

## MUSICWEB INTERNATIONAL Recordings Of The Year 2020

---

This is the eighteenth 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 2019-November 2020).

The 146 selections have come from 28 members of the team and 69 different labels, the choices reflecting as usual, the great diversity of music and sources; I say that every year, but still the spread of choices surprises and pleases me.

Of the selections, ten have received two nominations:

- Eugene Ormandy's Saint-Saëns Organ symphony on Dutton
- Choral music by Jančevskis on Hyperion
- Stephen Hough's Beethoven concertos on Hyperion
- Lutosławski symphonies on Ondine
- Stewart Goodyear's Beethoven concertos on Orchid Classics
- Maria Gritskova's Prokofiev Songs and Romances on Naxos
- Giandrea Noseda's Dalapiccola *Il Priogioniero* on Chandos
- Les Kapsber'girls *Che fai tù?* on Muso
- Edward Gardner's *Peter Grimes* on Chandos
- Véronique Gens recital *Nuits* on Alpha

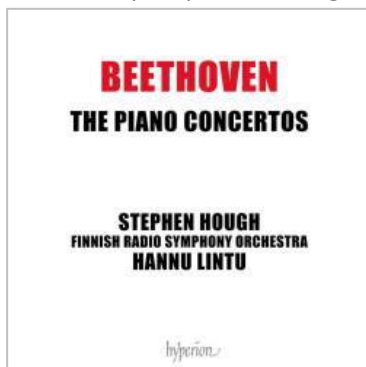
Hyperion was this year's leading label with 16 nominations, and Chandos with 11 deserves an honourable mention.

---

### MUSICWEB INTERNATIONAL RECORDING OF THE YEAR

---

In this twelve-month period, we published more than 2300 reviews. There is no easy or entirely satisfactory way of choosing one above all others as our Recording of the Year.



**Ludwig van BEETHOVEN** Piano Concertos 1-5 - Stephen Hough (piano), Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra/Hannu Lintu rec. 2019  
**HYPERION CDA68291/3**

It being a big Beethoven anniversary year, that seemed to provide a clue as to where to look for a choice. There are two Beethoven piano concerto cycles among the list of doubly-nominated recordings and I have opted for Stephen Hough's, mainly to acknowledge the Hyperion label for its stellar year in gaining sixteen nominations, far more than the best achieved by a label in recent years.

---

### LEN MULLENGER (FOUNDER)

---



**Sir John Barbirolli – The complete Warner recordings** rec. 1928-1970  
**WARNER 9029538608** [109 CDs]

This was a purely speculative purchase. 109 CDs, many of recordings I have had in my collection for years. Was I just wasting my money? Well let's clear out of the way that not one of these are Warner recordings and it is insulting for them to claim that they are. These are EMI recordings stretching back to the days of the 78. Listening to the Elgar First Symphony and the Mahler 9<sup>th</sup> reveals how magnificent those original recordings were, but they now sound as if someone has had a go with the Duraglit. They shine and reveal much more detail than the original EMI CD releases. Ralph Moore has already commented on the transformation of Janet Baker's *Sea Pictures* [review](#). Shop around because there can be a difference of £100 in the prices. Also be quick, this is a limited edition. [Full Review](#)

---

**ROB BARNETT (FOUNDING EDITOR)**


---

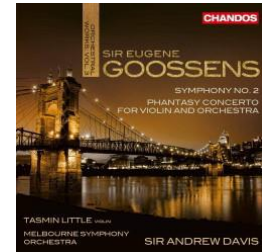


**Frédéric d'ERLANGER and Thomas DUNHILL** Piano Quintets - Goldner String Quartet, Piers Lane (piano) rec. 2019 **HYPERION CDA68296**

Rejecting the time-tired formula of coupling one obscure work with one starry familiar, this disc presents two full-on works of romantic turbulence. [Full Review](#)

**Eugene GOOSSENS** Phantasy Concerto, Symphony No.2 – Tasmin Little (violin), Melbourne SO/ Andrew Davis rec. 2018/19 **CHANDOS CHSA5193**

Chandos continue their well-paced Goossens cycle and give us the first ever recording of the mercurial and out of its time Violin Phantasy Concerto. The *Cowboy Fantasy* next? [Full review](#).

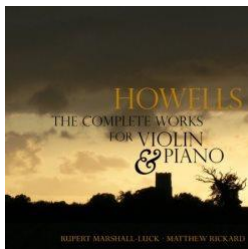
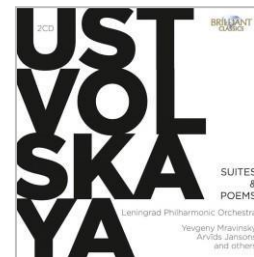


**Jean SIBELIUS** Incidental Music – Turku PO/Leif Segerstam rec. 2014 **NAXOS 8.506032**

This handsome 6-CD set which appears as an edition presenting Sibelius is an overwhelming listening experience of often unfamiliar vignettes. Far more magic, some familiar moments and little that is prosaic. Enjoyable. [Full review](#)

**Galina USTVOLSKAYA** Suites and Poems – Leningrad PO/Yevgeny Mravinsky, Arvids Jansons rec. 1950s-2016 **BRILLIANT CLASSICS 96084**

Don't expect revolutionary Ustvolkskaya. This is mostly Soviet-era populism but vivid and imaginative. It will appeal to those already won over by the cinema music of Shostakovich and Khachaturian. [Full Review](#)



**Herbert HOWELLS** Complete Works for Violin and Piano – Rupert Marshall-Luck (violin) Matthew Rickard (piano) rec. 2013 **EM RECORDS EMRCD019-20**

Jousting for its place here with the superb Hyperion Howells *Missa Sabrinensis* under David Hill, this set wins out on compositional and performer merits. [Full review](#)

**Friedrich BRUK** Orchestral Music Vol. 2 – Liepāja SO, Lithuanian State SO/Māris Kupčs rec. 2019 **TOCCATA CLASSICS TOCC0543**

Too easy to lose this one in the thickets and bracken. In the 1990s Bruk was kind enough to send me private recordings of some of his symphonies. This second volley from the ambition-achieving Toccata shows this composer as a master of seriousness and sincerity, angularity and warmth. [Full Review](#)




---

**STEPHEN BARBER**


---

I would have liked to recommend Janowski's new recording, his second, of Weber's *Der Freischütz*. The singing is excellent, but the producer has incomprehensibly substituted a cheesy narration for the original dialogue. Nikolai Tcherepnin's *Narcisse et Echo* is an attractive work from the composer who was displaced for Diaghilev by Stravinsky. Edward Gardner's coupling of Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande* and his monodrama *Erwartung*, with the excellent Sara Jakubiak, offers fine performances but in an inappropriate coupling and with no translation of the German text. The following are my recommendations.

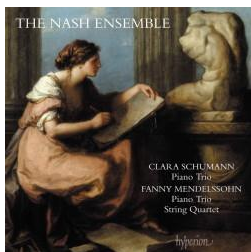


**Witold LUTOSŁAWSKI** Symphonies 2 & 3 - Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra/Hannu Lintu rec. 2018 **ODINE ODE1332-5 SACD**

Lutosławski's symphonies are now standard repertoire, at least as far as recordings are concerned. Here we have the best I have yet heard of the Second, making it sound more coherent and less experimental than previously. And there is a thrilling performance of the Third, arguably the composer's masterpiece. [Full Review](#)

**Ludwig van BEETHOVEN** Piano Concertos 1-5 - Stephen Hough (piano), Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra/Hannu Lintu rec. 2019 **HYPERION CDA68291/3**

Hough is both a highly intelligent pianist and also a sensitive artist with a wide expressive range which encompasses the many moods of these protean concertos. He can be playful or gruff, spin a long lyrical line or pound out the virtuoso passages as required. Lintu offers good accompaniments and there is not a trace of routine about these performances. [Full Review](#)



**Clara SCHUMANN & Fanny MENDELSSOHN** Piano Trios, String Quartet - The Nash Ensemble rec. 2019 **HYPERION CDA68307**

Clara Schumann was a child prodigy. In her lifetime she was better known than her husband Robert and she had a successful career as a concert pianist. She wrote little chamber music and the piano trio here is the finest. It also inspired Robert's works in the medium. Fanny Mendelssohn was also greatly gifted but wrote little. Her string quartet is a fierce piece, in the mood of German romanticism. Her piano trio is one of her last works, also bold and forceful and a good companion to her friend Clara's. Fine performances of worthwhile works. [Full Review](#)

**Detlev GLANERT** *Oceane* - Maria Bengtsson (soprano), Chorus and Orchestra of Deutsche Oper Berlin/Donald Runnicles rec. 2019 **OEHMS OC985**

Detlev Glanert is well-established as an opera composer in Germany, where he seems to be taking on the mantle of Henze. *Oceane* tells the fairytale-like story of a mysterious woman from the sea, a Melusine figure, who comes from the sea and tries but fails to fit into the human world. Much of the music is wonderfully beautiful and it is also very varied. Despite the absence of a translation of the libretto I could not fail to include this successful and enjoyable modern opera. [Full Review](#)

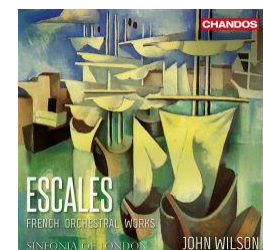


**Fryderyk CHOPIN** Piano Sonata No. 3, Ballades - Joanna Ławrynowicz (piano) rec. 2005-2011 **ACTE PREALABLE AP0310**

Joanna Ławrynowicz has recorded the whole of Chopin over a period of years for the Acte Préalable label, and on the basis of this disc, the only one of the series I have heard, she has justified the faith put in her. She has thought through every aspect of these very demanding pieces and come up with interpretations which are no way odd or eccentric but which illuminate the music and convey a strong narrative sense. [Full Review](#)

**Escales** French Orchestral Works - Sinfonia of London/John Wilson rec. 2019 **CHANDOS CHSA5252 SACD**

This collection is a delight. There are some well-known works, such as Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and Chabrier's *España*, and some relative rarities such as Ibert's *Escales* – a much more sultry work than one associates with him – and Duruflé's *Trois Danses*, a real discovery which I have played again and again. Polished and exuberant performances. [Full Review](#)





---

**DAVID BARKER**


---

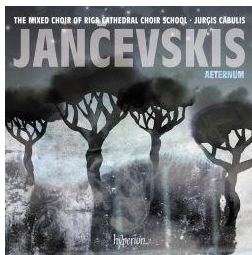
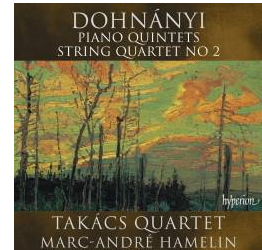


**Asier Polo (cello)** Cello Concertos by Boccherini, Haydn & Vivaldi - Orquesta Barroca de Sevilla rec. 2019 **IBS CLASSICAL**

This was such a surprise. I'd not heard of the soloist, and only requested it because of a love of the Haydn concertos. All four works are given wonderful performances: Spanish cellist Asier Polo showed great flair and musicality, but it was the orchestra that perhaps dazzled me even more. [Full Review](#)

**Ernő DOHNÁNYI** Piano Quintets, String Quartet - Takács Quartet, Marc-André Hamelin (piano) rec. 2018 **HYPERION CDA68238**

Hyperion throw their big guns at these underappreciated works and composer, and it comes off magnificently. Each time I listen the music of Dohnányi, I feel I really should investigate his output further. He deserves greater recognition, especially in the concert hall. [Full Review](#)



**Jēkabs JANČEVSKIS** Choral Music - Mixed Choir of Riga Cathedral Choir School/Jurgis Cābulis rec. 2018/19 **HYPERION CDA68328**

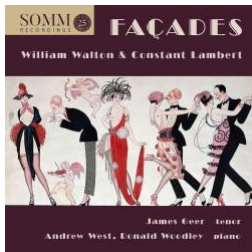
Without doubt my discovery of the year. I hadn't listened to much contemporary choral music before reading a review of this by a colleague. Because it included a work based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which was relevant to a talk I was preparing at the time, I decided to try it out. I am so glad I did, and will be cautiously exploring the genre further. [Full Review](#)

---

**NICK BARNARD**


---

As ever, for a disc of the year status I require a revelation. Whether of repertoire, interpretation or all-round excellence I want the best discs to stop me in my listening tracks. Only three discs this year really fitted this bill. Here they are in the order they were reviewed:



**Sir William WALTON, Constant LAMBERT** Facades etc - James Geer (tenor), Andrew West, Ronald Woodley (piano) rec. 2019 **SOMM RECORDINGS SOMMCD0614**

A typically excellent disc from SOMM. Skilfully programmed, wonderfully played and beautifully presented. A disc that combines listening pleasure with musical insights. [Full Review](#)

**Claude DEBUSSY** Orchestral Works – Hallé Orchestra/Sir Mark Elder rec. 2018/2019 **HALLÉ CDHLL7554**

Music of great familiarity but presented with such sensitivity and flair and gorgeously played. Mark Elder's set of Debussy recordings with the Hallé are a highlight of his impressive discography there. [Full Review](#).

