of the programme was not really convincing, but the playing most certainly was. [Full Review](#)

Charles Villiers Stanford Preludes - Sam Haywood (piano) rec. 2016 **HYPERION CDA68183**

It was good for me, as an organist and cathedral musician, to come across Charles Villiers Stanford as a pianist and recital room composer. Sam Haywood’s selection of Preludes from Stanford’s two sets of Preludes in all the keys reinforced the conviction I have that Stanford is not so much a fine composer for the church as a brilliant composer full stop. [Full Review](#)



BOB STEVENSON

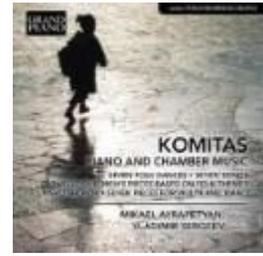


Stephen DODGSON Piano Quintets, String Quintet - Tippett Qt, Emma Abbate (piano), Susan Monks (cello) rec. 2016 **TOCCATA CLASSICS TOCC0357**

I don’t think I can better summarise this disc than by quoting what I said at the time: “There is no competition but, fortunately, all the performances are absolutely splendid and quite beautifully recorded and balanced, with a pleasingly wide sound stage. The piano sound in particular is exemplary. Booklet notes are by John Warrack and are models of their kind. Toccata can be proud of this generously-filled offering which is a very worthwhile and welcome addition to the discography of an unjustly neglected composer”. [Full Review](#)

KOMITAS Vardapet (1869-1935) Chamber works - Mikael Ayrapetyan (piano) Vladimir Sergeev (violin) rec. 2013 **GRAND PIANO GP720**

There are five groups of pieces on this disc, including one of miscellaneous violin and piano pieces. All are splendidly played and each group has its own rewards. For example, Seven Songs for Piano consists of some exquisite little pieces – each based on a named melody. As the booklet aptly puts it: “tiny windows on the gently circling melodies and rhythmic drive of Armenian music”. The sound of the piano on this release initially sounds slightly wrong – very slightly out of tune - until one realises that it, and the luminous acoustic, are absolutely right for this music. I visited Armenia a few years ago and these performances transport me back there – with some of the playing successfully recreating the specific timbres of various ethnic Armenian instruments. The only problem with this CD is that attempting to listen to all the piano music together is rather too much of a good thing. [Full Review](#)



Leo ORNSTEIN (1893-2002) Chamber works - Francesco Parrino (violin) Stefano Parrino (flute) Maud Renier (piano) rec. 2016 **BRILLIANT CLASSICS 95079**

Splendid performances of disparate works, in luminous and generally unimpeachable recordings. What is particularly interesting about this disc is that it provides a very good illustration of the range of styles that Ornstein’s music embodies – not because his style evolved throughout the course of his career, but because he simply wrote exactly what he felt at any time, in the

style that suited it. [Full Review](#)

Carl CZERNY (1791-1857) Piano Concertos, Rondo Brillant - Tasmanian SO/Howard Shelley (piano) rec. 2015 **HYPERION CDA68138**

Howard Shelley has made a quite amazing contribution to the exploration of dark musical corners and, in particular, to unearthing obscure virtuoso concertante piano works. Whilst the music here is by no means great, it is difficult to imagine a very much better performance or recording of it than is to be found on the present disc. [Full Review](#)



JOHAN VAN VEEN



La Belle Vielleuse The virtuoso hurdy gurdy in 18th Century France - Monika Mauch (soprano) Ens Danguy rec. 2016 **RICERCAR RIC382**

Tobie Miller is a brilliant player of the hurdy-gurdy; her command of the instrument is highly impressive. But she is also a fine musician. This disc is much more than a technical demonstration; this is real music. It is one of the most impressive, most surprising and most entertaining productions which I have heard recently. [Full Review](#)

Michael PRAETORIUS Lutheran Choral Concerts - Weser-Renaissance Bremen/Manfred Cordes rec. 2016 **CPO 555 064-2**

Among all the discs which have been released as part of the commemoration of 500 years of Reformation, this is probably the best. This disc is an impressive testimony of Praetorius’s brilliance as a composer of sacred music. It is also a model of a performance that brings out the emotions which Luther and his followers, among them Michael Praetorius himself, must have felt while writing and singing these hymns. [Full Review](#)





