

MUSICWEB INTERNATIONAL Recordings Of The Year 2019

This is the seventeenth 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 2018-November 2019).

The 128 selections have come from 27 members of the team and 65 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, one has received three nominations:

- An English Coronation on Signum Classics

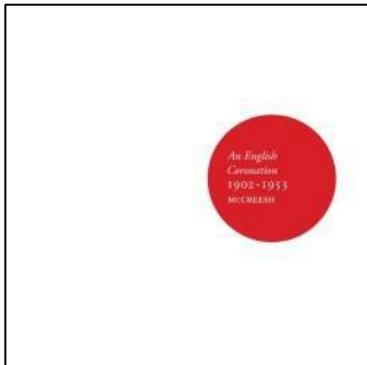
and ten have received two nominations:

- Gounod's Faust on Bru Zane
- Matthias Goerne's Schumann Lieder on Harmonia Mundi
- Prokofiev's Romeo & Juliet choreographed by John Cranko on C Major
- Marx's Herbstsymphonie on CPO
- Weinberg symphonies on DG
- Shostakovich piano works on Hyperion
- Late Beethoven sonatas on Hyperion
- Korngold orchestral works on Chandos
- Coates orchestral works on Chandos
- Music connected to Leonardo da Vinci on Alpha

Hyperion was this year's leading label with nine nominations, just ahead of C Major with eight.

MUSICWEB INTERNATIONAL RECORDING OF THE YEAR

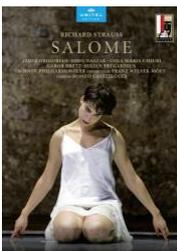
In this twelve month period, we published more than 2300 reviews. There is no easy or entirely satisfactory way of choosing one above all others as our Recording of the Year, but this year one recording in particular put itself forward as the obvious candidate.



An English Coronation 1902-1953 Simon Russell Beale, Rowan Pierce, Matthew Martin, Gabrieli Consort; Gabrieli Roar; Gabrieli Players; Chetham's Symphonic Brass Ensemble/Paul McCreech rec. 2018 **SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD569**

This recording was reviewed four times on MWI, and on each occasion, it was nominated as a Recommended recording, once being accorded Recording of the Month status. Now, three of those reviewers have selected it among their Recordings of the Year. With such acclaim, it made the choice of overall Recording of the Year very simple. [Full Reviews](#)

LEN MULLENGER (FOUNDER)



Richard STRAUSS Salome – Asmik Grigorian, Vienna PO/ Franz Welser-Möst rec. 2018 **UNITEL EDITIONS 801704 Blu-ray**

In over 60 years of collecting I have never been so captivated as I have been by Asmik Grigorian's assumption of the role of Salome and have not felt the need to make a special recommendation disc for some years. She is a superb actress, fully able to act as a wilful teenager princess transmuted into a besotted, and ultimately doomed, depraved psychopath. Her voice is the best I have ever heard in this role; just as powerful as Nilsson but more human. In modern parlance she owns this role. If you have any discs of Salome in your collection you will need this too. [Full Reviews](#) ~ [Interpretation](#)

ROB BARNETT (FOUNDING EDITOR)



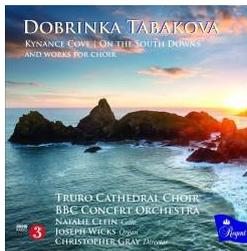
Joseph MARX *Eine Herbstsymphonie* - Grazer Philharmoniker/Johannes Wildner rec. 2018 **CPO 555 262-2**

A most lusciously extravagant work that in this well recorded and inspired performance surges, sobs and sighs in voluptuous triumph. [Full Review](#)

Georgy CATOIRE & Ignaz FRIEDMAN Piano Quintets - Andreas Brantelid, Bengt Forsberg, Ulf Forsberg, Ellen Nisbeth, Nils-Erik Sparf rec. 2017 **BIS BIS-2314 SACD**



Two decidedly late-romantic works from either end of the Great War. Catoire: luxuriantly textured. Friedman: furiously active: stirring, epic, high voltage and on occasion subtle. Artists and technicians aim for and achieve the highest musical standards. Will please and broaden your cultural horizons. [Full Review](#)



Dobrinka TABAKOVA Choral Works - Truro Cathedral Ch, BBC Concert O/Christopher Gray rec. 2018 **REGENT REGCD530**

Like Finzi, an unEnglish name but taps into the essence of the British Isles. Lyrical but distinctive. A vibrant involving presence in English and world music. [Full Review](#)

Allan PETERSSON Violin Concerto No. 2, Symphony No.17 - Ulf Wallin, Norrköping SO/Christian Lindberg

rec. 2017/18 **BIS BIS-2290 SACD**

Tongues of flame lick around a headlong drama: flayed passion with moments of poise. All that survives of the last symphony; not a work where Pettersson broke away from his accustomed style. Wields a dumbfounding and fascinating power. [Full Review](#)



Sir Charles Villiers STANFORD Orchestral Works - Kerry Stamp, Ulster O/Howard Shelley rec. 2018 **HYPERION CDA68283**

Accomplished with brilliance. At one moments a triumph of feathery lyricism and at others impressionistic delicacy against doughty pride. A resoundingly confident contribution to the Stanford revival. [Full Review](#)

Arnold ROSNER Orchestral Music Vol. 3 - London PO/Nick Palmer rec. 2017 **TOCCATA CLASSICS TOCC0469**

Rosner's high impact and memorable music is well served by Nick Palmer - a talent of which we need to hear more. Good to see him engaged by Rosner's music. This disc is satisfying and challenging in itself but also serves as a very substantial punctuation point for the world premiere, next February, of Rosner's opera *The Chronicle of Nine*. [Full Review](#)



STEPHEN BARBER

There are several fine recordings which I am passing over for one reason or another. The third volume of the Richard Rodney Bennett cycle from John Wilson and Chandos, the coupling of masses by Frank Martin and Kenneth Leighton from King's College London, George Benjamin's latest opera *Lessons in Love and Violence* and a minor nineteenth century classic, Marschner's *Hans Heiling* are all works which will find their listeners anyway. I liked Sylvain Cambreling's Messiaen cycle very much, but it is not complete. Carlo Grante's Busoni Elegies were very impressive, but the rare *An die Jugend* coupling is an unsatisfactory work. I am rather unfairly passing over Scarpini's Busoni piano concerto. Vladimir

Feltsman's *Forgotten Russians*, as represented by piano works, was fascinating but only one work on it struck me as really memorable, the Protopopov sonata.



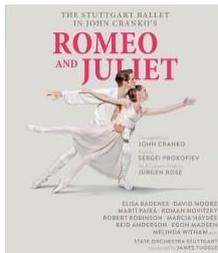
Paul HINDEMITH *Ludus Tonalis* - Käbi Laretei rec. 1965 **ELOQUENCE 484 0142**

This is the first issue on CD of a legendary recording. Käbi Laretei was Estonian. She had a successful career but made few recordings of which this is the most celebrated. She had studied *Ludus tonalis*, Hindemith's most important piano work, with the composer and her interpretation can be regarded as authoritative. She brings a light touch, a sense of playfulness and a great deal of variety and makes what can seem a rather forbidding work something

sparkling. [Full Review](#)

Sir Michael TIPPETT Symphonies 3, 4 & B flat - Rachel Nicholls, BBC Scottish SO/Martyn Brabbins rec. 2018 **HYPERION CDA68231/2**

Last year I enthusiastically welcomed Brabbins' recordings of the first two Tippett symphonies. Now he has completed the cycle, and the results are even finer. The third, one of Tippett's greatest works, gets the best performance I have heard, with Rachel Nicholls particularly convincing in the tricky vocal finale. In the fourth symphony Brabbins at last finds a convincing rendering of the breath effect which opens and closes the work, and indeed of the display of orchestral virtuosity which constitutes the main part. As a bonus we get the first recording of Tippett's unnumbered early symphony, performed a few times, then withdrawn but now available again. [Full Review](#)



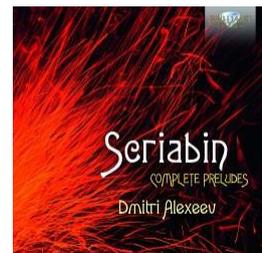
Sergei PROKOFIEV *Romeo and Juliet* - David Moore, Elisa Badenes, Stuttgart Ballet, State Theatre Stuttgart O/James Tuggle rec. 2017 **C MAJOR 801108 DVD**

Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* is arguably the finest full length ballet composed in the twentieth century. Several choreographers have had a go at it, but this 1961 version, by John Cranko, is by some way the finest of all I have seen. It is not surprising that it remained his signature work and has remained in the repertory of the Stuttgart company, for whom he wrote it, ever since he created it. This is a

recent performance, with excellent sound and picture quality. All the dancers act as well as dance, and every one has an individual character. The set and costumes bring Renaissance Verona to life, the orchestral playing is very good and the whole performance is a delight. [Full Review](#)

Alexander SCRIBIN Complete Preludes - Dmitri Alexeev rec. 2017 **BRILLIANT CLASSICS 95651**

Dmitri Alexeev's Scriabin cycle goes from strength to strength and I have been completely blown away by this new set of the preludes. Alexeev seems the complete Scriabin pianist: he has the technique, the fastidiousness, power when it is required and delicacy too. The pieces themselves start under the influence of Chopin but gradually move into Scriabin's mature idiom, with rich and complex harmonies, cross-rhythms and his characteristic leaping figure. In the final pieces we are in a strange world indeed, in which Scriabin seems to be pushing at the limits of the expressible. This is a splendid set. [Full Review](#)



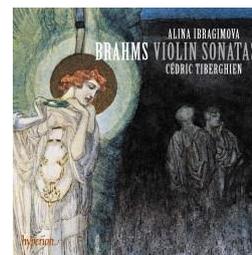
Franz LISZT Late Piano Works - Cédric Tiberghien rec. 2017 **HYPERION CDA68202**

Late Liszt is a different world from that of the well-known virtuoso works. The subjects are sometimes religious, sometimes macabre, and they explore strange harmonic regions with an undertone of mystery and terror. Tiberghien is an expert guide to this territory and he moulds and shapes the sometimes forbiddingly bare writing as well as rising to massive climaxes when required.