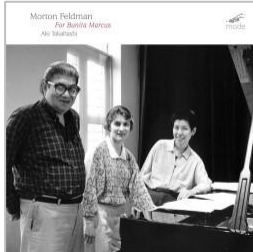


**Ottorino RESPIGHI** Roman Trilogy - Sinfonia of London/John Wilson rec. 2019 **CHANDOS CHSA5261 SACD**

Surely, we do not require another recording of Respighi's most popular works? The answer is no... right up to the moment you hear this disc. John Wilson and the reformed Sinfonia of London are simply sensational from first to last, backed up by Chandos' finest recording that I have heard from them in years. A disc worth annoying the neighbours with. My single 'best' disc of the year by a distance. [Full Review](#)

## DOMINY CLEMENTS

As the years go on, I find myself less tolerant of the 'same old, same old', and while I appreciate and admire Beethoven as much as the next person I more often than not find myself gravitating towards the polarising effects of newness and exploration - modern or obscurely ancient. Going through my list of reviews in 2020, these are a few that made a lasting impression.



**Morton FELDMAN** *For Bunita Marcus* - Aki Takahashi (piano) rec. 2007 **MODE 314**

Aki Takahashi gave the première of *For Bunita Marcus* and her playing became the inspiration for Morton Feldman's later chamber works with piano. Few recordings can lay claim to being definitive, but this becomes hard to refute when it comes to this intensely beautiful performance. [Full Review](#)

**Lament** Works by Asheim, Hagen & Nordheim - Norwegian Soloists' Choir/Grete Pedersen, Daniel Paulsen, Terje Viken, Hans-Kristian Kjos Sørensen (percussion), Ensemble Allegria rec. 2018/19 **BIS BIS-2431 SACD**

*Lament* is the kind of album that can get inside your head and haunt your imagination long after you've heard it. It has a superb balance between drama, beauty, time suspended and surreal imagery, all performed with utter conviction and recorded in immersive SACD sound. [Full Review](#)

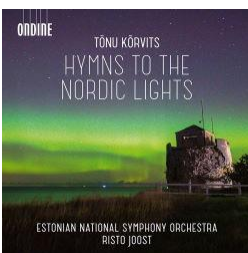
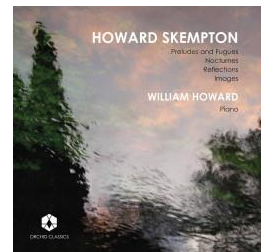


**Maxim SHALYGIN** *Todos los fuegos el fuego* - Amstel & Keuris Quartets rec. 2019 **TRPTK RECORDS TTK0050**

Maxim Shalygin singlehandedly resurrected my interest in the possibilities of the saxophone quartet, giving it new sounds and expressive potential with effects that, quite simply, deliver terrific music. [Full Review](#)

**Howard SKEMPTON** *Preludes and Fugues, Nocturnes, Reflections, Images* - William Howard (piano) rec. 2019 **ORCHID CLASSICS ORC100116**

Howard Skempton's brief but highly personal and always effective piano pieces are an inspiration, especially when played as well as they are in this fine recording with William Howard. [Full Review](#)



**Tõnu KÕRVITS** *Hymns to the Nordic Lights* - Estonian National Symphony Orchestra/Risto Joost rec. 2015-19 **ONDINE ODE1349-2**

Tõnu Kõrvits' compositional voice is very much one that invites rather than repels the listener, creating gorgeous sounds to go along with imaginatively conceived and expressively grounded material and restoring one's faith in the value and power of good contemporary music. [Full Review](#)

**Johann Sebastian BACH** *Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin* - Atilla Aldemir (viola) rec. 2019 **CYBELE RECORDS 2SACD321903**

Atilla Aldemir's Bach impressed on first hearing and has grown on me ever since. Superbly recorded, the deep tone of the viola gives the *Sonatas and Partitas* added expressive dimensions, but on any instrument these are performances full of eloquence and poetry. [Full Review](#)



## MICHAEL COOKSON

**Véronique Gens (soprano) *Nuits* - I Giardini rec. 2019 ALPHA CLASSICS 589**

My Record of the Year is a pretty straight forward choice. Standing out with her latest recital album 'Nuits' ('Nights') is soprano Véronique Gens. Undoubtedly a voice I never tire of hearing, Gens revels in this collection of enchanting French *mélodies*. With a theme of exploring the different ways in which poets have described nightfall and dreams this enticing programme focuses on *mélodies* with piano quartet accompaniment. In her prime and singing in her native language Gens demonstrates glorious form in such beguiling repertoire. [Full Review](#)

**Richard WAGNER *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* - Georg Zeppenfeld, Sächsischer Staatsopernchor Dresden, Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden/Christian Thielemann rec. 2019 PROFIL EDITION PH20059**



Conducted by Christian Thielemann this production of 'Meistersinger' from the 2019 Osterfestspiele, Salzburg received fairly mixed reviews primarily owing to bewilderment and disenchantment with Jens-Daniel Herzog's staging. I find the atmosphere produced to be special and everything works extremely well as a whole. This wouldn't be my model 'Meistersinger' cast, nevertheless the principals are in splendid form and combine together so well with utmost sincerity. A seasoned Wagnerian, Thielemann ensures a keen feeling for dramatic balance from his soloists, Dresden orchestra and chorus. [Full Review](#)



**Dimensionen Innenwelt** Marlis Petersen (soprano), Stephan Matthias Lademann (piano), Gregor Hübne (violin) rec. 2019 SOLO MUSICA SM316

On every occasion German soprano Marlis Petersen sings, it feels as if she is determined to give the greatest performance of her life. In this recital album ('Inner World') the soprano displays her special talent for Lieder and Mélodie the genre of art song she loves to perform. Last year in Munich I saw Petersen give a great performance as Strauss' 'Salome' that redeemed a bewildering staging. I have only admiration for Petersen and recital partner Stephan Matthias Lademan for creating this compelling album. [Full Review](#)

**Piotr Beczala (tenor) *Vincerò!* - Orquestra de la Comunitat Valenciana/Marco Boemi rec. 2019 PENTATONE PTC5186733 SACD**



Following on the heels of his album of Polish songs, Polish lyric tenor Piotr Beczala returns to the world of opera. With this album of Italian verismo arias from Mascagni, Cilea, Leoncavallo, Giordano and Puccini, Beczala tackles what is for him new and challenging repertoire. He delivers his trademark warm and attractive tone with arias of a weighty, dramatic character and emotional depth by some of the most celebrated heroes in opera. [Full Review](#)



**Ermonela Jaho (soprano) *Anima Rara* - Orquestra de la Comunitat Valenciana/Andrea Battistoni rec. 2019 OPERA RARA ORR253**

On the opera stage Ermonela Jaho the Albanian-born soprano is noted for her thrilling performances and the total emotional involvement given to her roles. For this, her eagerly anticipated debut recital album 'Anima Rara' ('Rare Soul'), she focuses on the Italian Verismo style. In this collection Jaho is honouring the career of Venetian lyric soprano Rosina Storchio (1872-1945). I find it futile to withstand the lure of this special soprano. [Full Review](#)

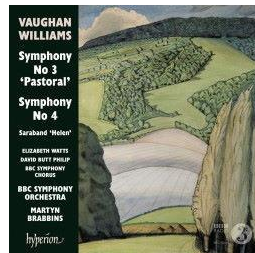


**Reynaldo HAHN** *L'Île du rêve* - Hélène Guilmette, Chœur du Concert Spirituel, Münchner Rundfunkorchester/Hervé Niquet rec. 2020 **BRU ZANE BZ1042**

With this new CD-book release Palazzetto Bru Zane continues its objective of rediscovering and reviving French stage works. This is the world premiere recording of Hahn's enchanting opera, described as an *Idylle Polynésienne*. Hahn was only seventeen when in 1891 he commenced *L'Île du rêve* and twenty-three when it was premiered at the Opéra-Comique, Paris. In France, musical theatre had responded enthusiastically to oriental topics which remained in vogue for several decades. Hahn too was also enamoured by oriental themes and *L'Île du rêve* is set on the Pacific island of Tahiti, an exotic locale then part of French Polynesia. Hahn's relative youth is no barrier as it is a beautiful opera which many mature composers would be proud to have written and it is eminently enjoyable from the first note to the last. [Full Review](#)



## PAUL CORFIELD GODFREY



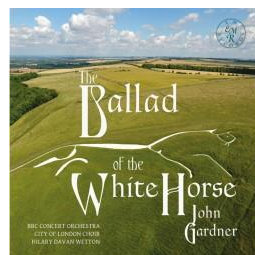
**Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS** Symphonies 3 & 4, *Saraband 'Helen'* - BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra/Martyn Brabbins rec. 2018 **HYPERION CDA68280**

The two symphonies are given superlative performances under Martyn Brabbins, as one might expect, but the real highlight on this disc is the world première of the *Helen* Saraband, a setting of Marlowe hitherto totally unknown and anticipating the composer's later developments in quite startling ways. [Full](#)

### [Review](#)

**Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART** *Idomeneo* - Eric Cutler (tenor), Teatro Real Chorus and Orchestra/Ivor Bolton rec. 2019 **OPUS ARTE OABD7276D Blu-ray**

In a year that has produced some quite horrendous video releases, this was a blessed relief – a modern updated staging that at the same time enhanced the music and did not fight against it. Indeed, it provided a real sense of dramatic involvement to a score that I had always wrongly regarded as a work of classical restraint. [Full Review](#)



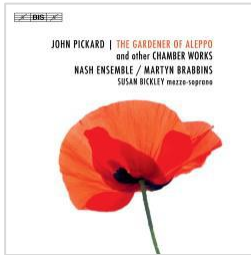
**John GARDNER** *The Ballad of the White Horse, An English Ballad* - City of London Choir, Paulina Voices, BBC Concert Orchestra/Hilary Davan Wetton rec. 2017 **EM RECORDS EMR CD057**

This first recording of the attractive English choral work based around the victory of King Alfred over the Danes effectively reveals a masterpiece that was only hinted at in the previously available online taping of the first performance many years ago. The filler remains a puzzle, though. [Full Review](#)

**Kalevi AHO** *Sieidi*, Symphony No. 5 - Colin Currie (percussion), Lahti Symphony Orchestra/Dima Slobodenoiuk rec. 2017/20 **BIS BIS-2336 SACD**

In my review I noted that I would not wish to undergo the traumatic experience of listening to Aho's *Fifth Symphony* too frequently. But since writing that I *have* listened to it again, twice, and am pleased to report that the overwhelming power of its dramatic engagement does not wear off with increased familiarity. The percussion concerto *Siedi* is pretty good, too. [Full Review](#)





**John PICKARD** *The Gardener of Aleppo* & other chamber works - Susan Bickley (mezzo-soprano), Nash Ensemble/Martyn Brabbins rec. 2018 **BIS BIS2461 SACD**

A rewarding collection of chamber music from a period of thirty years and more, ranging from the deathly serious depiction of the title character, a victim of the Syrian wars, to more light-hearted pieces. *The Phagotus of Afranio* is a hoot, a genuinely funny piece which invites instant repetition. [Full Review](#)

**Michael CSÁNYI-WILLS** Symphony No. 1 - Cardiff University Symphony Orchestra/Mark Eager rec. 2020 **PRIMA FACIE PFCD136**

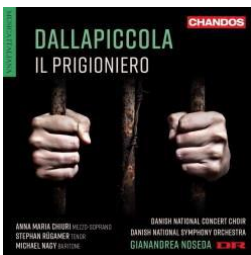
From a well-established symphonist, to a beginner. I have followed the music of this composer with interest for some years now, and his first essay into symphonic form is a significant milestone in his career. The performance, by a student body, is also well worthy of mention and the presentation is excellent.