Il pianto della Madonna Works by Monteverdi & Frescobaldi - La Compagnia del Madrigale rec. 2014 **GLOSSA GCD922805**

The polyphonic version of the Pianto della Madonna is very important and it receives a brilliant and highly emotional performance. Never the emotions in these pieces are exaggerated; the expression is always carefully balanced. This is a splendid disc which offers something of a new perspective on parts of

Monteverdi's oeuvre. [Full Review](#)

Enlightened Virtuoso Works by Khandoshkin, Paganini, Roman & Rust - Zbigniew Pilch (violin) rec. 2015 **CD ACCORD ACD232-2**

From the angle of repertoire this is a highly important release. Moreover, Zbigniew Pilch shows an impressive technique and it is understandable that he plays in some of the best baroque ensembles of our time. His interpretation is outstanding; he brings every single piece to life and reveals its individual qualities. This is violin playing of the highest order. [Full Review](#)



Johann Sebastian BACH Dialogue Cantatas - Hana Blažíková (soprano) Dominik Wörner (bass) Kirchheimer BachConsort/Alfredo Bernardini (oboe) rec. 2016

There is certainly no lack of recordings of these cantatas, but the present, under the direction of Alfredo Bernardini, is probably the best available right now. That is due to the two excellent soloists. Both Hana Blažíková and Dominik Wörner deliver an incessant interpretation of the text. Even if you have these cantatas in your collection, I urge you to add this disc to it. [Full Review](#)

Gamba Concertos by Abel, J. C. Bach, Johan Carl I, Milling & Raetzel - Thomas Fritsch (viola da gamba) Michael Schönheit (fortepiano) Merseburger Hofmusik rec. 2017 **COVIELLO CLASSICS COV91710**

It does not often happen that all the compositions on a disc are world première recordings, but that is exactly the case here. It is not only the repertoire which makes this disc an attractive proposition. The same goes for the performances. Thomas Fritsch is an outstanding interpreter, who plays the pieces with much imagination and flair; this recording is a most eloquent case for these unknown pieces. [Full Review](#)



JIM WESTHEAD

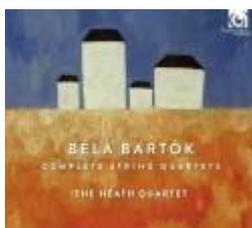


Felix NOWOWIEJSKI Quo Vadis - Podlasi Opera & Philharmonic Ch, Poznań PO/Łukasz Borowicz rec. 2016 **CPO 555089-2**

I was smitten by this splendid recording of a live performance of this mighty, but almost forgotten oratorio. Vivid, colourful, memorable, beautifully and powerfully sung, enthusiastically conducted and played - think of as many estimable adjectives as you like and apply them to this recording. I consider it to be an absolute 'must' for anyone who likes late-romantic oratorio. [Full](#)

[Review](#)

MICHAEL WILKINSON

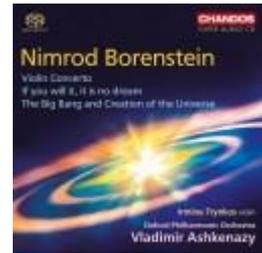


Béla BARTÓK Complete String Quartets - Heath Qt rec. 2016 **HARMONIA MUNDI HMM907661.62**

These performances stand with the very best, thoughtful, humane and - as great quartet playing should be - conversational, both warm and dramatic, capturing Bartók's extraordinary range of moods. Wonderful playing from the remarkable Heath Quartet. [Full Review](#)

Nimrod BORENSTEIN (b. 1969) Orchestral works - Irmina Trynkos (violin)
Oxford PO/Vladimir Ashkenazy rec. 2016 **CHANDOS CHSA5209 SACD**

For sheer pleasure and melodic inventiveness nothing I have heard this year touches this delightful CD - charming and accessible music to discover and enjoy. [Full Review](#)



George LLOYD (1913-1998) Symphonies Nos 6 & 7 -BBC Northern SO/Sir Edward Downes rec. 1979-80 **LYRITA REAM1135**

These recordings, taken from Richard Itter's tapes, represent recordings of world premieres of these two splendid - and too little performed - symphonies. Sir Edward Downes was the most doughty champion of Lloyd's wonderful music, and these performances offer far more than mere historical interest. [Full Review](#)

BRIAN WILSON

As usual, there were several near-misses, such as the Andrew Davis Elgar *Falstaff* (Chandos) where I found the coupling less enticing than on his very fine earlier recording. Another recent release, Hannu Lintu's Sibelius (Ondine) fell out of the last six because the coupled Sibelius songs are not among his best. Some of my choices come not from the main pages but from the occasional round-ups in which I usually have the valuable assistance of Dan Morgan.