The recording is superb. [Full Review](#)

Johannes BRAHMS Violin Sonatas - Alina Ibragimova, Cédric Tiberghien rec. 2018 **HYPERION CDA68200**

No apologies for including Tiberghien twice. His partnership with Ibragimova is a real one and they seem to feel and breathe the music together. I liked the restraint of their performance: instead of milking the juicy harmonies for all they are worth, they are the more powerful for using suggestion and nuance. The performance of the D minor work, in my view the finest of the three, is particularly impressive, and there is no lack of power and strength in the passionate finale. As an encore there is a salon piece by Clara Schumann. [Full Review](#)



DAVID BARKER

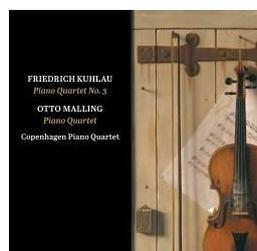
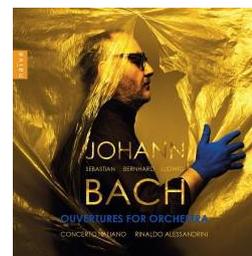


Joseph HAYDN Symphony No. 82 **Jean-Baptiste DAVAUX & François DEVIENNE** Symphonie concertantes - Le Concert de la Loge/Julien Chauvin rec. 2017 **APARTÉ AP186**

I didn't really have great expectations for this disc, requesting it mainly for the lesser-known composers out of curiosity. They were very enjoyable, and the Haydn is given a cracking performance, blending the elegant and humorous to perfection. [Full Review](#)

Johann Sebastian BACH, Johann Bernhard BACH & Johann Ludwig BACH Ouvertures - Concerto Italiano/Rinaldo Alessandrini rec. 2018 **NAÏVE OP30578**

I hadn't paid the recordings of Rinaldo Alessandrini that much attention in the past, having believed some less than flattering reviews. My loss, but having heard these Ouvertures (orchestral suites) by three Bachs, I am keen to make up for lost time. The faster movements are given such energy without overdoing it, and where poetry is required, poetry is provided. [Full Review](#)



Friedrich KUHLAU & Otto MALLING Piano Quartets - Copenhagen Piano Quartet rec. 2015/16 **DACAPO 6.220591 SACD**

The piano quartet repertoire is not a large one, so these two delightful works, separated by 90 years, in such good performances are to be welcomed. The Kuhlau, despite being written in 1829, brings Mozart to mind, and while it is not suggested that the Brahmsian Malling is a premiere, I can find no other version.

[Full Review](#)

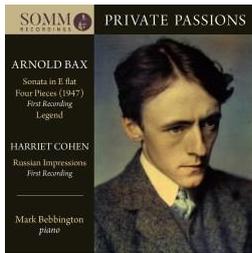
Heino ELLER Symphonic Poems - Estonian Ntl SO/Olari Elts rec. 2018/19 **ONDINE ODE1335-2**

Four atmospheric and lyrical poems from the Estonian Heino Eller, in glowing performances. This is Ondine's second release of Eller's orchestral works under the baton of Olari Elts in the last twelve months. I'm certainly hopeful that there will be more, including the hitherto unrecorded first symphony. [Full Review](#)



NICK BARNARD

For a variety of reasons, I have reviewed fewer discs in 2019 than other years. One of my enduring passions is the music of Arnold Bax but curiously I am not sure it has ever featured in my ROTY choices - to make amends here are three. Manfred Honeck is a consistently revelatory conductor and his collaboration in Pittsburgh is superb. I am glad to be able to include a disc from SOMM again this year - their recordings, repertoire and performances are always a delight. For once I have included a disc I did not review - John Wilson's spectacular new version of the Korngold Symphony. In the order they were reviewed:

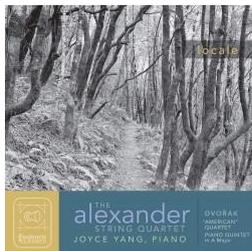
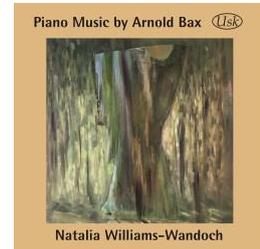


Sir Arnold BAX Piano Sonata, Legend, In the Night, Four Pieces **Harriet COHEN** Russian Impressions - Mark Bebbington rec. 2017 **SOMM SOMMCD0193**

Mark Bebbington has an astonishingly wide range of repertoire but his recordings of British music are a particular delight. A well-thought out programme crowned by the finest version of the early E flat sonata (which became Symphony No.1) I have ever heard. [Full Review](#)

Sir Arnold BAX Nympholept, Sonatas, Two Hungarian Dances, The Happy Forest - Natalia Williams-Wandoch rec. 2018 **USK RECORDINGS USK1236CD**

A remarkably fine debut disc by pianist Natalia Williams-Wandoch. Released on the small Usk label this is a gem and a must for the Bax aficionado as almost all of the music here receives its first recording. Not all of it is vintage Bax but at its best both the music and the performances are revelatory. [Full Review](#)



Antonin DVOŘÁK String Quartet No.12, Piano Quintet No.2 - Alexander String Quartet, Joyce Yang rec. 2017/18 **FOGHORN CLASSICS FCL2020**

Joyful, open-hearted music receiving unaffectedly skilled and sensitive performances. These might be very well known works, familiar from many famed recordings but the simplicity and directness of these performances is a consistent delight. [Full Review](#)

Anton BRUCKNER Symphony No. 9 - Pittsburgh SO/Manfred Honeck rec. 2018 **REFERENCE RECORDINGS SACD FR-733**

Manfred Honeck is a consistently challenging and inspiring conductor. Certainly his superb Pittsburgh players sound inspired. Deeply considered and superbly rendered this is a performance of visionary magnificence. Backed up by Reference's state of the art recording. [Full Review](#)



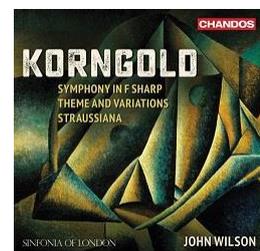
"B" Like Britain Ludmilla Berlinskaya, Arthur Ancelle rec. 2018 **MELODIYA MELCD1002565**

Once you get past the dreadful artwork this is a superb and varied programme, cunningly conceived and brilliantly executed. This is piano duet playing of the very highest order technically but also wholly in tune with this sound world of each - widely-differing - composer. The finest versions of the Bax pieces I know and equally convincing in the other works too. Fine Melodiya recording ices

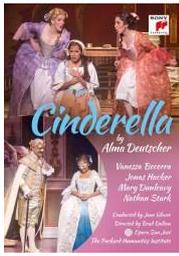
the cake. [Full Review](#)

Erich Wolfgang KORNGOLD Symphony, Theme and Variations, *Straussiana* - Sinfonia of London/John Wilson rec. 2019 **CHANDOS CHSA5220 SACD**

The recording I did not review but one that has received accolades from my colleagues. John Wilson has reformed the Sinfonia of London and this is their debut disc. Make no mistake - this is a brutally hard work to play and Wilson's players produce a performance of blistering brilliance. Wilson's approach is powerfully dramatic - perhaps linking the work more to Korngold's earlier swashbuckling scores rather than the post-war aching nostalgia some other performances emphasise. In its own right this is a sensational interpretation with the finest recordings of the two 'fillers' to boot. I listened to it in Chandos' Studio Master Download format and even by the high standards of the house this is a remarkable production allied to the performance. The next recordings from this combination of artists and recording company are eagerly awaited. [Full Review](#)



MAX BURGDÖRFER



Alma DEUTSCHER *Cinderella* - Vanessa Becerra, Jonas Hacker, Opera San José Dancers, Ch & O/Jane Glover rec. 2018 **SONY CLASSICAL 19075895049 DVD**

Alma Deutscher is much more than the 'normal' wunderkind: She is a truly original composer and has so far given to the world some extraordinary compositions. Her full-length opera *Cinderella* is outstanding in many respects, but her determination to continue on her innate path without devoting too much attention to critical voices is simply inspiring. She has become a role model for composers of tonal music in the struggle to have the value of classical approaches and new music regarded equally, so that - eventually - "it will not be considered a crime to want to compose beautiful music." [Full Review](#)

DOMINY CLEMENTS

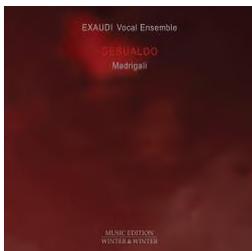
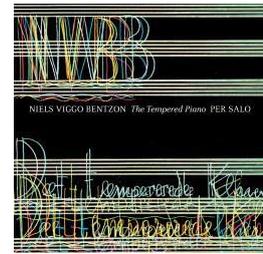


Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH Piano Sonatas, Preludes - Andrey Gugnin rec. 2018 **HYPERION CDA68267**

One of the finest piano discs I've heard for many a year, and so a shoe-in for this list. Andrey Gugnin's remarkable pianism and musicianship is served by an equally breathtaking recording. [Full Review](#)

Niels Viggo BENTZON *The Tempered Piano* - Per Salo rec. 2019 **DACAPO 8.226077**

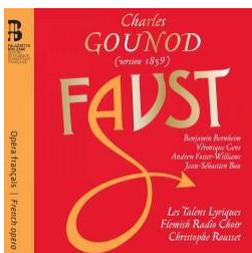
People should know more of Niels Viggo Bentzon's work, and this carefully chosen selection by Per Salo is a tremendous introduction to his vast Well Tempered Piano. "From the riches of Lisztian textures to the most sparing and Webernesque of moments, you will find it all here." [Full Review](#)



Carlo GESUALDO *Madrigali a cinque voci* - Exaudi Vocal Ensemble/James Weeks rec. 2019 **WINTER & WINTER 910 259-2**

Exaudi's hauntingly memorable recording of Gesualdo Madrigals is quite simply one of the outstanding vocal discs of 2019. There's no tiptoeing around the heavy emotions expressed in these incredible works, and the detailed colouring around each line of text is second to none. [Full Review](#)

MICHAEL COOKSON



Charles GOUNOD *Faust* - Benjamin Bernheim, Véronique Gens, Les Talens Lyriques/Christophe Rousset rec. 2018 **BRU ZANE BZ1037**

My record of the year is a recording of Gounod's masterpiece *Faust* in a timely concert performance at Paris given in the bicentenary year of the composer's birth in 1818. Given here is the 1859 version, the so-called 'first' *Faust*, in four acts with French spoken dialogue, complete with several of the numbers which were later removed or changed. The cast is outstanding, led by exceptional soprano Véronique Gens singing Marguerite and tenor Benjamin Bernheim in the title role with Les Talens Lyriques on period instruments directed by Christophe Rousset. On Bru Zane this set is part of the CD/Book series in a limited edition of 4,000 and is a must for lovers of French Romantic Opera.