[Full Review](#)



## HUBERT CULOT

I have been able to listen to a number of new records over the last twelve months and many of them were very fine indeed but, amongst the ones I listened to, very few were meeting the criteria set for being cited as Recording of the Year. However, one of them definitely stood out for me.



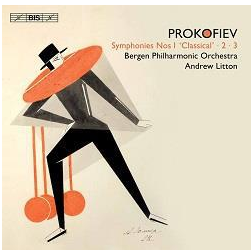
**Luigi DALLAPICCOLA** *Il Prigioniero* - Stephen Rügamer, Danish National Concert Choir, Danish National Symphony Orchestra/Gianandrea Noseda. rec. 2019 **CHANDOS CHSA5276 SACD**

This superb release of what is one of the unquestionable masterpieces of the 20<sup>th</sup> century really stands above all the rest for the wholehearted commitment of all concerned: splendid singing from soloists and chorus alike and immaculate playing on the orchestra's part, the whole recorded in Chandos'

best sound. The chorus also deserves a tip of the hat for their top-class performances of the two unaccompanied works that are much more than fill-ups. Definitely, this is the finest release that has come my way over the last months. [Full Review](#)

## ROBERT CUMMINGS

While selecting a handful of the best recordings from the fifty-plus that I've reviewed over the past year is always quite a challenge, it's also a task I love doing, mainly because I get to revisit my recent favorite recordings. Here are my choices in order of preference.



**Sergei PROKOFIEV** Symphonies 1-3 - Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra/Andrew Litton rec. 2015/17 **BIS BIS-2174 SACD**

This recording of these three Prokofiev symphonies made the top of my list for the following reasons: the performances and sound are excellent; I love these works, especially the intractable Second Symphony; and BIS provides 86:33 worth of music. A winner on every count! [Full Review](#)

**Ludwig van BEETHOVEN** The Complete Piano Concertos - Stewart Goodyear (piano) BBC National Orchestra of Wales/Andrew Constantine rec. 2018 **ORCHID CLASSICS ORC100127**

I would never have expected that a new cycle of Beethoven's ubiquitous piano concertos by the team of Stewart Goodyear and Andrew Constantine leading the BBC NO of Wales to deliver one of the very finest versions ever put on record, but here it is for all to admire. A marvelous achievement by all parties!

[Full Review](#)







**Johannes BRAHMS** *Ein Deutsches Requiem* – Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen & State Choir Latvija/Paavo Järvi rec. 2018 **C MAJOR/UNITEL Blu-ray 753303**

Though there are many fine versions of this Brahms masterpiece on CD, this one on video has become my favorite, at least for now. It seems Paavo Järvi has grown in wisdom and stature over the years, while his repertory on disc widens. His Brahms Requiem is certainly a performance to cherish. [Full Review](#)

**Gustav MAHLER** *Symphony No. 2 - Munich Philharmonic Orchestra/Gustavo Dudamel* rec. 2019 **UNITEL EDITION Blu-ray 802904**

This is a tremendously exciting Mahler Second, captured well by the engineers, both in its audio and video aspects. It is especially remarkable since it is derived from a single live performance. You can almost feel the electricity in the air during the performance. [Full Review](#)



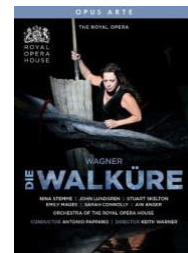
**Sergei PROKOFIEV** *Songs and Romances* - Margarita Gritskova (mezzo-soprano), Maria Prinz (piano) rec. 2019 **NAXOS 8.574030**

Among song collections on disc this past year this was certainly one that stood out in my mind. This is an extremely well performed effort, both by the singer and pianist. Prokofiev song discs are not particularly common, but over the years there have been some very impressive efforts. This is the best I've yet encountered. [Full Review](#)

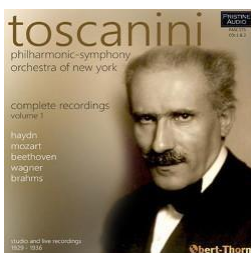
**Richard WAGNER** *Die Walküre* – Nina Stemme, John Lundgren, Royal Opera House Orchestra/Antonio Pappano rec. 2018 **OPUS ARTE DVD OA1308D**

This performance features excellent singing and is brilliantly led by Antonio Pappano. Some Wagner traditionalists might object to aspects of the production, but overall this is a huge success that should be of great interest to admirers of the composer.

[Full Review](#)



## DAVID DUNSMORE



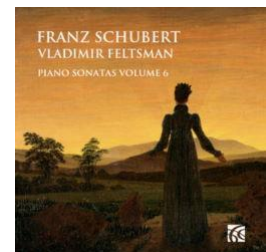
**Arturo Toscanini** Complete Recordings - Volume 1 – Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York, NBC Symphony Orchestra /Arturo Toscanini rec. 1929-36 **PRISTINE AUDIO PASC575**

These recordings have meant a great deal to me, since I first heard them over 30 years ago. They have never sounded better and all lovers of great music making should acquire these ASAP. [Full Review](#)

**Franz SCHUBERT** Piano Sonatas - Volume 6 - Vladimir

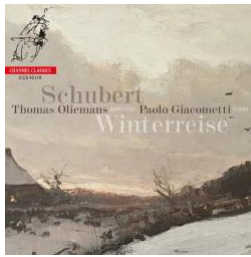
Feltsman (piano)  
rec. 2014/19 **NIMBUS ALLIANCE NI6392**

I've had the pleasure of reviewing five volumes of Vladimir Feltsman's survey of Schubert's Piano Sonatas. They are all consistently of a very high standard and show great individuality. I'm looking forward to reviewing the remaining Volume 5. These join a very select group of fine recordings of these special works. [Full Review.](#)



## GÖRAN FORSLING

As usual, my reviewing diet has mainly consisted of vocal music and this year has been an uncommonly good year for art songs. Several excellent issues missed the final cut by a hair's breadth, the most regrettable loss being Peter Mattei's *Winterreise*.



**Franz SCHUBERT** *Winterreise*, Thomas Oliemans (baritone), Paolo Giacometti (piano) rec. 2018 **CHANNEL CLASSICS CCS42119**

Several good *Winterreise* recordings came my way during this period but it was Oliemans' that touched me the most. [Full Review](#)

**Johannes BRAHMS** *The Songs Vol. 9* - Robin Tritschler (tenor) Harriet Burns (soprano), Graham Johnson (piano) rec. 2018 **HYPERION CDJ33129**



Tritschler's disc, *Songs First Cycle* (January 2020) was truly stimulating but his contribution to Hyperion's complete Brahms cycle was even better. It is certainly one of the best Brahms recording in recent times. [Full Review](#)



**Sergey PROKOFIEV** *Songs and Romances* - Margarita Gritskova (mezzo-soprano), Maria Prinz (piano) rec. 2019 **NAXOS 8.574030**

Prokofiev's songs are rare visitors to the recording studios and this issue was an eye-opener to me, not least thanks to Margarita Gritskova's deeply involved singing. This is a worthy sequel to her previous disc of Russian songs. [Full Review](#)

**Samuel Mariño (soprano)** *Care pupille* -

Händelfestspielorchester Halle/Michael Hofstetter rec. 2019 **ORFEO C998201**

Samuel Mariño's beautiful soprano voice and superb technical skill really floored me. A distinguished debut disc. [Full Review](#)



**Robert SCHUMANN** *Lieder* - Marianne Beate Kielland (mezzo-soprano), Johannes Weisser (baritone), Nils Anders Mortensen (piano) rec. 2018 **LAWO LWC1197**

Marianne Beate Kielland has long been one of my great favourites and here sharing the disc with her compatriot Johannes Weisser we are treated to Schumann singing of the highest order. [Full Review](#)

**Gunnar IDENSTAM** *Metal Angel* - Gunnar Idenstam

(organ) Rec. 2020 **TOCCATA CLASSICS TOCC0495**

The combination of Scandinavian folk music and hard rock may seem odd, but when Gunnar Idenstam lets himself loose on the magnificent organ of Monte Carlo Cathedral it is irresistible. An orgy for organ freaks! [Full Review](#)



## STEPHEN GREENBANK

Looking back over this awful year, where coronavirus has disrupted the lives of everyone, and many have sadly lost loved ones, reviewing has been one of the elements in my life to add some sanity and restore some balance. I've had the pleasure of savouring several interesting box sets, and these I've concentrated on for my Recordings of the Year.

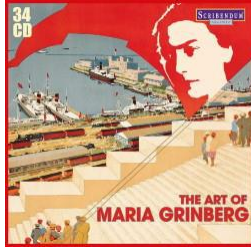
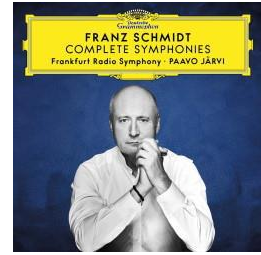


**Franco Gulli (violin)** *reDiscovered* rec. 1957-97 **RHINE CLASSICS RH-005**

Rhine Classics are to be lauded for unearthing this wealth of live and studio recordings of the Italian violinist Franco Gulli, which span a period of forty years from 1957 to 1997. He's an artist definitely worthy of attention and this treasure trove will both delight and intrigue. [Full Review](#)

**Franz SCHMIDT** *Complete Symphonies* - Frankfurt Radio Symphony/Paavo Järvi rec. 2013-18 **DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 4838336**

Following in the footsteps of his father Neeme Järvi, Paavo has set down his interpretations of these compelling works. Whilst I admire both cycles, this latest one from DG is graced with slightly better sound, and is the one I'd recommend you go for. [Full Review](#)



**Maria Grinberg (piano)** *The Art of* rec. 1946-76 **SCRIBENDUM SC814**

This 34-CD set ushered in 2020. It was very welcome and long overdue. Overshadowed by the likes of Richter, Gilels and, to some extent, Yudina, Maria Grinberg was finally vouchsafed her moment in the sun with this superb release, courtesy of Scribendum, packed tight with wonderful gems. [Full Review](#)

**Lotte Schöne (soprano)** *The Complete Lotte Schöne* rec. 1921-1950 **MARSTON 55002-2**

My review of Marston's celebration of the lyric soprano Lotte Schöne was accorded *Recording of the Month* status back in July. This was the first time all of her extant recordings had been gathered together. An outstanding production spotlighting a wonderful artist and highly individualistic voice, it deserves a prominent place on the shelves of collectors of the refined art of singing. [Full Review](#)

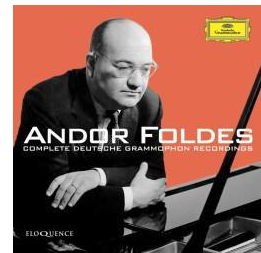


**Monet Quintett** *Wind Quintets* rec. 2018-2019 **CAVI-MUSIC 8553008**

This release is the Monet Quintett's debut recording, and what an impressive achievement. Everything ticks all the right boxes - a well-considered programme, superb sound quality but, most of all, playing notable for its intelligence, musicality and spectacular technical command. It doesn't get any better than this. [Full Review](#)

**Andor Foldes (piano)** *Complete Deutsche Grammophon Recordings* rec. 1951-1963 **ELOQUENCE 4841256**

Andor Foldes never achieved the acclaim he deserved, yet his profile has been raised by the determined championing of Eloquence. This year they collected together the recordings he made for DG into this spectacular 19-CD box - a gift to pianophiles. The bonus is Stephen Siek's in-depth booklet, in English only. [Full Review](#)



## MICHAEL GREENHALGH

Every year I get nervous that the discs I select may turn out not to be as good as I remembered. But every year so far, a check has reassured me they are! This year I have done something different. In the Brahms, Handel and Tchaikovsky discs below I have taken the opportunity to comment on works I didn't feature specifically in my review.