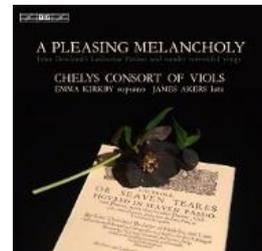
Joan Bautista José CABANILLES Keyboard Music Vol. 1 - Timothy Roberts (organ) rec. 2016 **TOCCATA CLASSICS TOCC0391**

Timothy Roberts' recording of the organ music of Joan Bautista Cabanilles is one of many examples, this and every year, of the sterling work that Toccata are doing to unearth neglected repertoire. If some of the performances are not quite out of the top drawer, that's not true of this recording, and I'm pleased to see that a second volume is due for release in late December 2017.

[Full Review](#)

John DOWLAND *A Pleasing Melancholy* - Emma Kirkby (soprano); Chelys Consort of Viols; James Akers (lute) rec. 2016 **BIS BIS-2283 SACD**

A new BIS SACD of John Dowland and contemporaries, *A Pleasing Melancholy*, challenges my previous recommendation for *Lachrimæ* on an earlier BIS recording from the Lindberg Consort. The participation of Emma Kirkby, still sounding fresh on the new release, clinches the choice for me. [Full Review](#)



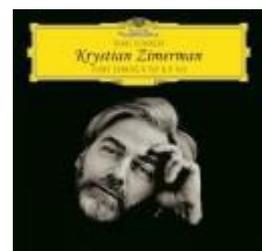
Johann Sebastian BACH *Cantatas for Soprano* - Carolyn Sampson (soprano) Freiburg Baroque O/Petra Müllejjans rec. 2016 **HARMONIA MUNDI HMM902252**

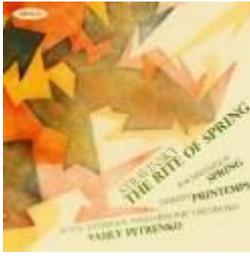
From many very fine JS Bach recordings I choose Soprano Cantatas, sung by Carolyn Sampson with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra. That this recording shone even more brightly than a similar collection sung by Gillian Keith which I reviewed simultaneously (Signum) and that I even preferred Cantata No.202

to Emma Kirkby's recording says it all. [Full Review](#)

Franz SCHUBERT Piano Sonatas D959 & D960 - Krystian Zimerman (piano) rec. 2016 **DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 479 7588**

Any recording of Franz Schubert's posthumous Piano Sonata D960, that rivals the Clifford Curzon classic has to be a statutory choice, especially when the performance is coupled with an equally fine D959. Krystian Zimerman's new recording seems likely to achieve its own classic status. [Full Review](#)





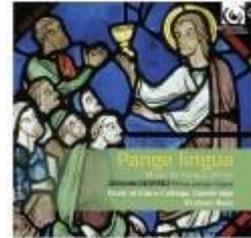
Claude DEBUSSY *Printemps* **Serge RACHMANINOV** *Vesna* **Igor STRAVINSKY** (1882–1971) *Le Sacre du printemps* - Rodion Pogassov (baritone) Royal Liverpool PO & Ch/Vasily Petrenko rec. 2016 **ONYX 4182**

Vasily Petrenko and the RLPO offer a very fine Spring-based programme on Onyx. Their Rite of Spring is as good as any that I've heard, including Stravinsky's own CBS recording, and it's joined by equally revelatory Debussy – the best account of *Printemps* for a long time - and Rachmaninov's Spring

Cantata. [Full Review](#)