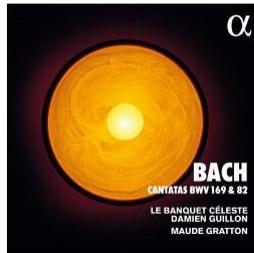
[Full Review](#)

Maurice RAVEL *Daphnis et Chloé, Suites, La Valse, Le Tombeau de Couperin* - Münchner Philharmoniker/Sergiu Celibidache rec. 1979-87 **MÜNCHNER PHILHARMONIKER MPHIL0010**

Sergiu Celibidache conducted his first concert series with the Münchner Philharmoniker in 1979 becoming its general music director later that year and serving in that post until his death in 1996. Celibidache was a renowned Ravel conductor and this beautifully played live archive recording for radio broadcast forms part of a valuable recording legacy that Celibidache had with the Münchner Philharmoniker.



[Full Review](#)



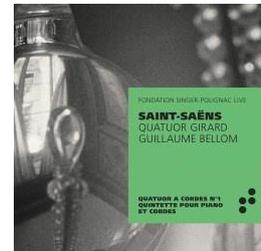
Johann Sebastian BACH Cantatas - Céline Scheen, Nicholas Scott, Benoît Arnould, Le Banquet Céleste/Damien Guillon rec. 2018 **ALPHA CLASSICS 448**

Period instrument ensemble Le Banquet Céleste and four vocal soloists directed by Damien Guillon (a countertenor, who is one of the soloists) excel in this J.S. Bach album containing two Leipzig church cantatas BWV 82 and BWV 169 together with three chorale preludes for solo organ. This music could hardly be better performed making it indispensable listening for devotees of Baroque

music on Alpha Classics. [Full Review](#)

Camille SAINT-SAËNS String Quartet No. 1, Piano Quintet - Quatuor Girard, Guillaume Bellom rec. 2018 **B-RECORDS LBM018**

As a longtime admirer of the chamber works of Saint-Saëns I was thrilled by this recording played by Quatuor Girard and pianist Guillaume Bellom on the Paris based label B-Records. Works separated by almost forty years, Saint-Saëns' First String Quartet and Piano Quintet, are given outstanding performances that I've been playing repeatedly. [Full Review](#)



Giacomo PUCCINI *Tosca* - Anja Harteros, Aleksandrs Antonenko, Ludovic Tézier, Staatskapelle Dresden/Christian Thielemann rec. 2018 **C MAJOR Blu-ray 748404**

This exciting production of Puccini's *Tosca* was the centerpiece of the 2018 Osterfestspiele Salzburg. On this Blu-ray stage director Michael Sturminger and his creative team provide a new and modern-dress production in the manner of a 'film-noir'. Sturminger provides a prologue and immediately before the music starts, shots are fired and sirens wail as Angelotti is sprung in an ambush from an Italian police van in an underground car park. The traditional storyline of the final scene has been radically altered, an approach I usually detest, yet it all works marvellously for me but I'm not going to give the game away. I've also written a spoiler-alert on the review. [Full Review](#)

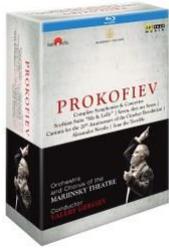
Olivier MESSIAEN *Le Tombeau resplendissant, Les Offrandes oubliées, méditation symphonique, Un sourire, L'Ascension* - Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich/Paavo Järvi rec. 2019 **ALPHA CLASSICS 548**

Inevitably a release arrives just before the cut-off for the Record of the Year nominations and this was it. Played by the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich under Paavo Järvi this release of Messiaen orchestral works, three early and one late, was something of a revelation to me. The focused playing of the Tonhalle is quite splendid and Järvi's requirement for accuracy and attention to detail has commendable integrity, qualities which feel so essential in this music. [Full Review](#)



ROBERT CUMMINGS

Selecting a handful of the best recordings from the fifty or sixty I've reviewed here over the past year is a daunting challenge. After careful consideration, here they are and in order of preference:

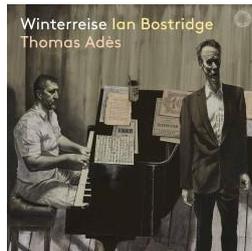


Sergei PROKOFIEV Symphonies, Concertos & Cantatas - Mariinsky Theatre O/Valery Gergiev rec. 2016 **ARTHAUS MUSIC Blu-ray 109330**

This is a most important video collection for Prokofiev mavens and perhaps others interested in 20th century music. It offers twenty major orchestral, concerto and choral works by Prokofiev in fine live performances led by Valery Gergiev, with mostly well-known soloists. A documentary film about Prokofiev is included. [Full Review](#)

Charles GOUNOD *La Nonne Sanglante* - Michael Spyres, Vannina Santoni, Insula O/Laurence Equilbey rec. 2018 **NAXOS NBD0097V Blu-ray**

This opera, not heard for a century and a half, reappeared about a decade ago. This is its second recording, first on video. Gounod admirers will certainly want this excellent performance of this masterwork. This was chosen as a Recording of the Month. [Full Review](#)

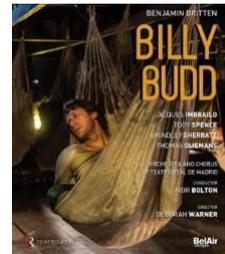


Franz SCHUBERT *Winterreise* - Ian Bostridge, Thomas Adès rec. 2018 **PENTATONE PTC5186764**

Bostridge's *Winterreise* may generate a little controversy but to me this performance becomes an engrossing experience. He is abetted by the fine accompaniment of Thomas Adès. [Full Review](#)

Benjamin BRITTEN *Billy Budd* - Jacques Imbrailo, Toby Spence, Ch & O Teatro Real, Madrid/Ivor Bolton rec. 2017 **BEL AIR CLASSIQUES BAC554 Blu-ray**

This is a great performance and production of a Britten masterpiece. Admirers of the composer will certainly find it to their liking and perhaps even those unfamiliar with Britten's operas. [Full Review](#)



Piotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony No. 6 - Berliner Philharmoniker/Kirill Petrenko rec. 2017 **BERLINER PHILHARMONIKER BPHR190261 SACD**

This SACD may be a little short on timing, but Petrenko's Tchaikovsky Sixth with the Berlin PO is a performance for the ages. [Full Review](#)

ROBERT FARR

Very often in my introductions to my Recordings of the Year, specialising in opera recordings as I do, I have frequently railed against modern producers with their concepts and Regietheater which make works I know intimately barely recognisable in terms of the staging and dramaturgy on show. The outcome has been that I have not been able to specify as many as six for my list. In more than one case, the second time around I have turned off the picture and listened to the performance in sound only. This year matters are a little different, in that I have used all the six recommendations allowed while in some cases still being disappointed by the producers' vision in some cases and believing that it does not represent the composer's intentions. It is not that I am mellowing in my old age of 83, rather that the performances of the singers, in particular, are such as to make the recording de rigueur for inclusion.



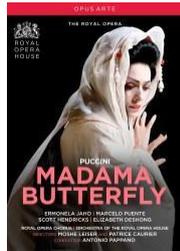
Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART *Don Giovanni* - Ildebrando D'Arcangelo, Andrea Concetti, Carmela Remigio, O Fondazione Regionale delle Marche/Riccardo Frizza rec. 2007 **C MAJOR DVD 749308**

Although issued during this present year, the recording dates back to performances at the Sferisterio Opera Festival of July 2007. Made under the directorship of the long-experienced Pier Luigi Pizzi, who is also responsible for the sets and costumes, it focuses on the core of the story: the variety of sexual connections and events on stage

between the various couples involved. There is nothing licentious on view, albeit that I suggested in my summary that the superb realisation of the opera was at times nearly adults-only viewing. My only reservations centred on the weak staging of the last scene, where the licentious Don goes down to hell, his sins having caught up with him. [Full Review](#)

Gioachino ROSSINI *L'italiana in Algeri* - Cecilia Bartoli, Ildar Abdrazakov, Ensemble Matheus/Jean-Christophe Spinosi rec. 2018 **UNITEL DVD 801808**

This is the exception that makes the rule. To an updated, sometimes irrelevant dramaturgy, I gave the issue a Recommended tag. Why? It represented the return to the recording studios, via a performance at The Salzburg Festival, of Cecilia Bartoli, in a role she had never sung before and did so with great professionalism, surrounded by other stars familiar with this Fach. [Full Review](#)

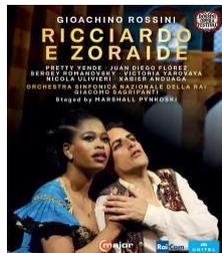


Giacomo PUCCINI *Madama Butterfly* - Ermonela Jaho, Marcelo Puente, Ch & O Royal Opera House, London/Sir Antonio Pappano rec. 2017 **OPUS ARTE DVD OA1268D**

I gave this recording of a 2017 performance of this opera the imprimatur of Recommended because of the outstanding interpretation of Ermonela Jaho in the title role and the musical realisation by Covent Garden's musical director along with an excellent cast and realistic, imaginative staging. [Full Review](#)

Gaetano DONIZETTI *Il Castello Di Kenilworth* - Jessica Pratt, Carmela Remigio, Ch & O Donizetti Opera, Bergamo/Riccardo Frizza rec. 2018 **DYNAMIC Blu-ray 57834**

This staging and performance are the antithesis of Regietheater. Costumes in period, and with minimal stage props, the director and singers realise the intimate and dramatic story before one's eyes. It is an exemplary demonstration of singers working to bring out the drama and emotion of a story by acting and vocal expression alone. Again, I gave the issue my personal Recommended. [Full Review](#)