**Johannes BRAHMS** *Piano Concerto No. 1* - Royal Northern Sinfonia/Lars Vogt (piano) rec. 2018 **ONDINE ODE1330-2**

In Ballade 4 Lars Vogt's fine-grained gently sighing melody is able still to glimpse beauty and joy. His second section sketches the sensitivity and cocooning of private musing. His third progresses through chordal treatment into quiet, dignified contentment before his final section of personal reverie still returns appreciatively to flecks of the opening melody. [Full Review](#)



**Frédéric CHOPIN** Piano Concertos - Benjamin Grosvenor (piano), Royal Scottish National Orchestra/Elm Chan rec. 2019 **DECCA 485 0365**

In the Romanza of Concerto 1, I appreciate the sensitivity and finesse of piano and orchestra which doesn't parade itself. The later elaboration and greater virtuosity then become a natural, unforced progression. Particularly fun are the duets of Ben Grosvenor and the warm, smiling bassoon and Ben's delicate descant over the orchestral recapitulation. [Full Review](#)

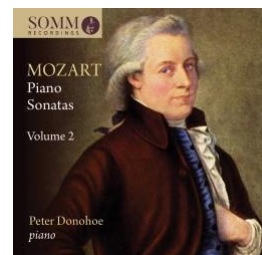


**George Frideric HANDEL** Concerti grossi - Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin/Georg Kallweit rec. 2019 **PENTATONE PTC5186776 SACD**

Two admirable features of George Kallweit's performance of Concerto 3 are the tasteful ornamentation by the solo flute in its slow introductory and epitaph-like third movements and the clarity of the clean lines in the nifty, lightly applied perkiness of the fugal second movement and the summatory fusion of rapid and sustained melodies in the fugal finale. [Full Review](#)

**Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART** Piano Sonatas Vol. 2 - Peter Donohoe (piano) rec. 2019 **SOMM SOMMCD0198**

Taking the first movement of K309, here's scintillating, pure classical playing: a model of clarity, crispness and firmness to the loud passages, a glistening, limpid smoothness and legato to the soft ones. Then the development can be sterner and more troubling and the recapitulation just a tinge more joyous, a tightrope of balance on which Donohoe excels. [Full Review](#)

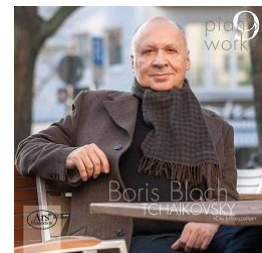


**Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH** Violin Concerto No. 1 **Igor STRAVINSKY** Élégie **Pyotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY** Symphony No. 5 - Baiba Skride (violin), Gewandhausorchester Leipzig/Andris Nelsons rec. 2019 **ACCENTUS MUSIC ACC20478 DVD**

Baiba Skride excels in internalizing Shostakovich's expressive cantilena, conveying it with moving eloquence, facing squarely the Nocturne's bleak elements, but also its pathos. Yet equally she revels in the external display of virtuosity, whether in the sometimes merrily outlandish Scherzo or the compelling rawness and drama within the Passacaglia cadenza. [Full Review](#)

**Pyotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY** Piano works Vol. 9 - Boris Bloch (piano) rec. 2019 **ARS PRODUKTION ARS38509**

*May Nights*, *May of The Seasons*, begins with a lovely melody with a haunting opening motif repeated then smoothly extended into a climax, all evoking utter contentment in the scene. With Boris Bloch it's all about poise of presentation and glow of piano sound, but he also conveys limpid calm and gratitude for it and the passion beyond and before it too. [Full Review](#)



## RICHARD HANLON

If the first half of the year seemed unrelentingly odd, the second half trumped it with the onset of bouts of illness (including the dreaded Coronavirus) which have had a significant effect on my own reviewing functionality. Inevitably then, much of my listening in recent months has been for pleasure - familiar and reassuring as opposed to intellectually challenging; happily, I now seem to be on the mend. Given the privations facing the classical music industry many labels have somehow surpassed themselves in managing to release an extraordinary breadth of music at a time of surely unprecedented challenge - I strongly suspect 2021 will deliver a plethora of chamber and instrumental recordings which could never be a bad thing; one should remain optimistic in any case. Stay safe and happy listening to one and all.

I'd like to mention in dispatches three splendid discs which just fell short of my personal 'super six'. A delightful recital of Haydn folksong arrangements given by James Graham with the evocatively named Poker Club Band directed by Masoko Art has given much pleasure – the involvement of harp and guitar breathes new life into them (BIS 2471). I have overdosed on the high-octane piano thrills provided by the forty-fingers of Marc-Andre Hamelin in a remarkable recital of Samuil Feinberg's first six piano sonatas (Hyperion CDA68233). One hopes numbers 7 to 12 will not be too far behind. More recently, a reissue of a much earlier Hyperion LP has finally (and most unexpectedly) turned up on CD after nearly 40 years, happily licensed to the ever-enterprising Métier label. It features two big concertos by Edward Cowie, an underappreciated British master. The late Alan Hacker's account of Cowie's fascinating Clarinet Concerto No 2 is unmissable by any measure (Métier MSV92108)

My list proper is dominated by contemporary music. I imply no hierarchy whatsoever among the first five selections.



**Lars Petter HAGEN** *Harmonium Repertoire* - Cikada/Christian Eggen rec. 2019  
**LAWO CLASSICS LWC1190**

Norwegian composer Lars-Petter Hagen's voice is singular, uncompromising, and extraordinarily quiet. Do try his *Harmonium Repertoire* disc: these are fascinating, rapt concentrated sounds that project an immersive melancholy which has consistently touched this reviewer over the course of the year. [Full Review](#)

**Coriún AHARONIÁN** *Una carta* - Ensemble Aventure, SWF SO, Baden-Baden/Zoltán Peskó rec. 1993-2019 **WERGO WER7374-2**

A completely new name to me was the late Uruguayan Coriún Aharonián. *Una Carta* is a survey of his music on Wergo which revealed a vibrant, fresh, unusual voice. It includes instrumental and ensemble miniatures of captivating originality – the disc concludes with *Mestizo*, an exceptional and unforgettable orchestral work which is at least the equal in intensity of anything I have ever encountered from Latin America. [Full Review](#)



**Gustavo DÍAZ-JEREZ** *Maghek* - Cristo Barrios (clarinet), Ricardo Descalzo (piano), Royal Scottish National Orchestra/Eduardo Portal rec. 2019 **SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD612**

Another exciting Latin compositional voice is that of Gustavo Díaz-Jerez. He hails from Tenerife and pianophiles may recognise his name; he has recorded a much-admired account of Isaac Albéniz's suite *Iberia*. I was quite blown away by *Maghek*, a massive suite of seven symphonic poems inspired by Díaz-Jerez's native Canary Islands. The whole cycle lasts nearly two and a half hours – each piece constitutes a portrait of a single island. What impresses most is this composer's seemingly inexhaustible well of invention – the whole suite embodies a dazzling breadth of colour, pace and, more unexpectedly, melody. This is immaculately crafted music, challenging but rewarding. Two of the poems are in effect solo concertos – for piano and clarinet; both are thrilling. The Royal Scottish National Orchestra under Eduardo Portal are utterly at one with Díaz-Jerez's idiom and intention; Signum's recording is of demonstration quality. [Full Review](#)

**Benjamin BRITTEN** *The Wild Song* - Marci Meth (soprano), Simon Russell Beale (reciter), Anna Tilbrook (piano) rec. 2016 **MODERN POETICS MP001**

On a contrastingly intimate scale, soprano Marci Meth's disc *The Wild Song* set a new standard for the interpretation of Benjamin Britten's folksong arrangements, as well as presenting them in a completely fresh and compelling context. Interpolated between her vernal, engaging accounts of eighteen songs (with Anna Tilbrook's perfectly-judged accompaniment) are Simon Russell Beale's humane readings of poems by W B Yeats, each carefully selected to illuminate aspects of the



song narratives, as well as a series of tiny, electronic interludes by Mychael Danna which effortlessly bring the Suffolk landscape to life. One is reluctant to use the phrase ‘concept album’; *The Wild Song* is simply a meticulously crafted, open-hearted and richly rewarding disc which has brought me consolation and joy in equal measure. [Full Review](#)



**Sir James MACMILLAN** Symphony No. 4, Viola Concerto - Lawrence Power (viola), BBC Philharmonic/Martyn Brabbins rec. 2019 **HYPERION CDA68317**

It's virtually unprecedented for a new British symphony to be commercially recorded twice within five years of its premiere but Sir James MacMillan's Fourth is eminently worthy of this privilege. Hyperion's immaculate recording with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra under Martyn Brabbins provides some clarification of textures which seem comparatively knotty in Onyx's recording of the work's 2015 Proms premiere with the same orchestra under Donald Runnicles. The clincher in this case is the coupling – Macmillan's *Viola Concerto* strikes me as being yet another superlative example of this singular composer's mastery of concerto form and incorporates a cogent blend of vernacular, formal and spiritual elements. It's a work which I suspect will become a repertoire staple for years to come. Lawrence Power gives a dazzling account of the dizzying solo part. [Full Review](#)

**Claudio MONTEVERDI** *Vespro Della Beata Vergine* - La Tempête/Simon-Pierre Bestion rec. 2018 **ALPHA 552**

“A cogent blend of vernacular, formal and spiritual elements” is a phrase I am more than happy to recycle to summarise my Recording of the Year. There are countless wonderful recordings of Monteverdi's *Vespers* of 1610, but none of them approach the universality, exoticism, fervour and mystery of Simon-Pierre Bestion's miraculous, if controversial realisation. Purists may balk at the idea of extending this monumental work by an hour; Bestion liberally interpolates Gregorian antiphons and earthy *faux-bourbons*, enhances the *instrumentarium*, and leads his singers and players in a vision of the work which openly embraces a plethora of cosmopolitan traditions. The performance standards are beyond extraordinary; the recording takes one's breath away, literally and repeatedly. Opulent, magnificent and moving, it amounts to a celebration of life and brotherhood. I couldn't recommend it highly enough at any time, but at this particular moment *Vespro* truly seems like a gift from the Gods. In fact, I'm going to put it on right now.... [Full Review](#)

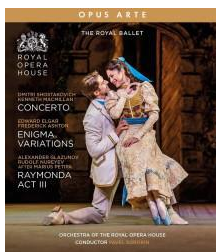



---

## ROB MAYNARD

---

The filmed ballet releases that have come my way in 2020 have, on the whole, been of a rather higher quality than in the past, suggesting, perhaps, that in these difficult times producers are being more selective in what they choose to record and market. As long as it remains difficult or even impossible to watch live performances in theatres, filmed releases – whether streamed or on disc – will continue to demonstrate their value in providing immense pleasure to viewers all over the world.



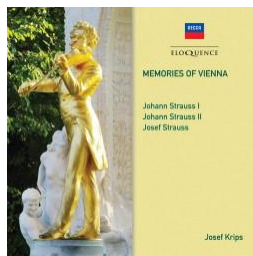
**Concerto - Enigma variations - Raymonda Act III** Royal Ballet, Orchestra of the Royal Opera House/Pavel Sorokin rec. 2019 **OPUS ARTE Blu-ray OABD7272D**

My Blu-ray/DVD release of the year has to be the Royal Ballet's performance of Frederick Ashton's *Enigma variations*. This genuine ensemble piece offers the company an opportunity to demonstrate its strength in depth on a well-populated Covent Garden stage. Meanwhile, Kenneth MacMillan's *Concerto*, set to the music of Shostakovich, and Rudolf Nureyev's choreography to the third Act of Glazunov's *Raymonda* offer further nods to the Royal Ballet's rich history while simultaneously showcasing its currently high standards. [Full Review](#)



***Nutcracker And Mouse King*** Ballett Zürich, Philharmonia Zürich/Paul Connelly rec. 2018 **ACCENTUS MUSIC DVD ACC20449**

Ballett Zürich's production, choreographed by Christian Spuck, offers a new take on that perennial Christmas favourite *The Nutcracker*. While the two Acts of traditional productions often seem to bear little relation to each other, Spuck's conception, with its re-ordered Tchaikovsky score, more coherent storyline and greater pace, feels better balanced and more satisfying. This is, in sum, a somewhat more sophisticated production than usually encountered – and one in which adult viewers will find plenty of thought-provoking ideas to stimulate their brains. [Full Review](#)

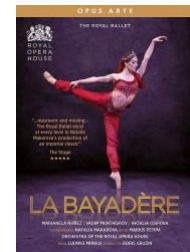


***Memories of Vienna*** Hilde Gueden (soprano), London Symphony Orchestra, New Symphony Orchestra, Wiener Philharmoniker/Josef Krips rec. 1948-57 **ELOQUENCE 484 0692**

The recordings may be well over 60 years old, but the affection that conductor Josef Krips invests in these scores is obvious. Soprano Hilde Gueden is the perfect choice for the repertoire and is especially delightful in *Dorfschwalben*. While the Vienna Philharmonic delivers the completely idiomatic performances that you'd expect, tracks from the London Symphony and New Symphony orchestras suggest that they too are entirely at home on the banks of the beautiful blue Danube. [Full Review](#)