Pange lingua *Music for Corpus Christi* - Ch Clare College, Cambridge/Graham Ross Michael Papadopoulos (organ) rec. 2016 **HARMONIA MUNDI HMU907688**

The latest in a series of very fine recordings of music for specific Christian festivals from Clare College and Graham Ross. At the heart is a splendid account of Guillaume Dufay's *Missa Pange Lingua*. My only regret is that, with most of the major festivals covered, there can't be many more similar recordings from this source. [Full Review](#)



JONATHAN WOOLF



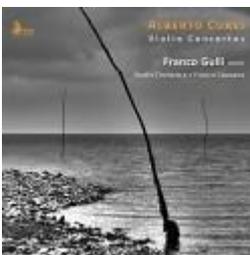
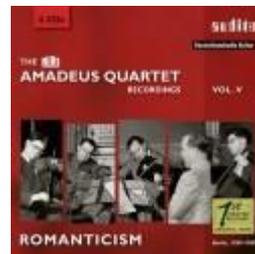
Wanda Luzzato (violin) Unreleased Recordings - rec. 1955/79 **RHINE CLASSICS RH-002**

Rhine Classics is a label devoted to rare and historic material and has made an excellent start to what looks like being a splendid stable of recordings. Wanda Luzzato is the subject of an 8-CD box made all the more valuable because the pupil of the great pedagogue Hubay never made a single studio recording. This lovingly presented box provides irrefutable proof of her status as one of Italy's

greatest string players. [Full Review](#)

Amadeus Quartet *The RIAS Recordings Vol. 5: Romanticism* - Cecil Aaronowitz (viola) Heinrich Geuser (clarinet) Conrad Hansen (piano) rec. 1950-69 **AUDITE 21.425**

Volume 5 in Audite's survey of the Berlin broadcasts of the Amadeus Quartet is undoubtedly the most important yet. Works wholly new to the quartet's discography, superbly performed, ensure that the box is of far more than archival interest. And then there are the three guest artists - Cecil Aronowitz, Heinrich Geuser and Conrad Hansen. A box to savour. [Full Review](#)



Alberto CURCI Violin Concertos 1-3, Suite italiana in stile antico - Franco Gulli (violin) Studio O/Franco Capuana rec. 1963/64 **FIRST HAND RECORDS FHR53**

Alberto Curci's concertos are charming, lyrical and largely undemanding but when played by a master such as Franco Gulli, magic is seldom far away. This restoration is a model of care – from the documentation, to the use of the studio tapes and presentation generally. [Full Review](#)

Carnevale 1729 Ann Hallenberg (mezzo) *Il pomo d'oro*/Stefano Montanari rec. 2016 **PENTATONE PTC5186678 SACD**

I can never get enough of mezzo Ann Hallenberg. The repertoire here includes Albinoni, Porpora and Leo, the singing is vivid and spirited and *Il pomo d'oro* under Stefano Montanari are at the top of their very considerable game. A bucket-load of world premiere recordings only reinforces the communicative currency of this wonderful release. [Full Review](#)



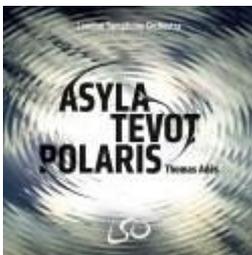


Jean HUBEAU (1917-1992) & Gian Francesco MALIPIERO (1882-1973) Violin Concertos - Henry Merckel (violin) O Ntl de la Radiodiffusion Française/Henri Tomasi rec. 1953/55 **FORGOTTEN RECORDS FR1285**

The Parisian violinist Henry Merckel has been a long-time favourite of mine. Here he's captured in broadcast performances of concertos by Jean Hubeau and Malipiero. The former is played with exceptional succulence and the latter makes a dramatic contrast with that favourite performance (one of very few, admittedly) by André Gertler. It's a real stunner, and Forgotten Records' restorations have done both concertos proud. [Full Review](#)

LESLIE WRIGHT

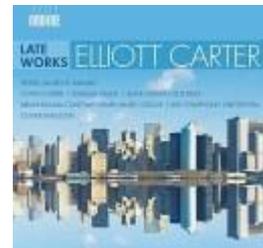
Having perused my list of reviews for 2017 I again found more than six that would be worthy of inclusion here. Among those I could have considered are Berio's Sinfonia with his arrangement of Mahler Lieder on Harmonia Mundi, Ligeti Chamber Works performed by Les Siècles/Roth, Sibelius songs with Gerald Finley on Chandos, Marin Alsop's accounts of Bernstein Symphonies on Naxos and Lutosławski's Cello Concerto with Capuçon on Accentus. However, those I have chosen have continued to give my unalloyed pleasure this year.