Gioachino ROSSINI *Ricciardo e Zoraide* - Juan Diego Flórez, Pretty Yende, SO Della Rai/Giacomo Sagripanti rec. 2018 **C MAJOR Blu-ray 752704**

One of my own personal operatic highlights was being present at the British premiere, at Garsington, on June 10th 2010 of Rossini's 22nd opera, (Armida), premiered at the San Carlo, Naples on 11th November 1817. It was the third of nine operas the composer wrote for that great theatre with professional musicians, stage facilities and a roster of the best singers of the time. This work is the least performed of all those nine Naples opere serie and this recording at the 2018 Rossini Festival is a first film of it. It features great singers and singing, not least by Juan Diego Flórez singing the role of Riccardo for the first time as well as the dramaturgy, costumes etc. being true to the composer. [Full Review](#)

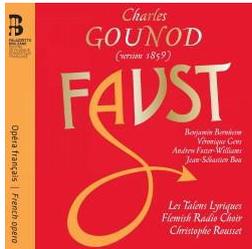
Giuseppe VERDI *Attila* - Ildebrando D'Arcangelo, Simone Piazzola, Ch & O Teatro Comunale Di Bologna/Michele Mariotti rec. 2016 **C MAJOR Blu-ray 748804**

Apart from *Nabucco*, and its Chorus of Hebrew Slaves, early Verdi gets little exposure on the stages of the world's major opera houses and certainly none appears in any of the popular cinema transmissions. Fortunately, the genre is kept alive in Italy by Milan's La Scala, alongside other smaller theatres, not least those at Parma, Venice and Bologna who shared this production, it being filmed at the last of those venues. The conducting and choral singing are of the highest order, the whole being somewhat marred by an incongruous change in period in the costumes mid-way through that stopped me awarding my personal imprimatur of Recommended. [Full Review](#)



GÖRAN FORSLING

This year's half-dozen Golden Eggs contains one revolutionary 'new' old opera and five vocal recitals with favourite singers. When I compiled my list I ended up with nine choices and in the last resort I left out three historical opera recordings, which still will be treasured Silver Eggs in my collection: the legendary studio recording of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* with Stracciari from the late 1920s and two live recordings of *Manon Lescaut* with Jussi Björling, one from the Metropolitan 1956 and one from Stockholm 1959. But here are the Golden ones:



Charles GOUNOD *Faust* - Benjamin Bernheim, Véronique Gens, Les Talens Lyriques/Christophe Rousset rec. 2018 **BRU ZANE BZ1037**

Faust played on period instruments and with a lot of previous unknown material, would have been interesting also in a mediocre performance, but with a near-all-French cast crowned by Benjamin Bernheim's superb Faust, possibly the best since Gedda, and the lovely Veronique Gens as Marguerite, singing better than ever, it is a must-have! [Full Review](#)

Russian Songs Margarita Gritskova, Maria Prinz rec. 2018 **NAXOS 8.573908**

The young Russian mezzo-soprano Margarita Gritskova may not be a household name yet, but she sings this lovely recital of Russian songs with such beauty of tone and such involvement that she surpasses many more famous predecessors in this repertoire. [Full Review](#)



Spirito Marina Rebeka, O Teatro Massimo di Palermo / Jader Bignamini rec. 2018 **PRIMA CLASSIC PRIMA001**

Latvian soprano Marina Rebeka has reached the stars, not least as a marvellous Violetta. Here she demonstrates her qualities also in the bel canto repertoire in an intelligently planned recital with several extended scenes instead of isolated arias. [Full Review](#)



Robert SCHUMANN Liederkreis, Zwölf Gedichte von Justinus Kerner - Matthias Goerne, Leif Ove Andsnes rec. 2018 **HARMONIA MUNDI HMM902353**

Matthias Goerne has been named 'the best Wotan since Hans Hotter' and 'the best Schubert singer since Fischer-Dieskau'. About this wonderful Schumann disc one could simply say: 'Goerne at his best – and no one is better!'

[Full Review](#)



A Simple Song Anne Sofie von Otter, Bengt Forsberg rec. 2016 **BIS BIS2327 SACD**

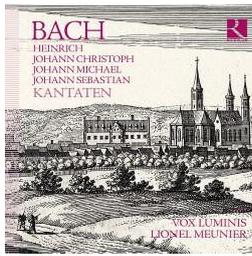
Anne Sofie von Otter has had a long and successful career and she has never ceased exploring new paths. She is also well aware of the limitations of her voice now that she has left her first blossoming behind, and this deeply felt recital is wonderful proof to her vocal intelligence. [Full Review](#)

Gustav MAHLER Rückert-Lieder, Kindertotenlieder, Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen - Marianne Beate Kielland, Nils Anders Mortensen rec. 2016 **LAWO LWC1157**

I have with great interest followed Marianne Beate Kielland's development during almost 15 years. For each new disc she claims new fields of the song repertoire and makes it hers. Her 'Whispering Mozart' a couple of years was masterly. It was only a matter of time before she chose to climb the Everest of the repertoire, Gustav Mahler. The result is marvellous. [Full Review](#)



MICHAEL GREENHALGH



BACH Family Cantatas - Vox Luminis/Lionel Meunier rec. 2018 RICERCAR RIC401

Johann Christoph Bach's *Es erhub sich ein Streit* is for double choir and adds 4 trumpets and timpani to the standard string orchestra to tell of Michael and his angels battling with the dragon and his angels and then to celebrate Michael's victory. It's an outstanding example of the immediacy, sheer bite and exuberance of all Vox Luminis accounts here. [Full Review](#)

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN Piano Concertos 1 & 2, Rondo - Boris Giltburg, Royal Liverpool PO/Vasily Petrenko rec. 2019 NAXOS 8.574151

Made me reevaluate the Second Concerto as a more urbane, witty and subtle work than the more exuberant and, in the slow movement, romantic First Concerto. Both are given very fresh accounts with the contrast between the two telling, through Petrenko's acuity in orchestral pointing and Giltburg's charisma, a compeer for young Beethoven as virtuoso. [Full Review](#)

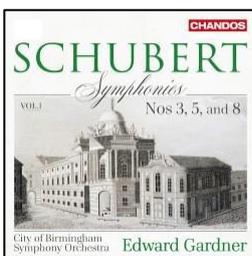


Frédéric CHOPIN Impromptus, Waltzes and Mazurkas - Pavel Kolesnikov rec. 2018 HYPERION CDA68273

Just one example of Kolesnikov's ability at dramatization, the Mazurka in C minor, op. 30/1. An opening theme of inconsequentiality, a central section more resolute before Kolesnikov's repetition of its dotted-quaver/semiquaver motif casts a spell. The return of the opening now briefly illuminates with unexpected beauty before it becomes waggish. [Full Review](#)

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART Piano Sonatas Vol. 1 - Peter Donohoe rec. 2018 SOMM SOMMCD0191

Donohoe presents the slow movement of Sonata 17, K570, thoughtfully savoured. A song whose every note and feeling is placed with care and you witness how the rhythms, harmonies and structure contribute to the whole experience. Then relief: a second episode warmer, smoother, robust and exquisite in turn; a coda both dignified and affectionate. [Full Review](#)

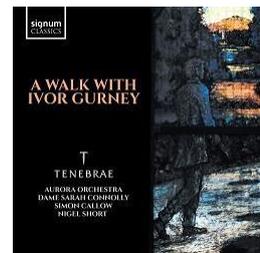


Franz SCHUBERT Symphonies 3, 5 & 8 - City of Birmingham SO/Edward Gardner rec. 2018 CHANDOS CHSA5234 SACD

Take the opening movement of the *Unfinished* symphony, with appreciable clarity of texture Gardner pulls no punches. The sforzandos shock, his tension in the development creates a long sustained explosive outpouring. Yet his second theme remains demure but kindly and, after a brutal response, resilient. This is an emphatic but never heavy account. [Full Review](#)

A Walk With Ivor Gurney Sarah Connolly, Simon Callow, James Sherlock, Tenebrae, Aurora Orchestra/Nigel Short rec. 2018 SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD557

The title is that of a world premiere recording of Judith Bingham's selection from Gurney's poems, a purely vocal piece which mixes a choral starscape and soloist arioso interspersed with choral tombstone statements and the wailing of the spirits. Time present and past coalesce, fear and ecstasy combine and the cruel high tessitura is grippingly realized. [Full Review](#)



RICHARD HANLON

I feel that 2019 has been something of a freak year in terms of both the quality and variety of recordings. Indeed there have been periods where everything I was reviewing seemed to merit the 'Recommended' tag, and at times I have had to step back and invent some kind of critical filter.

It took an aeon to narrow my choices down to nine discs, all of which I feel duty-bound to mention; the unlucky three which I have agonised over excluding from my 'super six' are (a) Cantaloupe's stunningly engineered issue of John Luther Adams' timely orchestral 'slow burner' (choice of words deliberate in the extreme) *Become Desert*, evidence (if any more were needed) of the rapid rise to super-orchestra status of Ludovic Morlot's plush Seattle Symphony (b) Imogen Cooper's insightful traversal of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* on a Chandos disc notable for the crystalline purity of its piano sound. This is luminous playing, always individual, never attention-seeking, which sheds yet more light on this still underappreciated masterpiece and (c) the recent Alpha disc of Messiaen orchestral music which features two somewhat overlooked early works, *Le Tombeau Resplendissant* and *Les Offrandes Oubliées* as well as an exalted account of *L'Ascension*. The Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich under Paavo Järvi provide richly textured performances laid down in a generous acoustic.



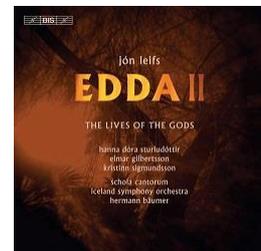
Isang YUN *Sunrise Falling* - Matt Haimovitz (cello), Bruckner O Linz/Dennis Russell Davies rec. 2017 **PENTATONE PTC5186693 SACD**

My 'top six' list for 2019 is dominated by discs of little-known 20th and 21st century repertoire. Firstly, Pentatone celebrated the music of Isang Yun with a luxuriant twofer of the trailblazing Korean's chamber, instrumental and orchestral music, crowned by revelatory accounts of the *Violin Concerto No 1* and the *Cello Concerto* by Yumi Hwang-Williams and Matt Haimovitz respectively. They are accompanied by the Bruckner Orchester, Linz under Dennis Russell Davies. It is an exceptional issue which unequivocally reinforces the view that Yun was a twentieth-century master.