**Ludwig MINKUS** *La bayadère* - Royal Ballet, Orchestra of the Royal Opera House/Boris Gruzin rec. 2019 **OPUS ARTE Blu-ray OABD7263D**

Standards at London's Royal Ballet are as high right now as they have ever been and the company rises triumphantly to the multiple challenges set by Marius Petipa's 19<sup>th</sup> century blockbuster *La Bayadère*. Star dancers Marianela Nuñez, Natalia Osipova and Vadim Muntagirov create a finely balanced and believable love triangle and Natalia Makarova's reconstructed final Act – amazingly still not adopted by some major international companies - delivers the necessary emotional catharsis. Ludwig Minkus's perky score is very well played by the Covent Garden orchestra under Boris Gruzin. [Full Review](#)

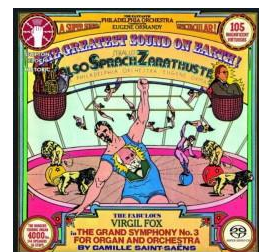


***Peer Gynt*** Wiener Staatsballett, Orchester der Wiener Staatsoper/Simon Hewett rec. 2018 **C MAJOR 755808 DVD**

Modern choreography can be somewhat off-putting at times, but Edward Clug's fast-moving production for Wiener Staatsballett is easily accessible. It also provides a fine showcase for young dancer Jakob Feyferlik who, as the eponymous anti-hero, is rarely off the stage. You will need to read the booklet notes in advance in order to make the most of the story, but there is certainly plenty to engage the mind – as well as to delight the eye – in this well presented offering from Vienna. [Full Review](#)

**Richard STRAUSS** *Also sprach Zarathustra* **Camille SAINT-SAËNS** Symphony No. 3 - Virgil Fox (organ) Philadelphia Orchestra/Eugene Ormandy rec. 1973/75 **DUTTON CDLX7379 SACD**

My colleague Ralph Moore's highly enthusiastic review prompted me to buy these remastered 1970s recordings for myself and, as he suggested, they have turned out to be something of a revelation. It has often been observed that Ormandy's Philadelphia Orchestra discs rarely managed to replicate the sounds he achieved in the concert hall, but Michael Dutton's engineering wizardry has brought up the vivid colours of *Also sprach Zarathustra* and the "*Organ*" symphony marvellously. As it says on the CD cover, "The greatest sound on earth!" [Full Review](#)



## RALPH MOORE

This has been a good year for recordings of large-scale, late Romantic music, one of my two favourite genres, and a virtual wash-out for the other, which is opera. Hence, my six chosen recordings below are divided into three 19<sup>th</sup> century orchestral masterworks and three superlative chamber music recitals – but nothing vocal. I would have liked to have included the newly released Bruckner Fifth Symphony conducted by Konwitschny on the Tower Records label, but it is in somewhat compromised, if perfectly tolerable, sound and hardly available except very expensively, so that had to yield place, great as it is.



**Franz SCHUBERT** Piano Sonata in A major, D.959, Minuets - Arcadi Volodos (piano) rec. 2017/19 **SONY CLASSICAL 19075868292**

Exquisitely refined and shaped, this is a virtuoso performance of a favourite sonata. Volodos' slightly slower speeds permit him to emphasise the poetry of the music and cast a dreamy spell over the listener. This is one of Schubert's most profound and mercurial works, and Volodos rises to every challenge. The three supplementary minuets are played with equal sensitivity. [Full Review](#)

**Jean SIBELIUS** Symphony No. 2, King Christian II Suite - Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra/Santu-Matias Rouvali rec. 2019 **ALPHA CLASSICS 574**

Santu-Matias Rouvali is a comparative newcomer to British concert halls – remember concerts? – and having been mightily impressed by his appearance in the Royal Festival Hall, I found that impression confirmed by this splendid studio recording of Sibelius' wild and wonderful Second Symphony, supplemented by a beguiling performance of the youthful, somewhat neglected King Christian II suite. [Full Review](#)

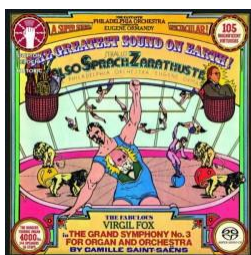


**Ludwig van BEETHOVEN** String quartets - Tetzlaff Quartett rec. 2019 **ONDINE ODE1347-2D**

These are flawless performances in impeccable sound of two late, great Beethoven quartets played by one of the foremost string quartets today. They are "modern" in that vibrato is applied judiciously and sparingly and there is no unseemly lingering or "sopiness" in the Cavatina of Op. 130, yet the Tetzlaff Quartett pierces the emotional heart of this miraculous music. [Full Review](#)

**Anton BRUCKNER** Symphony No. 5 - Hiroshima Symphony Orchestra/Tatsuo Shimono rec. 2019 **BRAIN MUSIC OSBR-36033**

No selection of the year's finest would be complete without at least one recording of my beloved Bruckner. This is one of many highly recommendable Bruckner recordings emanating in recent years from Japan, where it seems that composer is increasingly esteemed and performed. This grand, carefully weighted and beautifully recorded live account of the Fifth Symphony acknowledges the greatness of a work which is still not always given its due in comparison with the more popular Fourth, Seventh and Eighth. [Full Review](#)



**Richard STRAUSS** *Also sprach Zarathustra* **Camille SAINT-SAËNS** Symphony No. 3 - Virgil Fox (organ) Philadelphia Orchestra/Eugene Ormandy rec. 1973/75 **DUTTON CDLX7379 SACD**

This is a remastering of two mid-70's recordings in spectacular analogue sound from a conductor whose finest work remains, I feel, under-valued. I was bowled over on first hearing by what I call "seventy minutes of high-powered music-making" and these two old warhorses could hardly be given a more thrilling gallop round the paddock. Dutton's remastering is especially praiseworthy – this is one for audio enthusiasts as well as "pure music" lovers. [Full Review](#)

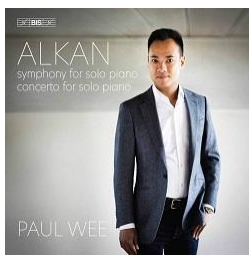
**Heifetz & Piatigorsky - The Chamber Concerts** Works by Brahms, Franck, Mendelssohn & Mozart rec. 1961 **PRISTINE AUDIO PACM108**

My final selection is essentially “historical” and I am pleased to be able to include a double disc from the Pristine stable, as Andrew Rose does so much to revitalise venerable recordings and give them new currency. These are four of the greatest pieces of chamber music played by ensembles headed by two of the most celebrated solo musicians of their era, whose artistry emerges new-minted in these wonderful works. [Full Review](#)



## DAN MORGAN

Alas, not a terribly productive year for me, thanks to the disruption caused by Covid-19. That said, it's been more than just an inconvenience for musicians, technicians and record labels, with long-planned projects shelved or cancelled. Fortunately, there's been enough pre-pandemic product to keep my spirits up. Here are my six picks.



**Charles-Valentin ALKAN** Symphony, Concerto - Paul Wee (piano) rec. 2017/18 **BIS BIS-2465 SACD**

My reviewing year got off to a cracking start with pianist - and barrister - Paul Wee's BIS debut. This couples Alkan's daunting Concerto and Symphony, played with a mix of jaw-dropping virtuosity and uncommon insight. Dave Hinitt's fearless recording is a bar-raiser, too. [Full Review](#)

**Aaron COPLAND** Symphony No. 3 - San Francisco Symphony/Michael Tilson Thomas rec. 2018 **SFS MEDIA SFS0078**

With Michael Tilson Thomas's 25-year stint with the San Francisco Symphony ending in 2020, it was good to hear them in this 'deceptively easeful, yet quietly commanding' performance of Copland's Third. Also, the orchestra's supremely polished playing is superbly caught by SFS Media's recording team. [Full Review](#)



**Ludwig van BEETHOVEN** The Complete Piano Concertos - Stewart Goodyear (piano) BBC National Orchestra of Wales/Andrew Constantine rec. 2018 **ORCHID CLASSICS ORC100127**

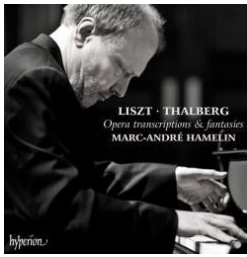
I first heard pianist Stewart Goodyear play his arrangement of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* (Steinway). A musical and sonic treat, that was one of my top picks for 2017. Now he's back in the charts with this Orchid Classics set of the Beethoven concertos. His thoughtful, unaffected way with this music is a joy to behold, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and conductor Andrew Constantine in rapt attendance throughout. Simon Eadon's recording is detailed and beautifully balanced. [Full Review](#)

**Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH** Symphony No. 13 - Oleg Tsibulko (bass), Popov Academy of Choral Arts Choir, Kozhevnikov Choir, Russian National Orchestra/Kirill Karabits rec. 2017 **PENTATONE PTC 5186618 SACD**

Sadly, the projected performance and recording of Shostakovich's 'Babi Yar' with Andris Nelsons and the Boston Symphony was stymied by the virus. All the more reason to welcome Kirill Karabits's 'quietly compelling' reappraisal of the piece, the Russian National Orchestra, choirs and soloist as one in their commitment to this searing score. Not only that, engineer Erdo Groot's recording makes this the best-sounding 'Babi Yar' I know. [Full Review](#)







**Franz LISZT & Sigismond THALBERG** *Opera transcriptions & fantasias* - Marc-André Hamelin (piano) rec. 2019 **HYPERION CDA68320**

A new recording from pianist Marc-André Hamelin is always an event; this collection of opera transcriptions and fantasias by Franz Liszt and his great rival, Sigismond Thalberg, is no exception. A pianistic prestidigitator, he commands the physical keyboard while also, exploring the music's inner workings. As for Arne Akselberg's Teldex recording, it's simply splendid. [Full Review](#)

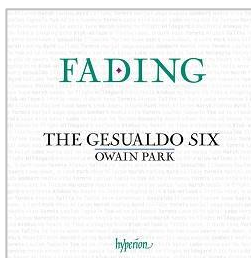
**Sigismond THALBERG** *L'art du chant appliqué au piano* - Paul Wee (piano) rec. 2020 **BIS BIS-2515 SACD**

My reviewing year ends as it began, with a new BIS/Paul Wee album. This time it's Thalberg's *L'art du chant appliqué au piano*, a collection of vocal, mainly operatic transcriptions, essayed with all the sensitivity and skill I've come to expect from this fine artist. Alkan this ain't, but there's lots here to cosset the ear and gladden the heart. As expected, Dave Hinitt's recording is first rate. [Full Review](#)



## MIKE PARR

In spite of the pandemic situation, 2020 has been a wonderful year for new releases and also for reissues of older material. I choose not to list any reissues among the ROTY because I truly believe it unfair for recordings which have already received their accolades in the past to be classed with outstanding new efforts on the part of our hard-working classical labels.