Thomas ADÈS *Asyla, Tevot, Polaris, Brahms* - Samuel Dale Johnson (baritone) London SO/Thomas Adès rec. 2016 **LSO LIVE LSO0798 BD-A/SACD**

This composer-led trilogy of orchestral works with the London Symphony only increases one's appreciation of the creator's mastery and provides the best case for including Adès among the most important of living composers. As a bonus, the programme concludes with Adès's witty tribute to Brahms with lyrics by Alfred Brendel. The set comes with both SACD and audio Blu-ray discs in state-of-the-art sound. [Full Review](#)

Elliott CARTER *Late Works* - Pierre-Laurent Aimard (piano) Colin Currie (percussion) Isabelle Faust (violin) Jean-Guihen Queyras (cello) Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, BBC SO/Oliver Knussen rec. 2015/16 **ONDINE ODE1296-2**



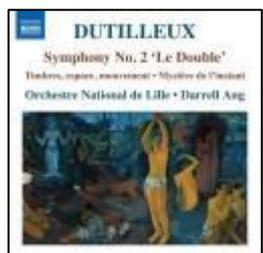
What must surely be the definitive recording of this music for years to come is a cause for celebration. These works, all of which Carter composed from age 95 and beyond, attest to his undiminished vitality, wit, and astounding creativity. It was obviously a labour of love for the performers, including pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard and conductor Oliver Knussen. [Full Review](#)



Antonín DVOŘÁK String Quartet No. 12, String Quintet - Škampa Qt rec. 2015 **CHAMPS HILL RECORDS CHRCD110**

The pairing of these two seminal chamber works does not occur as often as one would expect, largely because the quintet requires the extra violist. Here they are given idiomatic performances by the illustrious Škampa Quartet with guest violist Krzysztof Chorzelski that in their warmth and naturalness leaves nothing to be desired. These accounts can easily serve as reference versions of these pieces. [Full Review](#)

Henri DUTILLEUX Symphony No. 2, *Timbres, espace, mouvement, Mystère de l'instant* - Françoise Rivalland (cimbalom) O Ntl de Lille/Darrell Ang rec. 2015/16 **NAXOS 8.573596**



I am happy to report that Dutilleux's music continues to get worthy attention on disc. I thought Ludovic Morlot and the Seattle Symphony said nearly everything that could be said about this composer. Enter Darrell Ang and Orchestre National de Lille in some of the most exciting and vibrant accounts

this music has yet received. His bold approach has equal validity to Morlot's rather more refined one.

[Full Review](#)



Carl NIELSEN Flute Concerto, Clarinet Concerto, Aladdin Suite - Samuel Coles (flute) Mark van de Wiel (clarinet) Philharmonia O/Paavo Järvi rec. 2015/16
SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD477

This disc gives Alan Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic's recordings of these concertos some stiff competition. The performances, like Gilbert's, are recorded live and the immediacy is palpable, while the sound the engineers have provided is more stunning than that on the DaCapo issue. The accompanying Aladdin Suite does not enhance the issue, but the concertos are what count. [Full Review](#)

Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH Suite on Verses of Michelangelo Buonarroti **Arnold SCHOENBERG** Kol Nidre - Ildar Abdrazakov (bass) Alberto Mizrahi (narrator) Chicago SO & Ch/Riccardo Muti rec. 2012 **CSO RESOUND CSOR9011602**

Granted this is a rather odd coupling, Schoenberg's Kol Nidre with one of Shostakovich's late, great works. While one is not likely to turn often to the Schoenberg with its dramatic narration, the Shostakovich is another matter. Ildar Abdrazakov possesses the deep, rich voice that is perfect for much of this music and he is given outstanding orchestral support by Muti and the Chicago Symphony, especially its resplendent brass. [Full Review](#)