[Full Review](#)

Jón LEIFS *Edda II* - Schola Cantorum Reykjavík, Iceland SO/Hermann Bäumer rec. 2018 **BIS BIS-2420 SACD**

Over more than two decades Robert von Bahr has been single-minded in his proselytizing on behalf of another figure whose reputation has been unfairly compromised by what might be viewed as an accident of geography. His BIS label's impressive edition devoted to the Icelander Jón Leifs reached its thirteenth volume with the release of the second part of Leifs' monumental *Edda* trilogy. This is an extraordinary disc whose outstanding sound (in both stereo and surround) gets closer to Leifs' impossible sonic ambitions (and unique approach to orchestral and choral colour) than any of the previous issues, impressive as they are. This is a visceral experience indeed – the magnificent new Harpa hall in Reykjavik providing an awesome acoustic to match the characteristically full-bodied BIS engineering. The performances by the Icelandic forces and soloists under Hermann Bäumer are also world class. [Full Review](#)

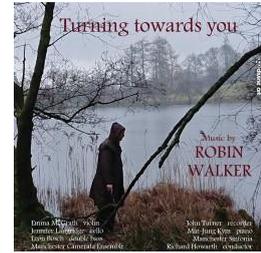


Avet TERTERIAN *Symphonies 3 & 4* - Bournemouth SO/Kirill Karabits rec. 2019 **CHANDOS CHSA5241 SACD**

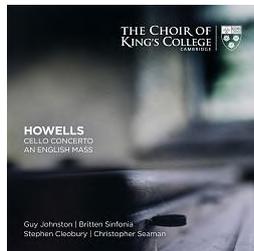
There have been many articles and broadcasts in the last few weeks marking the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. In musical terms, one of the eventual consequences of this event was the exposure to Western ears of two or three generations of composers from countries whose unique cultural identities were largely obliterated by absorption into the Soviet Union. Figures such as Schnittke, Gubaidulina, Denisov, Pärt, Kancheli and Vasks were quickly recognised as important and their works began to appear on concert programmes and discs with increasing frequency. Three decades on their lesser-known contemporaries are being rediscovered and reappraised, one of whom is the Armenian Avet Terterian. His imposing and exotic symphonies are as unique and exhilarating in

their own way as Leifs' orchestral works. So it is good to see his Third and Fourth Symphonies coupled on a thrilling new Chandos disc recorded in the unlikely setting of The Lighthouse in Poole. Kirill Karabits makes an illuminating guide while the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra reveal an unexpectedly idiomatic and instinctive grasp of Terterian's singular sound world. [Full Review](#)

Robin WALKER *Turning Towards You* - John Turner, Manchester Camerata String Quartet, Manchester Sinfonia/Richard Howarth rec. 1999/2018 **DIVINE ART DDA25180**



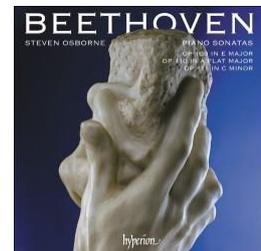
I have especially enjoyed two discs of English music. When one spends so much time listening to music from parts of the world that are often overlooked and ignored, it is perhaps not all that surprising that one misses out on the sounds coming from what is, in relative terms at least, the house next door. I have recently begun to discover the music of Robin Walker, a York-born composer in his early sixties whose music invariably projects the tang and the loam of the northern English landscape. *Turning Towards You* is an absorbing miscellany of seven of his works, all of which blend terrific craftsmanship with profoundly beautiful sound. His Double Concerto, A Prayer and a Dance of Two Spirits for recorder, violin and strings is a real find. Walker is another independent spirit who has much to say, and who manages to do so in original and accessible terms. [Full Review](#)



Herbert HOWELLS *An English Mass, Cello Concerto* - Guy Johnston, Britten Sinfonia, Ch King's College Cambridge/Stephen Cleobury rec. 2018/19 **KING'S COLLEGE KGS0032 SACD**

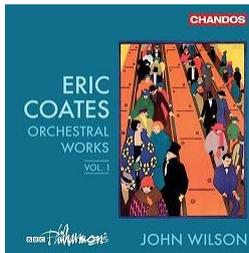
From a musician born in York to one who has very sadly just passed away there (touchingly, during the closing moments of St Cecilia's Day, the night before last as I write these words). I refer to the inspirational director of King's College Choir, Sir Stephen Cleobury, who had only retired from that role a couple of months ago. Apart from his magnificent contributions over decades to King's College's renowned Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, Sir Stephen was instrumental in the development of King's College's own record label, and one of his final appearances on disc was on an exceptional twofer devoted to the music of Herbert Howells. He leads glowing accounts of the Te Deum and Magnificat from Howells' signature Collegium Regale sequence, as well as a beautifully turned reading of the English Mass, one of the composer's most overlooked big works. There are also immaculate performances of three of Howells' organ pieces, not least the moving Rhapsody No 3. Quite apart from marking Sir Stephen's unparalleled contribution to King's College life, the set acts as a reminder of Howells' still underappreciated orchestral music, and is topped off by Guy Johnston's suave account of the Cello Concerto, a substantial work whose reconstruction has only been completed in the last few years. Thus the set is a desirable conspectus of familiar and rare Howells, and it has rarely been far from my CD player since its release. [Full Review](#)

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN *Piano Sonatas 30-32* - Steven Osborne rec. 2018 **HYPERION CDA68219**



But for my disc of the year, I return to the mystical world of late Beethoven, and to Steven Osborne's unassuming yet revelatory Hyperion disc of the last three sonatas. While the market becomes more saturated with sets of this immortal triumvirate by the month, the omnipresent danger of a dilution of the humanity and solace projected by these masterpieces is undeniable. Osborne prevails by yielding utterly to the music with flawless technique and total humility. He is assisted by a Hyperion recording which is so natural and clean it eclipses even the most outstanding piano discs that have previously emerged from that fine label. This disc has moved me far comprehensively than I anticipated when I compiled the original review. In a crowded field, trust me: this is the real thing. It absolutely encapsulates the motivation for writing these reviews. One is alive; and one recognises that being able to listen to this singular disc, on a weekly basis if I so choose, is a sacred and unalloyed privilege, never to be taken for granted. [Full Review](#)

IAN LACE



Eric COATES Orchestral Works Vol. 1 - BBC Philharmonic/John Wilson rec. 2019 **CHANDOS CHAN20036**

This year I have had to take something of a sabbatical from reviewing recordings; duty calling me towards local community responsibilities but I have chosen one recording dear to my heart - i.e. the first recording in a new Chandos series to be devoted to the music of Eric Coates. John Wilson conducts with supreme empathy with Eric Coates's music and in the great tradition of

Stanford Robinson and Eric Coates himself. [Full Review](#)

ROB MAYNARD

This year has seen a slight increase in the number of filmed ballets released on Blu-ray or DVD. Some have been particularly fine accounts and, as a result, I have no space left to mention any CDs that also came my way, even though they included some first class re-released material by dance specialists Anatole Fistoulari and Robert Irving.

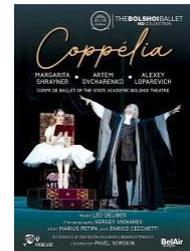


Kenneth MacMillan's Manon Sarah Lamb, Vadim Muntagirov, Ryoichi Hirano, Royal Ballet, Royal Opera House O/Martin Yates rec. 2018 **OPUS ARTE DVD OA1285D**

Just like his perennially popular *Romeo and Juliet*, Kenneth MacMillan's *Manon* is a crowd-pleasing masterpiece on a grand scale. A score that's finely constructed from various Massenet pieces offers the Royal Ballet's accomplished dancers the opportunity to pay homage to their past artistic director in a work that's become very much a company calling card. [Full Review](#)

Léo DELIBES *Coppélia* - Margarita Shrayner, Artem Ovcharenko, Alexey Loparevich, O State Academic Bolshoi Theatre/Pavel Sorokin rec. 2018 **BELAIR CLASSIQUES Blu-ray BAC463**

The Bolshoi Ballet's production of *Coppélia* is arguably the finest to be seen anywhere in the world. While we still wait to see if a recording of Natalia Osipova's outstanding performance will ever be officially released, this one will do very well to be going along with. Only a curmudgeon of Dr Coppélius-like proportions would fail to enjoy this splendidly invigorating show. [Full Review](#)



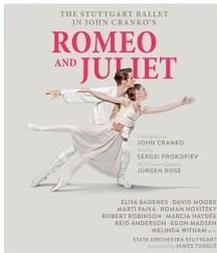
Akram Khan's Giselle Tamara Rojo, English National Ballet & Phil/Gavin Sutherland **OPUS ARTE Blu-ray OABD7254D**

Though certainly not *Giselle* as it is known and loved throughout the world, Akram Khan's remodelling of the classic Romantic ballet into a drama focusing on 21st century issues – and set to a very 21st century score – has proved justifiably popular. English National Ballet's artistic director Tamara Rojo dances the leading role with immense conviction, power and artistry. [Full Review](#)

Adolphe ADAM *Le corsaire* – Robert Gabdullin, Maria Yakovleva, Wiener Staatsballett, Wiener Staatsoper O/Valerey Ovsianikov rec. 2016 **NAXOS Blu-ray NBD0090V**

While it may not be as well-known as Adolphe Adam's ballet masterpiece *Giselle*, his *Le corsaire* is a hugely enjoyable romp. This well-filmed Vienna performance's high production values offer a fine setting for some accomplished dancing that almost succeeds in furnishing the outrageous plot with a degree of credibility. A particularly winning performance from Robert Gabdullin as the titular buccaneer is the icing on the cake. [Full Review](#)





Sergei PROKOFIEV *Romeo and Juliet* - David Moore, Elisa Badenes, Stuttgart Ballet, State Theatre Stuttgart O/James Tuggle rec. 2017 **C MAJOR Blu-Ray 801104**

Choreographer John Cranko played a major part in the development of the Stuttgart Ballet and it is fascinating to compare his *Romeo and Juliet* with that of his friend Kenneth MacMillan. The German company clearly relishes the opportunity to show why it still holds Cranko in such high esteem and its dancers demonstrate not just their complete commitment but exceptional artistry in this repertoire.