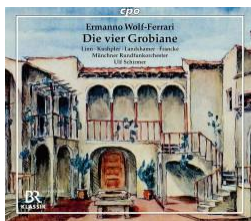
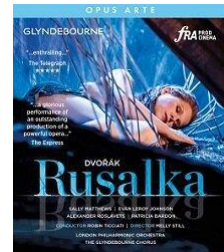


**FADING** The Gesualdo Six/Owain Park (bass) rec. 2019 **HYPERION CDA68285**

This was a superlative release by a highly skilled group which I feel qualifies as my most outstanding disc of the year. [Full Review](#)

**Antonín DVOŘÁK** *Rusalka* - Sally Matthews (soprano), Glyndebourne Festival Chorus and London Philharmonic Orchestra/Robin Ticciati rec. 2019 **OPUS ARTE Blu-ray OABD7266D**

Opus Arte triumphs in releasing this amazing production, beautifully recorded, which immediately becomes the first choice among video releases of this engrossingly rich opera. [Full Review](#)



**Ermanno WOLF-FERRARI** *Die vier Grobiane* - Jürgen Linn (bass baritone), Zoryana Kushpler (mezzo), Münchner Rundfunkorchester/Ulf Schirmer rec. 2014 **CPO 555 140-2**

A superbly comic gem received a lively and entertaining recording which was among the first outstanding recordings I auditioned this year. [Full Review](#)

**Véronique GENS (soprano)** *Nuits* - I Giardini rec. 2019

**ALPHA CLASSICS 589**

This luminous recital of French music by the ever-fascinating Véronique Gens was one of my happiest purchases this past year. [Full Review](#)



**Jake HEGGIE** *Unexpected Shadows* - Jamie Barton (mezzo), Jake Heggie (piano), Matt Haimovitz (cello) rec. 2019 **PENTATONE PTC5186836** [66:40]

The particular delights of this superb collection of recital songs by Jake Heggie proves what a valuable artist Jamie Barton has become and her collaboration with the composer is in every way ideal. [Full Review](#)



**Le Sacre Royal de Louis XIV** Les Pages du Centre de musique baroque de Versailles; Ensemble Correspondances/Sébastien Daucé rec. 2019 **CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES CVS017 DVD**



One of the most entertaining and unique DVDs that crossed my desk this year was the Coronation Mass for Louis XIV as reconstructed by the resident Versailles ensemble. When my review was published I did not give it an outright recommendation because I felt that the documentation about the reconstruction lacked sufficient detail; however, It is a remarkably enjoyable event that has been captured with a wonderful sense of the occasion and should not be missed. [Full Review](#)

---

**GWYN PARRY-JONES**

---



**Little Things In Odd Shapes** Istante Period Instrument Collective rec. 2018 **NOVANTIQUA NA35**

It's a quirky title and a quirky choice of music – relatively minor 18<sup>th</sup> century composers Luigi Boccherini and Michael Haydn and their music for mixed wind and string ensembles. The music is full of charm and wit, even if it doesn't 'plumb the depths'. Hugely entertaining, and played with the spirit of delight by the Istante Collective, whose members are drawn from many different

nations. [Full Review](#)

---

**GLYN PURSGLOVE**

---

My choices are all discs which I have felt compelled to listen to repeatedly since I first heard them. They all involve some sense of discovery – either personal to me or in terms of the wider musical landscape. Reluctant omissions include Europa Galante's *Vivaldi: Concertos per La Pietà* (Glossa), Bor Zuljan's *John Dowland: A Fancy* (Ricercar) and Richard Egarr's *Sweelinck: Fantasias, Toccatas and Variations*. The order of what follows does not represent an order of preference.



**Ninna Nanna:** Lullabies from Baroque Italy - Pino De Vittorio (voice), Laboratorio '600 / Franco Pavan rec. 2019 **GLOSSA GCDP33003**

These lullabies owe as much to the folk traditions of the Mezzogiorno as to the idioms of the baroque, especially in these delightful performances by Pino De Vittorio – very affecting and only occasionally bordering on the sentimental. The results are often glorious, as well as splendidly idiosyncratic. [Full Review](#)

**Giovanni Girolamo KAPSBERGER** Che fai tù? - Les Kapsber'girls rec. 2017-2018 **MUSO MU-037**

Recent years have seen a number of fine recordings of Kapsberger's music for lute and theorbo, but where his vocal music is concerned there has not, I think, anything to match this disc of his villanelles. The four female voices of Les Kapsber'girls bring out perfectly the individuality of each piece, whether in emotional or imitative terms. The whole is an unqualified delight. [Full Review](#)



**Bonaventura ALIOTTI** *Il trionfo della morte per il peccato d'Adamo* - Les Traversées Baroques/Étienne Meyer rec. 2019 **ACCENT ACC24368**

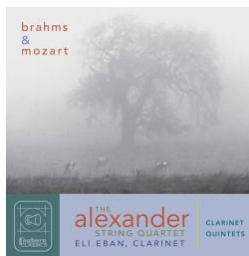
A forgotten oratorio turns out to be beautiful and powerful in this top class performance. This is an important rediscovery; Allioti's oratorio is as accomplished (sometimes more accomplished) than many better-known oratorios of its time. In both text and music there is a genuine depth of psychological and moral depth. [Full Review](#)

**Luigi DALLAPICCOLA** *Il Prigioniero* - Stephen Rügamer, Danish National Concert Choir, Danish National Symphony Orchestra/Gianandrea Noseda. rec. 2019 **CHANDOS CHSA5276 SACD**



I have long admired Dallapiccola's *Il Prigioniero* and this is a very perceptive new recording of the work. Gianandrea Noseda's conducting displays a perfect command of Dallapiccola's very distinctive idiom and orchestra, chorus and soloists all excel. What I have long felt to be Dallapiccola's particular mastery of vocal writing is made very clear on this recording. I have come to admire it more with each hearing.

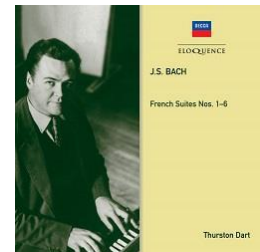
[Full Review](#)



**Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART & Johannes BRAHMS** Clarinet Quintets - Eli Eban (clarinet), Alexander String Quartet rec. 2019 **FOGHORN CLASSICS FCL2021**

Two of the great clarinet quintets in exemplary performances, full of subtle nuance, but tempered by a clear desire to communicate the quality of the music rather than the performers' skills. The differences between the two works are similarly tempered by recognition of how important the Mozart quintet was to Brahms in the composition of his quintet. The recorded sound is exemplary too – the balance of the five instruments being perfectly presented. [Full Review](#)

**Johann Sebastian BACH** French Suites Nos. 1-6 - Thurston Dart (clavichord) rec. 1961 **ELOQUENCE 4829398**



This is my reissue of the year. Eloquence has reissued a number of Dart's recordings and this, for me, is the pick of them. Though, in relative terms, an early 'early music' performer, Dart's reading of the French Suites is as insightful as any that have followed it. The remastering works well. The only reservation - though it doesn't worry me - is that Dart omits the repeats (so as to fit the whole onto the original issue as an LP). This remains sensitive and perceptive playing. [Full Review](#)

## JOHN QUINN

2020 will be an unforgettable year for us all – for all the wrong reasons. For anyone involved in whatever way in the musical world it was the year that Covid-19 cut a swath through live performances. The recording industry has proved amazingly resilient, though one fears that many labels are having a tough time of it. Despite the gloom everywhere, it's been a delight to receive so many excellent new recordings to review and it's been a challenge to whittle my long list down to the required maximum of six. Among those which came agonisingly close to making the cut was Christopher Maltman's compelling recital *The Soldier. From Severn to Somme*. Also linked to soldiering and the Great War was Stewart Morgan Hajdukiewicz's engrossing film about George Butterworth, *All My Life's Buried Here*. Equally notable were the debut recording of James MacMillan's Fifth Symphony, a sparkling disc of Ravel from pianist Javier Perianes and conductor Josep Pons, Herbert Blomstedt's wise and distinguished reading of Brahms' First symphony and Masaaki Suzuki's superb account of Bach's *St John Passion*, set down almost in defiance of the approaching Covid lockdown. In alphabetical order, here are my six choices for 2020 which, if you hear them, I hope will you will enjoy as much as I did.



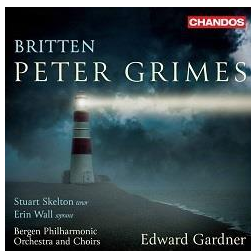
**William ALWYN** *Miss Julie* - Anna Patalong (soprano), Benedict Nelson (bass-baritone), BBC Symphony Orchestra/Sakari Oramo rec. 2019 **CHANDOS CHSA5253(2) SACD**

A very fine performance, superbly recorded by Chandos, set down immediately after a concert performance in London. Alwyn's opera is taut and compelling and it contains especially rich orchestral writing. The cast is excellent and Sakari Oramo conducts superbly. The 1979 Lyrita recording is by no means superseded but this new version demands to be heard. [Full Review](#)



**Ludwig van BEETHOVEN** Piano Concertos 1-5 - Stephen Hough (piano), Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra/Hannu Lintu rec. 2019 **HYPERION** CDA68291/3

The celebrations of the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Beethoven's birth were, inevitably, curtailed by the worldwide Covid restrictions. Happily, a flood of recordings helped to fill the gap. This rewarding and distinguished set of the piano concertos was a major contribution to Beethoven 250. As I commented in my original review, when listening to these performances I heard what I hoped to hear – indeed, time and again I heard *better* than I hoped to hear. [Full Review](#)



**Benjamin BRITTEN** *Peter Grimes* - Stuart Skelton (tenor), Erin Wall (soprano), Bergen Philharmonic Choir & Orchestra/Edward Gardner rec. 2019 **CHANDOS** CHSA5250(2) SACD

This electrifying account of Britten's great opera derived from semi-staged performances in Bergen in late 2019. Stuart Skelton is compelling in the title role and, as Ellen Orford, the late Erin Wall shows what we have lost through her tragically early death. There isn't a weak link in the cast. The Bergen

Philharmonic plays superbly. This is probably the best thing that Edward Gardner has done on disc and the Chandos sound is terrific. [Full Review](#)

**Lost Voices of Hagia Sophia** Cappella Romana/Alexander Lingas rec. 2016 **CAPPELLA ROMANA** CR420 CD/Blu-ray

This is a recording unlike any other I've heard. Cappella Romana sing a programme of Medieval Byzantine Chant. Thanks to ingenious use of technology their performances have been 'placed' in the virtual acoustics of the vast Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. The music is astonishing, the performances are superb and the sound is demonstration quality. This is a formidable achievement. [Full Review](#)



**Sir Charles Hubert Hastings PARRY** *Judith* - Sarah Fox (soprano), Crouch End Festival Chorus, London Mozart Players/William Vann rec. 2019 **CHANDOS** CHSA5268 SACD

This recording of Parry's long-neglected oratorio was made following a London revival which I attended. The work is uneven but it contains a great deal of music that is far too good to slumber unheard. The performance itself is magnificent and does full justice to Parry. Above all, the project is a triumph for

conductor William Vann who directs the work with total commitment. [Full Review](#)

**Spem in alium** ORA Singers/Suzi Digby rec. 2019 **HARMONIA MUNDI** HMM902669.70 CD/DVD

A thoughtfully constructed programme of Renaissance polyphony is bookended by two forty-part motets. The release celebrates the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tallis's *Spem in Alium* with a very fine account of that pinnacle of the polyphonic repertoire. To close the disc, Suzi Digby and her singers give us the first recording of James MacMillan's *Vidi aquam*, a magnificent homage to Tallis's masterpiece. In my original review I summed up this release as "a simply terrific disc". I haven't changed my mind. [Full Review](#)



## MARC ROCHESTER

Let's forget all that other stuff about COVID-19, Brexit and the American election, and look at 2020 as the Year of Musical Discoveries. All through this year I have been continually brought up short by new releases of music by composers and featuring performers of whom I had never previously heard, but whose work has proved so totally mesmerising that I can only marvel at the fecundity of our world with its seemingly limitless abundance of musical marvels.