[Full Review](#)

John Cranko's Onegin Friedemann Vogel, Alicia Amatriain, Stuttgart Ballet, State Theatre Stuttgart O/James Tuggle rec. 2017 **C MAJOR Blu-ray 801304**

Yet more Cranko from Stuttgart – and this *Onegin* is, if anything, even better than *Romeo and Juliet*. Friedemann Vogel and Alicia Amatriain deliver commanding performances all the way to the ballet's emotionally-poleaxing final scene. This level of accomplishment will surely be hard to beat – and it will be fascinating to see London's Royal Ballet making the attempt when they present *Onegin* at Covent Garden next year. [Full Review](#)



RALPH MOORE

My tastes are generally mainstream and conventional, and my choices for 2019 reflect that. The prevalence of Bruckner's symphonies both in the concert hall and in recordings proceeds apace and my first two choices are the best of a whole flood of Bruckner recordings particularly from Germany and Japan. It is but a small step for me, as a devotee of Austrian High Romantic music, from Bruckner to Mahler, and Vladimir Jurowski's pre-eminence among the current conductors of London orchestras is confirmed by yet another superb live recording of Mahler's most approachable symphony. We are hardly short of recordings of Verdi's Requiem but I recommend this new version by one of the greatest living Russian conductors, Yuri Temirkanov, as it stars two great female singers in an age increasingly bereft of big operatic voices. My final choice is smaller-scale chamber music: a flawless performance in impeccable sound of two great 'Impressionistic' quartets.

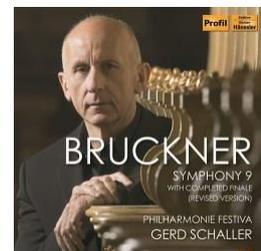


Anton BRUCKNER Symphony No. 3 - Frankfurt Radio Symphony/Paavo Järvi rec. 2014 **RCA SICC-10278 SACD**

I freely admit to never having been much of a fan of Paavo Järvi but a recent very positive experience of him in the concert hall and this driven, propulsive recording have made me happy to revise that opinion and welcome this proof of his affinity with Bruckner. [Full Review](#)

Anton BRUCKNER Symphony No. 9 - Philharmonie Festiva/Gerd Schaller rec. 2018 **PROFIL PH18030**

This is quite simply Gerd Schaller's finest Bruckner recording to date in addition to being the best completion of the Ninth Symphony available, the fruit of Schaller's revision of his own "reconstruction" - which is more an inspired invention, channelling the spirit of Bruckner. [Full Review](#)



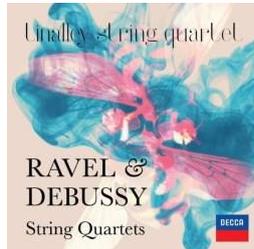
Gustav MAHLER Symphony No. 4 - Sofia Fomina, London Philharmonic Orchestra/Vladimir Jurowski rec. 2016 **LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA LPO0113**

The splendour of the recorded sound here is matched by the virtuosity of the LPO's playing and the assurance of Jurowski's conducting as a true Mahlerian. [Full Review](#)

Giuseppe VERDI *Messa da Requiem* - Dinara Alieva, Olesya Petrova, Francesco Meli, Dmitri Belosselskiy, Bolshoi Theater Chorus; St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra/Yuri Temirkanov rec. 2017 **DELOS DE3563**

A Grand Old Man at the helm and the finest new soprano on the circuit today are sufficient inducement for me to endorse this weighty, majestic performance featuring an inspired chorus underpinned by true Russian basses.

[Full Review](#)

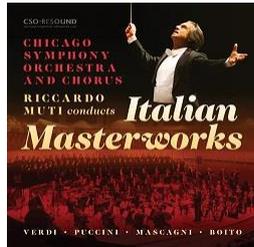


Claude DEBUSSY & Maurice RAVEL *String Quartets* - Tinalley String Quartet rec. 2017 **DECCA 4816906**

My preferred recording of these two seminal string quartets has long been the one by the Kodaly on Naxos but this new recording in splendid, translucent, digital sound now takes pride of place. The homogeneity and subtlety of the Tinalley Quartet are a delight. [Full Review](#)

DAN MORGAN

This year's harvest has been a good one. It's certainly yielded some fine Mahler from François-Xavier Roth, *Les Siècles* and the Gürzenich-Orchester Köln (Harmonia Mundi); two contrasting Sixths from Michael Gielen, recorded more than forty years apart (SWR Music); Iván Fischer's cycle-capping Seventh (Channel); and a hugely impressive Ninth from Herbert Blomstedt in Bamberg (Accentus). Other notable releases include more exhilarating Copland - *Grohg* and *Billy the Kid* - from Leonard Slatkin and his doughty Detroiters (Naxos); some refreshingly different Sibelius, courtesy of Sakari Oramo and the BBC Symphony (Chandos); *The Orchestral Organ*, a well-chosen set of transcriptions, played by Jan Kraybill (Reference); the Andris Nelsons/Boston Shostakovich 6 and 7 (Deutsche Grammophon); the start of what I hope will be a Korngold cycle from John Wilson and the Sinfonia of London (Chandos); and the triumphant close to Lan Shui's Debussy project (BIS). Also from BIS, two quite splendid concerto albums, with indecently talented pianists Alexandre Kantorow (*Saint-Saëns 3-5*), and Haochen Zhang (*Prokofiev 2* and *Tchaikovsky 1*). All were on my (rather long) shortlist, so final choices were even more difficult than usual.

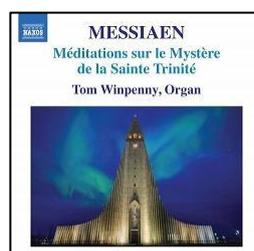


Italian Masterworks Chicago SO & Ch/Riccardo Muti rec. 2017 **CSO RESOUND CSOR9011801**

My reviewing year got off to a great start with this one, a delectable selection of opera overtures and intermezzi from Riccardo Muti and the Chicago Symphony (CSO Resound). A timely reminder of the conductor's long career in this field, it also finds orchestra and chorus at their opulent and exciting best. Ravishing sound, too. [Full Review](#)

Kalevi AHO *Trombone Concerto, Trumpet Concerto* - Jörgen van Rijen, Alain De Rudder, Antwerp SO/Martyn Brabbins rec. 2015 **BIS BIS-2196 SACD**

Despite what some critics have said, Kalevi Aho is still a force to be reckoned with, as his new trombone and trumpet concertos so amply demonstrate (BIS). These are premium quality pieces, with stellar playing from soloists Jörgen van Rijen and Alain De Rudder, respectively. Full-blooded support from Martyn Brabbins and the Antwerp SO, with a recording to match. [Full Review](#)



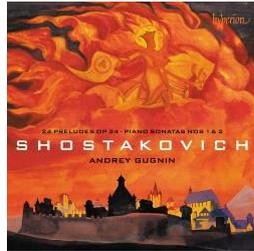
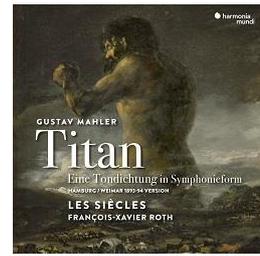
Olivier MESSIAEN *Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité* - Tom Winpenny rec. 2018 **NAXOS 8.573979**

I've not always warmed to Tom Winpenny's ongoing Messiaen series for Naxos, but I'm delighted to say he's finally hit his stride with his magnificent account of the *Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité*. With epiphanies

aplenty, a gorgeous Icelandic instrument and spectacular sound, this is now my first choice for the work. [Full Review](#)

Gustav MAHLER *Titan* - Les Siècles/François-Xavier Roth rec. 2018 **HARMONIA MUNDI HMM905299**

In February, I welcomed François-Xavier Roth's 'game-changing' Mahler 3 with the Gürzenich-Orchester Köln (Harmonia Mundi). Then, just two months later, HM released the Roth/Les Siècles recording of the 1893/4 Titan. And what an experience it turned out to be, so fresh and insightful from start to finish. The airy, delightfully detailed sound is a welcome bonus. [Full Review](#)



Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH Piano Sonatas, Preludes - Andrey Gugin rec. 2018 **HYPERION CDA68267**

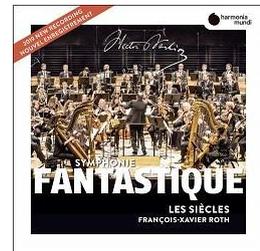
Even in a year packed with fine solo piano releases - just too many to mention - one really stands out. It features the multi-award-winning millennial Andrey Gugin in masterly performances of the Shostakovich piano sonatas and 24 Preludes. The recording is well up to the high standards of the house.

[Full Review](#)

Hector BERLIOZ *Symphonie fantastique*, Overture *Les Francs-Juges* - Les Siècles/François-Xavier Roth rec. 2019 **HARMONIA MUNDI HMM902644**

And what better way to celebrate this Berlioz anniversary than with a fabulous new performance of the *Symphonie fantastique* from M. Roth and his passionate period players. Really, this is a thoughtful, thoroughly engaging take on a rather tired piece. What's more, the sound is very good indeed.

[Full Review](#)



GLYN PURSGLOVE

The records I find worthy of this special accolade usually have something of the unfamiliar or unexpected about them, in approach or repertoire; they excite me and they teach me something. And I find myself playing them time and again. These six meet all those conditions. There is no significance to the order in which I have listed them.

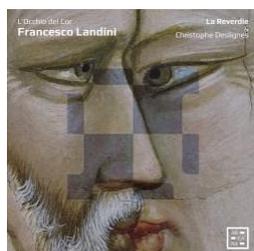


Ars longa: Old and new music for theorbo Elizabeth Kenny rec. 2018 **LINN CKD603**

A major contribution to the revival of the theorbo as a solo, rather than just a continuo, instrument. Kenny's playing is perceptive and assured throughout and there is much to admire and enjoy in the different ways which our contemporaries find to write for the theorbo. [Full Review](#)

Frammenti del discorso amoroso Marianna Henriksson rec. 2017 **SIBA RECORDS SRCD1020**

Henriksson's playing is passionate and disciplined in equal measure. The result is a remarkably exciting harpsichord recital. The work of Merula and Frescobaldi acquires a vivid new freshness and intensity. If I had to choose just one disc, I think this would be it. [Full Review](#)



Francesco LANDINI *L'occhio del cor* - La Reverdie/Christophe Deslignes rec. 2018 **ARCANA A462**

The best recordings of Landini I have heard for some time, making clearer than ever his importance in the cultural life of early Renaissance Florence. Mostly simple and sensuous and full of attractive melodies, La Reverdie sing and play this music with (appropriately) a spring-like freshness. [Full Review](#)

Leonardo Da Vinci: La Musique Secrète Douce Mémoire/Denis Raisin Dadre rec. 2018 **ALPHA CLASSICS 456**

This beautifully presented album (which is superbly documented, illustrated and printed) relates music and visual art more successfully than just about any recording of the kind I have ever encountered. Each piece of music is chosen on the basis that it seems to make a particular image by Leonardo 'speak'. The performances by Douce Mémoire are of the very highest standard. [Full Review](#)

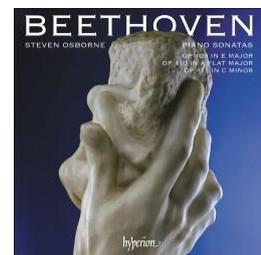


La Ruta de la Seda: Oriente y el Mediterráneo Capella de Ministrers, Lluís Vich Vocalis rec. 2016 **CAPELLA DE MINISTRERS CDM1743**

A range of music from along the length of the silk roads, from China to Spain, full of the rich colours one expects from the Capella de Ministrers, here supplemented by specialists from China, Persia and elsewhere. Delights abound, and the whole is an acoustic history lesson which is very thought-provoking. [Full Review](#)

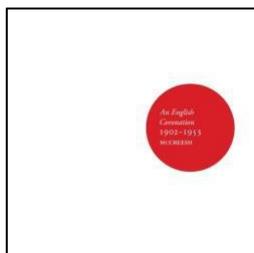
Ludwig van BEETHOVEN Piano Sonatas 30-32 - Steven Osborne rec. 2018 **HYPERION CDA68219**

Both moving and thoughtful (emotional and intellectual logics being inseparable in such music), Osborne's readings of these three sonatas are amongst the very best recorded versions. The 'mysteries' of this music are articulated with audible sincerity and a beautiful touch. Fortunately, the recorded sound is top class too. [Full Review](#)



JOHN QUINN

This year I've had many excellent recordings to review and from those releases the list of those which might be selected as Recordings of the Year was quite extensive. Among those which, by the finest of margins, didn't quite make the cut was a top-class account of Stenhammar's Second Symphony from Herbert Blomstedt; the performance of Mahler's Sixth with which Sir Simon Rattle bade farewell to the Berlin Philharmonic; and the most recent instalment of Andris Nelsons' Shostakovich cycle, which coupled the Sixth and the 'Leningrad'. It could easily have been the Year of Roth. In the end, his marvellous recording of Berlioz's *Harold en Italie* and his equally revelatory take on Mahler's 'Titan' symphonic poem yielded by the narrowest of margins to the Roth disc that's included in my six choices below. The stunning engineering of Andrew Litton's BIS recording of Holst's *The Planets*, allied to a superb performance made for another disc that was agonisingly close to my top six. I was sorely tempted to nominate the live video performance of *Salome* conducted by Franz Welser-Möst, not least for the astonishingly intense, once-in-a-lifetime assumption of the title role by Asmik Grigorian. It's a superlative release but, in the end, I decided to limit my choice to six releases which I reviewed myself. Each of these, in their different ways, seemed to me to have, like the *Salome* recording, that elusive X factor. They are listed in alphabetical order.



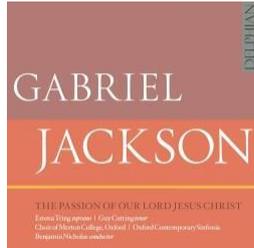
An English Coronation 1902-1953 Simon Russell Beale, Rowan Pierce, Matthew Martin, Gabrieli Consort; Gabrieli Roar; Gabrieli Players; Chetham's Symphonic Brass Ensemble/Paul McCreesh rec. 2018 **SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD569**

A highly imaginative reconstruction of a Coronation service, using words and items of music heard during the services at which four twentieth-century British monarchs have been crowned. The music is thrillingly executed and some of the pieces – and performances – are spectacular. One of the most exciting features is the involvement of so many young musicians. I described this as "a truly exciting release" when I reviewed it and I haven't changed my mind. [Full Review](#)

Hector BERLIOZ *La damnation de Faust* - Mathias Vidal, Anna Caterina Antonacci, Nicolas Courjal, Chœur Marguerite Louise, Les Siècles/François-Xavier Roth rec. 2018 **CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES CVS010 DVD**



This DVD lets us see a terrific account of Berlioz's utterly original masterpiece from L'Opéra du Château de Versailles. Everything about this performance oozes class, especially the wonderfully cynical assumption of the role of Méphistophélès by Nicolas Courjal. Roth conducts superbly, bringing out all the fantasy, colour and drama of this thrilling masterpiece and the period instrument timbres bring their own fascination. Dramatic flair characterises the whole enterprise. This was a memorable issue in the Berlioz 150th anniversary year. [Full Review](#)

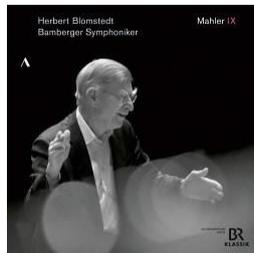
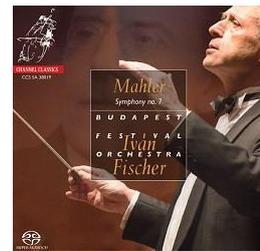


Gabriel JACKSON *The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ* – Emma Tring, Guy Cutting, Ch Merton College, Oxford, Oxford Contemporary Sinfonia/Benjamin Nicholas rec. 2018 **DELPHIAN DCD34222**

A very thoughtfully assembled libretto and eloquent, challenging music combine to tell the Passion story in a gripping and moving fashion. Jackson's score draws the listener in from the start and never lets go. The performance of this demanding work is superb and captured in excellent sound. This compelling work and performance represent contemporary choral music at its absolute best. [Full Review](#)

Gustav MAHLER *Symphony No. 7* - Budapest Festival O/Iván Fischer rec. 2015 **CHANNEL CLASSICS CCSSA38019 SACD**

Iván Fischer leads a tremendous performance of the Seventh, magnificently played and recorded. This is one of Mahler's most daring and inventive scores but it's not easy to bring off. Fischer does so triumphantly, with every movement a success and the whole even better than the sum of its parts. This is arguably the finest account of the Seventh that I've encountered. [Full Review](#)



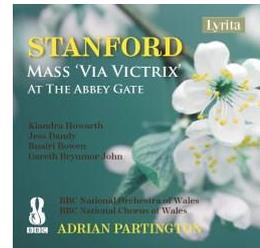
Gustav MAHLER *Symphony No. 9* - Bamberger Symphoniker/Herbert Blomstedt rec. 2018 **ACCENTUS ACC30477**

Among a number of distinguished Mahler issues this year, this one came as a bit of a surprise since Herbert Blomstedt is not a conductor I associate with Mahler. In my original review I described this magnificent live performance as "deeply considered, masterfully conducted and superbly played". I stand by that verdict and would just add that the recorded sound is excellent.

[Full Review](#)

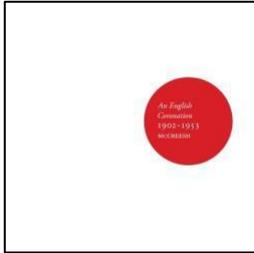
Sir Charles Villiers STANFORD *Mass Via Victrix, At the Abbey Gate* - BBC National Ch & O Wales/Adrian Partington rec. 2018 **LYRITA SRCD382**

It's been good to see some enterprising Stanford releases this year, most of them first recordings too. This one, however, takes the palm. It's a live recording of the first complete performance of Stanford's ambitious setting of the Mass, 99 years after Stanford wrote it. Composed in the immediate aftermath of World War I, the Mass remembers the dead, consoles the bereaved and, above all, gives thanks for victory, albeit not in a triumphalist way. A fine quartet of young soloists joins highly committed BBC Wales forces under the assured direction of Adrian Partington. This recording brings to the light a British choral work of major importance which should not have been allowed to suffer a century of neglect. [Full Review](#)



MARC ROCHESTER

If the sheer volume of new releases is anything to go by, the record industry is undergoing something of a resurgence after years in the doldrums. Quantity and quality are by no means synonymous, but during 2019 barely a month went by without some magnificent gem grabbing my attention.