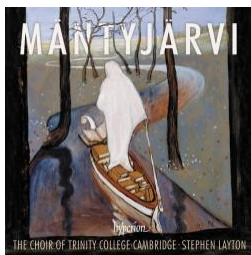
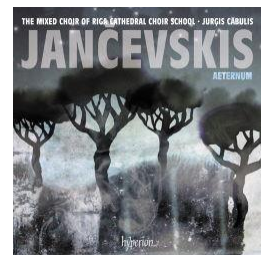


**Alexander BRINCKEN** Symphony No.4, Capriccio - Alexander Brincken (piano), Royal Scottish National Orchestra/Rainer Held rec. 2019 **TOCCATA CLASSICS TOCC0550**

It was in January that I first encountered the music of Alexander Brincken, and this first release in a projected series of his orchestral music on the Toccata Classics label had me asking "where has this glorious, rich, ravishing and at times passionate music been all my life?" I know where it is now: it is firmly embedded in my in-car CD interchanger. I go nowhere without it. [Full Review](#)

**Jēkabs JANČEVSKIS** Choral Music - Mixed Choir of Riga Cathedral Choir School/Jurgis Cābulis rec. 2018/19 **HYPERION CDA68328**

Another permanent resident in that in-car interchanger is Hyperion's stunning recording of music by Jēkabs Jančevskis. Again, this composer was a discovery for me, as was the unenticingly-named Mixed Choir of Riga Cathedral Choir School. But under their conductor Jurgis Cābulis and performing this wonderful music, this has proved to be one of the great choral releases of the year. [Full Review](#)



**Jaakko MÄNTYJÄRVI** Choral Music - Choir of Trinity College Cambridge/Stephen Layton rec. 2018-20 **HYPERION CDA68266**

Only a few weeks ago, Hyperion sent over another choral stunner, this time a matchless disc from the choir of Trinity College Cambridge under their brilliant director, Stephen Layton. This time the programme featured the Finnish composer, Jaakko Mäntyjärvi, who, once again, is a new name for me. However, his music is fabulous and everything about this disc makes it very, very special. [Full Review](#)

**Toru TAKEMITSU** *Quatrain II* **Olivier MESSIAEN** *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps* - José Luis Estellés (clarinet), Aitzol Iturriagagoitia (violin), David Apellániz (cello), Alberto Rosado (piano) rec. 2019 **IBS CLASSICS IBS72020**

Both composers on this disc are old and familiar friends, but it was the group of Spanish players who captured my attention with the sheer brilliance of their playing. Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* is, for me, one of the great works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but in this intelligent pairing with Toru Takemitsu's *Quatrain II*, it takes on a particularly arresting quality. [Full Review](#)

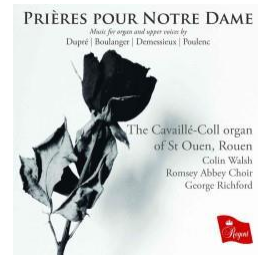


**Justin Heinrich KNECHT** Symphony in G **Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)** Symphony No.6 - Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin rec. 2019 **HARMONIA MUNDI HMM902425**

This having been Beethoven's 250<sup>th</sup> year, it would be wrong not to include something of his in my Recordings of the Year, and this refreshingly vivid recording of the 'Pastoral' Symphony would easily fit the bill. But what made this release from the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin under the direction of their concert-master Bernhard Forck so noteworthy was the coupling with J H Knecht's *Musical Portrait of Nature*, the rarely-heard work which served as the model for Beethoven's famous symphony. [Full Review](#)

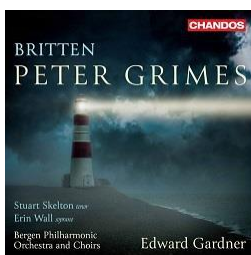
**Prières pour Notre Dame** Colin Walsh (organ), Senior Girls of Romsey Abbey Choir/George Richford rec. 2018 **REGENT REGCD538**

To end my choice, gorgeous music, gorgeously performed and beautifully recorded in the cavernous acoustic of St Ouen, Rouen. I fell in love with this disc when I first heard it at the tail end of last year and, had I known it at the time, I had stumbled across the perfect panacea for COVID-19, Brexit and the American election. [Full Review](#)



## SIMON THOMPSON

I'll get no originality marks for saying so, but the privations of 2020 have made many of us appreciate recordings more than ever. The generous streams from opera houses and orchestras have been a wonderful temporary boon, but my greatest lockdown pleasure has been reconnecting with the depths of my CD and DVD collection. Streams vanish, but I'm never letting my recordings go. The below are 2020's most worthy contenders to sit alongside them on the shelf.



**Benjamin BRITTEN** *Peter Grimes* - Stuart Skelton (tenor), Erin Wall (soprano), Bergen Philharmonic Choir & Orchestra/Edward Gardner rec. 2019 **CHANDOS CHSA5250(2) SACD**

And this is top of the list. I pondered it at the time, but now I'm convinced that this is the finest *Peter Grimes* we have in any format. It's made all the more poignant by the terrible news of the premature death of soprano Erin Wall, announced just after this recording was released. May it stand as a key

part of her legacy. [Full Review](#)

**Richard STRAUSS** *Die Frau ohne Schatten* - Stephen Gould (tenor), Camilla Nylund (soprano), Orchestra and Chorus of Wiener Staatsoper/Christian Thielemann rec. 2019 **ORFEO C991203**

On the one hand, this is a memento of the opera's centenary performance, given in the house of its birth; but it will stand for another hundred years due to the quality of its singing, its conducting and, most of all, the playing of the Vienna Staatsoper orchestra, captured in unfeasibly good sound for a live recording. My most luscious recorded treat of 2020. [Full Review](#).



**Georges BIZET** *Les Pêcheurs de perles* - Julie Fuchs (soprano), Cyrille Dubois (tenor) Les Crys de Paris, Orchestra National de Lille/Alexandre Bloch rec. 2017 **PENTATONE PTC5186685 SACD**

In a strong year for opera, and at the opposite end of the scale to Strauss's vast parable, Bloch's *Pearl Fishers* shows that this opera is more than just a guilty pleasure (though let's agree that it's definitely that as well!). Beautifully sung, lovingly shaped, and gorgeously recorded, it's surely a first choice for this

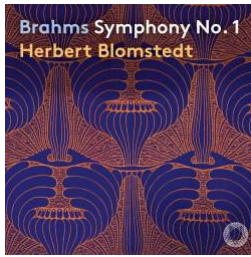
opera on disc. [Full Review](#)

**Richard STRAUSS** *Don Juan, Sechs Lieder, Tod und Verklärung* - Louise Alder (soprano) Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin/Robin Ticciati rec. 2019 **LINN CKD640**

The Scottish Chamber Orchestra's former boss has moved on to a bigger job in Berlin and, from the sounds of this, is making a great success of it. This is technicolour Strauss, realised on a big scale but effective down to its tiniest detail, and Linn's engineers deserve a medal for the clarity with which they have recorded it. [Full Review](#)





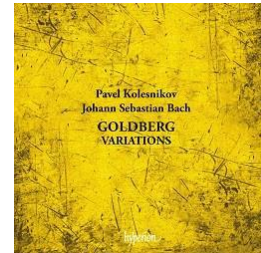


**Johannes BRAHMS** Symphony No. 1, Tragic Overture - Gewandhausorchester Leipzig/Herbert Blomstedt rec. 2019 **PENTATONE PTC5186850**

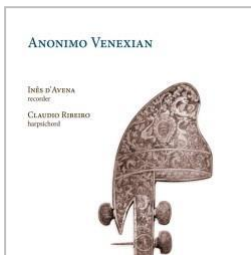
Captain Tom Moore wasn't the only nonagenarian to impress me this year. Herbert Blomstedt shows that Brahms symphonies can still sound sensational when they're played in the traditional way but with decades of experience behind them. The Leipzig Gewandhaus sound sensational, and so is the quality of the recorded sound. The energy of the performance means you'd never guess that it was a 92-year old on the podium. That this is the first instalment of a complete Brahms symphony cycle is one of the few pieces of good news to come out of 2020. [Full Review](#)

**Johann Sebastian BACH** *Goldberg Variations* - Pavel Kolesnikov (piano) rec. 2019 **HYPERION CDA68338**

And at the opposite end of the scale, piano wunderkind Pavel Kolesnikov delivers one of the finest *Goldbergs* ever. Improvisatory and intimate, yet rigorously structured and played, this is a disc to make you fall in love with Bach all over again. [Full Review](#)



## JOHAN VAN VEEN



**Anonimo Venexian** Works by Vivaldi, Gasparini, and Bigaglia - Inês d'Avena (recorder), Claudio Ribeiro (harpsichord) rec. 2018 **RAMÉE RAM1905**

This disc has it all: an interesting programme, based on meticulous musicological research, resulting in a number of first recordings, and outstanding performances by two of the finest musicians around. [Full Review](#).

**Pieter HELLENDAAAL** "Cambridge" Sonatas - Johannes Pramsohler (violin), Gulrim Choï (cello), Philippe

Grisvard (harpsichord) rec. 2018/19 **AUDAX ADX13720**

For many music lovers Hellendaal is not much more than a name. Johannes Pramsohler and his colleagues put him firmly on the map with a set of brilliant violin sonatas. I can't think of better performances than we get here. [Full Review](#)



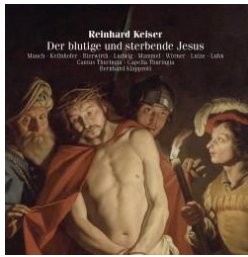
**Johann Gottlieb JANITSCH** Trio Sonatas - Berlin Friday Academy rec. 2019 **BRILLIANT CLASSICS 95977**

Janitsch, one of the lesser-known composers from Frederick the Great's environment, was an outstanding composer, whose fine quartets have received some attention recently. The Berlin Friday Academy shows that his trio sonatas are just as good. This is the young ensemble's first recording, and it's a winner in every respect. [Full Review](#)

**Giovanni Girolamo KAPSBERGER** *Che fai tù?* - Les Kapsber'girls rec. 2017-2018 **MUSO MU-037**

One won't expect vocal music from a composer who is mainly known for his music for the theorbo. And one won't certainly expect him to compose villanellas, a 'popular' Neapolitan genre of secular vocal music. He turns out to be an outstanding composer in this department, and Les Kapsber'girls are the ideal advocates. [Full Review](#)





**Reinhard KEISER** *Der blutige und sterbende Jesus* - Cantus Thuringia, Capella Thuringia/Bernhard Klapprott rec. 2018 **CPO 555 259-2**

This is a major discovery: a Passion oratorio by Reinhard Keiser, one of the main opera composers of his time. A large part of his oeuvre has been lost, and this oratorio shows that this is highly regrettable, as it is of outstanding quality. The performance could hardly have been any better. [Full Review](#)

**Praga Rosa Bohemiae** Cappella Mariana/Vojtěch Semerád rec. 2018 **SUPRAPHON SU4273-2**

Renaissance polyphony from Central European sources is the subject of this disc. Eight out of ten pieces are first recordings. The Cappella Mariana is one of the finest vocal ensembles as far as the performance of this kind of repertoire is concerned. This disc offers the perfect combination of an interesting programme and superb singing. [Full Review](#)



## RAYMOND WALKER



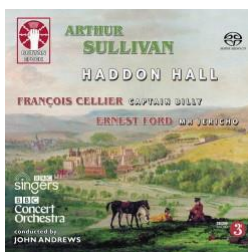
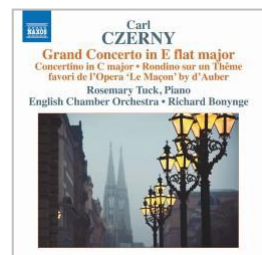
**Léo DELIBES** *Coppélia* – Royal Opera House Orchestra and Ballet rec. 2019 **OPUS ARTE OA1316D DVD**

There is much to commend this performance because it has tradition and carries the elegance of Osbert Lancaster's 1950s costume designs, which are matched by his quirky scenery. The choreography is meaningful and the exaggerated miming tells the story very clearly. More fun is provided by Dr Coppelius in this production than in either the excellent Bolshoi or Paris productions, and so provides good appeal. [Full Review](#)

## Review

**Carl CZERNY** Piano Concerto - Rosemary Tuck (piano), English Chamber Orchestra/Richard Bonyngue rec. 2018 **NAXOS 8.573998**

This is a sumptuous selection of Czerny's music that has never appeared in the catalogue before. The pieces are deftly played by pianist Rosemary Tuck who brings her usual energy and focus to Czerny's superbly written variations. Richard Bonyngue with the English Chamber Orchestra provides the perfect accompaniment in a wide acoustic that brings brilliance to the piano. The orchestra is very responsive and so complements the pianist ideally. [Full Review](#)



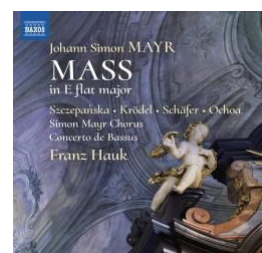
**Sir Arthur SULLIVAN** *Haddon Hall* **François CELLIER** *Captain Billy* **Ernest FORD** *Mr Jericho* - BBC Chorus & Concert Orchestra/John Andrews rec. 2019 **DUTTON 2CDLX7372 SACD**

As a lover of G&S I found that this work by Grundy & Sullivan follows the same light vein and good melody of the previous Savoy operas. The set is unique in that it adds two Savoy 'curtain raisers' by different librettists and composers who open the door to those early 20th Century musicals we all enjoy. The performance is enriched by the excellent direction of John Andrews and the BBC Concert Orchestra.

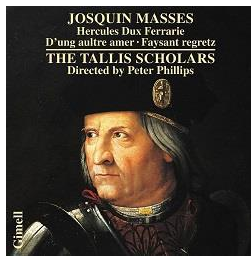
## Full Review

**Johann Simon MAYR** Mass - Simon Mayr Chorus, Concerto de Bassus/Franz Hauk rec. 2018 **NAXOS 8.574057**

Mayr's music is very engaging and perhaps promotes a style of composition yet to come. Although a contemporary of Beethoven, I find his writing more fluid and here somewhat inspired. The tradition of mass settings does not seem to concern him for this work is very operatic, rather than functional and includes many contrasts of light and shade. The soloists are excellent and add to the power of the piece. [Full Review](#)



## BRIAN WILSON

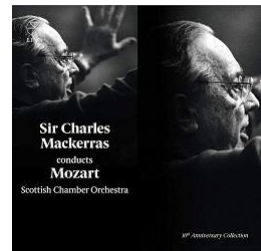


### JOSQUIN Des Prés Masses - The Tallis Scholars/Peter Phillips rec. 2019 GIMELL CDGIM051

My top choice this year is self-selecting: after three decades in progress, the Tallis Scholars and Peter Phillips have completed their survey of Josquin Des Prés' Masses with *Missa Hercules Dux Ferrariæ*, *Missa D'ung aultre amer* and *Missa Faysant regretz*. It's so good that any lover of Josquin's music will want it and the rest of the series. [Full Review](#)

### Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART 10th Anniversary Collection - Scottish Chamber Orchestra & Chorus/Sir Charles Mackerras rec. 2002-2009 LINN CKD651

The reissue package of the later Mozart symphonies and the *Requiem* from that most versatile of conductors, Sir Charles Mackerras, with the SCO, (5 CDs) is preferred even to the complete Sibelius symphonies (Vänskä) and the Mozart piano concertos (Brautigam), both from BIS, and renaissance music from North Germany (CPO). Slightly disappointingly, the Mozart symphonies were – and remain – available on SACD, whereas this package comes on CDs only. [Full Review](#)

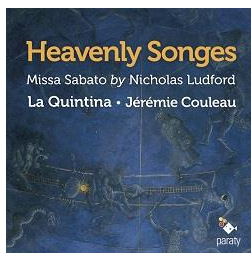


### Jean SIBELIUS Symphony No. 1, *En Saga*, Op.9 - Gothenburg Symphony/Santtu-Matias Rouvali rec.2018 ALPHA 440

I had some reservations about Vänskä's Minneapolis Sibelius, in many ways preferring his earlier Lahti recordings, but I wholeheartedly recommend Symphony No.1 and *En Saga* from the Gothenburg SO and Santtu-Matias Rouvali. [Full Review](#)

### Leonardo: *Shaping the Invisible* | Fagiolini/Robert Hollingworth rec. 2012-2018 CORO COR16171

*Leonardo: Shaping the Invisible* is an audio-visual experience – the performances by I Fagiolini of music ranging from the late medieval to the modern are related to individual Leonardo paintings reproduced in the booklet [Full Review](#).



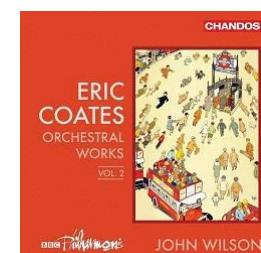
### Nicholas LUDFORD *Heavenly Songes* - La Quintina/Jérémie Couleau (tenor) rec.2019 PARATY PTY220191

I pass over the Magdalena Consort's anthems from Byrd to Hooper on Signum and Byrd's *Singing in Secret* (Delphian) in favour of the Tudor composer, Nicholas Ludford, who has never received the same acclaim as his contemporaries; a new recording of his *Missa Sabato* and other music from La Quintina and Jérémie Couleau should help put him back on the map. [Full Review](#)

### Review

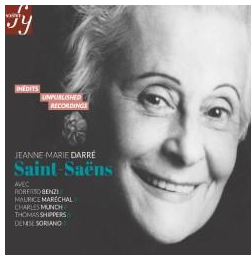
### Eric COATES Orchestral Works Vol. 2 - BBC Philharmonic/John Wilson rec. 2019 CHANDOS CHAN20148

With so much deep music already in my selection, the second volume of the Chandos series of music by Eric Coates, from John Wilson and the BBC Phil should lighten the mood splendidly [Full Review](#). Regrettably, that means omitting Wilson's other great Chandos success, the Korngold Violin Concerto and String Sextet and passing over Shostakovich's Symphony No.11 from Vladimir Jurowski (LPO), his two violin concertos (Hyperion), or one of Paul Corfield Godfrey's Tolkien-based works, *The Children of Húrin*.





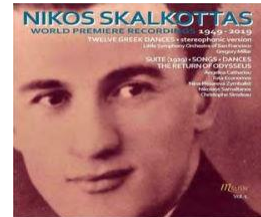
## JONATHAN WOOLF



**Camille SAINT-SAËNS** Piano Concertos, Violin and Cello Sonatas & piano works - Jeanne-Marie Darré (piano), Charles Munch, Thomas Schippers (conductors), Denise Soriano (violin), Maurice Maréchal (cello) rec. 1962-71 **SOLSTICE SOCD363-64**

Not only do the names Jeanne-Marie Darré and Camille Saint-Saëns go together like the familiar horse and carriage but the performances in this twofer are all previously unreleased live examples of the great pianist's art. There are three concertos, solo works and two sonatas, the cello sonata featuring Maurice Maréchal, the greatest French cellist of the first half of the twentieth century. What more could one want? [Full Review](#)

**Nikos SKALKOTTAS** *World Premiere Recordings* - Nina Pissareva Zymbalist (violin), Nikolaos Samaltanos, Christophe Sirodeau, Tota Economos (piano), Angelica Cathariou (mezzo-soprano), Little Symphony Orchestra of San Francisco/Gregory Millar rec. 1949-2019 **MELISM MLSCD025**



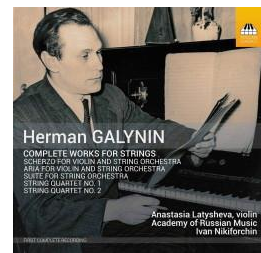
Musical archaeology is seldom as revealing as this release of premiere recordings. Each of the works reveals something salient about Skalkottas, ever fascinating in his stylistic scope. The *Violin Suite* reflects his Berlin sojourn, there's a fine restoration of the 1957 LP of the *12 Greek Dances*, as well as the first known recording of any of his music, from 1949, the year of his death. A quietly important disc. [Full Review](#)



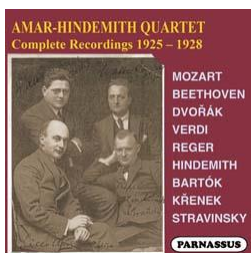
**British Violin Sonatas Vol. 3** Works by Alwyn, Bowen, Brown, Coates & Ireland - Tasmin Little (violin), Piers Lane (piano) rec. 2019 **CHANDOS CHAN20133**

No, this isn't selected as a 'home team' choice nor merely to salute all that Tasmin Little has done, in this, the year of her retirement from the concert stage. It's just that I have waited 25 years for her to record John Ireland's A minor sonata and here it is at last, the greatest reading of the work since the 78 set of Albert Sammons and Ireland himself. Add Bowen and Alwyn and you have a perfect summation of her collaboration with Piers Lane. [Full Review](#)

**Herman GALYNIN** Complete Works for Strings - Anastasia Latysheva (violin), Academy of Russian Music/Ivan Nikiforchin, Arina Minaeva (violin), Anastasia Benci, Kseniia Kharitonova (viola), Anna Scherbakova (cello) rec. 2019 **TOCCATA CLASSICS TOCC0514**



Pupil of Shostakovich and Myaskovsky, critically shredded by Tikhon Khrennikov in 1948, a sufferer from serious mental illness and dead at 44, Hermann Galynin might seem a broken figure. Not a bit. His life was bravely lived and his music blazed with vivid variety and superbly complex expression. Some of these string works might be over-reverberantly recorded but that's no impediment to me, nor should it be to you. Start with the Second String Quartet – deeply touching. [Full Review](#)



**Amar-Hindemith Quartet** *Complete Recordings 1925-28* **PARNASSUS PACD96070-72**

If I were to sit down and listen to a string quartet from the mid-1920s, I wouldn't choose the Amar-Hindemith for beauty of tone or expressive breadth. But for unerring insight into then-new repertoire this ensemble's complete recordings offer a huge amount, not least in Reger, Bartók and Hindemith himself. This is the first time the quartet's complete recordings have been made available and these are performances to relish, if not always to love, and that tension proves irresistible. [Full Review](#)

## LESLIE WRIGHT

Five discs made it to my top list this year, all but one of which I reviewed. There were a few others I could have included, namely, LA Phil 100, a C major Blu-ray celebrating the Los Angeles Philharmonic's centenary; Berio's *Coro* and *Cries of London* with the Norwegian Soloists' Choir on BIS; *Mozart y Mambo* with hornist Sarah Willis (Alpha); and the Ligeti Études and Horn Trio performed by pianist Eric Huebner and partners on New Focus Recordings. Listening to recorded music is ever more crucial in this time of pandemic with that segment of the music industry still thriving.

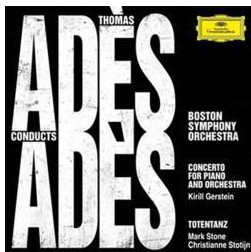
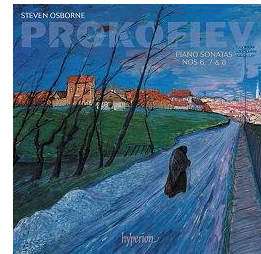


**Richard STRAUSS** *Don Quixote, Don Juan, Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* - Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko rec. 2017 **LAWO CLASSICS LWC1184**

Vasily Petrenko's recording of these popular Richard Strauss tone poems with the Oslo Philharmonic are exceptional. He gives the music a lighter touch than that of some of his illustrious predecessors. The performances do not lack in depth or warmth, and Petrenko manages to emphasize certain details that usually go unnoticed, as well as bringing out the humour of *Don Quixote* and *Till Eulenspiegel*. The recordings are exemplary with a natural concert-hall balance. [Full Review](#)

**Sergei PROKOFIEV** Piano Sonatas 6-8 - Steven Osborne (piano) rec. 2019 **HYPERION CDA68298**

Steven Osborne has demonstrated a real affinity for the music of Prokofiev before on disc. He continues to impress with these accounts of the three "War Sonatas" the composer produced during the Second World War. These three works represent the apex of Prokofiev's solo piano music and have been recorded numerous times by some of the world's most illustrious pianists. Osborne now joins their ranks as among the best in this repertoire. [Full Review](#)



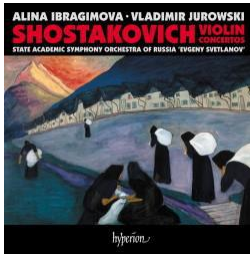
**Thomas ADÈS** Piano Concerto, *Totentanz* - Kirill Gerstein (piano), Christianne Stotijn (mezzo-soprano); Mark Stone (baritone) Boston Symphony Orchestra/Thomas Adès rec. 2016/19 **DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 483 7998**

These are world-premiere recordings of two recent works of Thomas Adès which, based on their quality, should become part of the standard repertoire. Kirill Gerstein plays the daylights out of Adès's take on the Romantic piano concerto, while mezzo-soprano Christianne Stotijn and baritone Mark Stone leave equally strong impressions in the powerful song cycle. The Boston Symphony under the composer's direction plays the demanding orchestral parts with panache. [Full Review](#)

**Witold LUTOSŁAWSKI** Symphonies 2 & 3 - Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra/Hannu Lintu rec. 2018 **ONDINE ODE1332-5 SACD**

This SACD completes Hannu Lintu's cycle of Lutosławski's symphonies, representing some of the most significant contributions to the twentieth-century symphony with their vivid and intricate writing for all sections of the orchestra. The performances here by the Finnish Radio Symphony more than hold their own among the growing competition and arguably have the best recorded sound of all. [Full Review](#)





**Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH** Violin Concertos - Alina Ibragimova (violin), State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia 'Evgeny Svetlanov'/Vladimir Jurowski rec. 2019 **HYPERION CDA68313**

Alina Ibragimova's accounts of the two Shostakovich concertos have already garnered accolades from many corners and deservedly so. Not only is this the first recording of the Concerto No. 1's original version with the violin soloist introducing the finale, but more important are the scintillating, no holds barred performances of both concertos by a Russian violinist, Russian conductor, and Russian orchestra. Not to be missed! [Full Review](#)

Compiled by David Barker and Mike Parr