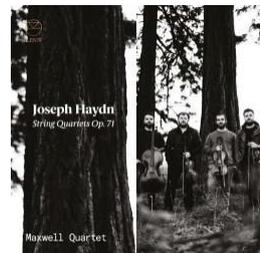


An English Coronation 1902-1953 Simon Russell Beale, Rowan Pierce, Matthew Martin, Gabrieli Consort; Gabrieli Roar; Gabrieli Players; Chetham's Symphonic Brass Ensemble/Paul McCreeh rec. 2018 **SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD569**

Absolutely top of my list, the huge favourite of the year and one of those releases you really feel privileged to have been able to review, was also one of the most gloriously eccentric. Paul McCreeh brought together music from each of the four coronations of the 20th century and roped in a huge cast of singers and instrumentalists to complement his own Gabrieli Consort. The results are truly spectacular. [Full Review](#)

Joseph HAYDN String Quartets & Scottish Traditional Tunes - Maxwell Quartet rec. 2018 **LINN CKD602**

When it comes to eccentric programming, few releases this year have matched the Maxwell Quartet's debut disc. I still have no idea what they were trying to achieve with their curious juxtapositioning of Haydn String Quartets and Scots traditional airs, but rather than attempt to intellectualise it, I have found that sitting back with a glass of whisky to hand and letting this superb playing simply wash over you has been one of the year's great pleasures. [Full Review](#)

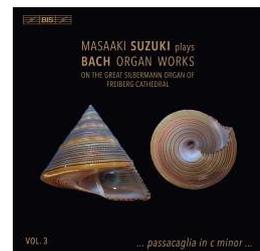


Gabriel FAURÉ Requiem **Francis POULENC** Figure humaine **Claude DEBUSSY** Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orléans - Roxane Chalard, Mathieu Dubroca, Louis-Noël Bestion de Camboulas, Ensemble Aedes, Les Siècles/Mathieu Romano rec. 2018 **APARTÉ AP201**

I never miss a chance to savour the beauties of Fauré's Requiem, and with over half a century of live and recorded performances behind me, I thought I had heard it all. But here was something which got closer to the true heart of Fauré than I would have imagined possible. And at the other end of the emotional scale, Mathieu Romano produces something both intense and electrifying from the singers of Ensemble Aedes in works by Poulenc and Debussy. [Full Review](#)

Johann Sebastian BACH Organ Works Vol. 3 - Masaaki Suzuki rec. 2018 **BIS BIS2421**

I could safely have predicted that I would be impressed with Masaaki Suzuki's Bach organ series for BIS, and I have not been disappointed with the volumes issued so far. But for its intelligent programming, its consistently imaginative playing and for the stupendous sound of the Silbermann organ of Freiberg Cathedral, volume 3 is my absolute favourite so far. [Full Review](#)



Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART Horn Concertos - Felix Klieser, Camerata Salzburg rec. 2018 **BERLIN CLASSICS 0301188BC**

I trained as an organist, but briefly worked as a professional French horn player. However, I never came anywhere near the brilliance Felix Klieser demonstrates on his disc of the four Mozart Horn Concertos. Partnered by Camerata Salzburg, this stood out for me as something exceptional even before I read in the booklet that Klieser had been born without arms, and operated the horn's valves with

his toes. [Full Review](#)

Johann Sebastian BACH Cantatas - Thomanerchor Leipzig, Sächsisches Barockorchester/Gotthold Schwarz rec. 2018 **ACCENTUS ACC30471**

The year saw a good number of Bach cantata recordings, but for me none matched the exquisite excellence of the three performed by the Thomanerchor Leipzig and Sächsisches Barockorchester under Gotthold Schwarz. I wrote in my original review that “I love this with a passion and have barely been able to rip it out of my CD player since the moment I first put it in and pressed Play”.

The passage of time has not in any way diminished my adoration for this gorgeous recording. [Full Review](#)



SIMON THOMPSON

The Hong Kong Ring (Naxos) nearly made my cut – so much bad news has been coming out of that city recently that it’s good to be reminded of the good things, too – but it was just edged out by the Dunedin *Samson*, which arrived late but went straight onto the list.



Ferruccio BUSONI Piano Concerto - Kirill Gerstein, Tanglewood Festival Ch, Boston SO/Sakari Oramo rec. 2017 **MYRIOS CLASSICS MYR024**

Any recording of Busoni’s gargantuan piano concerto is an event, but this one goes further and argues the case afresh for this piece not only to be taken seriously but to be admired. The brilliant performances and first rate sound and complemented by the outstanding packaging. [Full Review](#)

Robert SCHUMANN Liederkreis, Zwölf Gedichte von Justinus Kerner - Matthias Goerne, Leif Ove Andsnes rec. 2018 **HARMONIA MUNDI HMM902353**

Goerne’s beautiful voice and Andsnes’ sensitive pianism are a match made in musical heaven. For the Kernerlieder alone, this is a wonderful disc of song.

[Full Review](#)



George Frideric HANDEL *Samson* - Joshua Ellicott, Sophie Bevan, Tiffin Boys’ Ch, Dunedin Consort/John Butt rec. 2018 **LINN CKD599**

I often struggle to get excited about Handel’s oratorios, but I got very excited about this one. A taught, exciting reading with the very finest performances and top notch sound, with the option of downloading a second version if you buy the CD. Excellent! [Full Review](#)

Bernard Haitink: Portrait Bavarian RSO & Ch rec. 1997-2016 **BR KLASSIK 900174**

A very useful conspectus of Haitink’s recent work in Munich, reminding us how wonderful is his work and how indispensable he has been. This bargain package is made all the more essential by the fact that this year marked the great conductor’s 90th birthday and retirement from the podium. [Full Review](#)



Johann Sebastian BACH Violin Concertos - Isabelle Faust, Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin/Bernhard Forck rec. 2017/18 **HARMONIA MUNDI HMM902335.36**

This compendium of Bach’s music for violin and orchestra is not only brilliantly performed but it manages to be that rarest of things: a set of reconstructions that’s actually convincing! [Full Review](#)

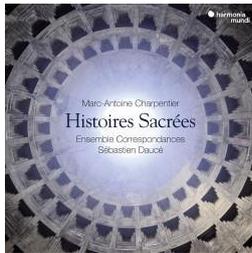
Carl Maria von WEBER *Der Freischütz* - Michael Kraus, Julia Kleiter, Eva Liebau, Ch & O del Teatro alla Scala/Myung-Whun Chung rec. 2017 **NAXOS Blu-Ray NBD0092V**

This is my only video this year, but it's worthwhile because, for once, it stages this most scenically problematic opera in a way that makes sense to us in the 21st century, avoiding both the twee and the absurd. The singing is excellent, too.

[Full Review](#)



JOHAN VAN VEEN

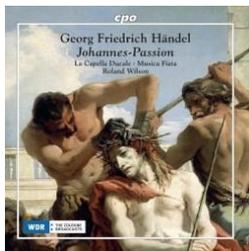


Marc-Antoine CHARPENTIER *Histoires Sacrées* - Ensemble Correspondances/Sébastien Daucé rec. 2016 **HARMONIA MUNDI HMM902280.81**

Some of Charpentier's oratorios and dialogues have been recorded before, but I can't remember having heard them in such outstanding performances. The Ensemble Correspondances has developed into a class of its own, especially with regard to French repertoire of the 17th century. The fact that Charpentier was not allowed to show his dramatic talent in opera is probably a blessing in disguise after all. Otherwise we may never have seen and heard these exciting sacred pieces. [Full Review](#)

Leonardo Da Vinci: La Musique Secrète Douce Mémoire/Denis Raisin Dadre rec. 2018 **ALPHA CLASSICS 456**

'The Hidden Music of Leonardo' is a marvellous project. I am very impressed by the way Denis Raisin Dadre has connected his selection of ten paintings with music from Leonardo's time. The performances by singers and instrumentalists are superb. The whole production deserves a ten out of ten: the book includes magnificent pictures of the selected paintings, each accompanied by an interesting analysis. If you are interested in the music of the renaissance, and especially if you like renaissance visual arts as well, this production is a must-have. [Full Review](#)



Georg Frideric HANDEL *Johannes-Passion* - La Capella Ducale, Musica Fiata/Roland Wilson rec. 2017 **CPO 5551732**

This is one of those works which are performed not often enough. With this superb performance Roland Wilson and his ensemble show what a fine work it is. Hans Jörg Mammel delivers a masterful account of the part of the Evangelist. The performances of the arias are excellent, without exception. One of the assets of this recording is also the use of a large organ for the basso continuo.

[Full Review](#)

Giovanni Benedetto PLATTI *Sonate à tre* - Radio Antiqua rec. 2018 **RAMÉE RAM1801**

This disc is one of the best chamber music recordings I have heard in recent times. More often than not Platti's music is pretty exciting stuff, and that comes off to the full in these outstanding performances by Radio Antiqua. They deserve much praise for their choice of Platti and the way they perform his music fully justifies their choice. [Full Review](#)



Sonatas for Two Violins Johannes Pramsohler, Rondán Bernabé rec. 2017 **AUDAX RECORDS ADX13714**

As recordings of baroque duets for violins are relatively rare, this disc is a major addition to the discography, and for that reason alone it deserves a strong recommendation. That is further supported by the quality of the music and the

level of music making. Johannes Pramsohler and Roldán Bernabé are brilliant violinists, who perform these pieces with stunning ease. [Full Review](#)

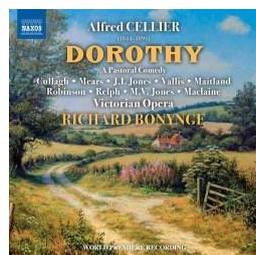
Les défis de Mr. Forqueray Lucile Boulanger, Claire Gautrot, Romain Falik, Pierre Gallon rec. 2017 **HARMONIA MUNDI HMM902330**

This disc is one of the best with music for the viola da gamba that I have heard in recent years. Not only are Lucile Boulanger's technical command of the instrument and the way she deals with the challenges of the music highly impressive, her performances are also strongly gestural, and her approach is quite theatrical. Her style of playing seems very much in line with what we know about Forqueray's own playing and his embracing of the Italian style. [Full Review](#)



RAYMOND WALKER

My choice does not just relate to the quality of singing/interpretation/recording but also considers the difficulty of the undertaking and for all chosen items in finding the music, and preparing a full score.



Alfred CELLIER Dorothy - Majella Cullagh, Victorian Opera Ch & O/Richard Bonygne rec. 2018 **NAXOS 8.660447**

There's a freshness to Cellier's lush melody lines, with vivacious singing and superb diction by young professional singers under the baton of world class conductor, Richard Bonygne. [Full Review](#)

MICHAEL WILKINSON

This year has not been a vintage one for new recordings – at least as far as I have heard – but a few would be exciting at any time.



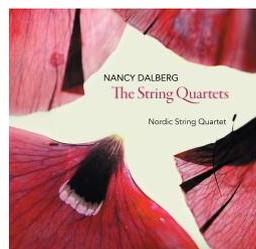
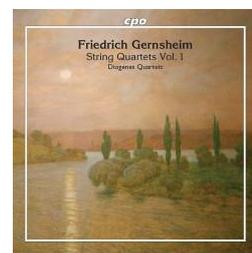
Sir Arthur SULLIVAN The Light of the World - BBC Concert O/John Andrews rec. 2017 **DUTTON EPOCH 2CDLX7356 SACD**

Of those I reviewed the one that has given most pleasure, while being an important issue in its own right. This oratorio is remarkable, not least in how Sullivan balances an orchestra within an orchestra for Christ's own voice, but also for the committed and engaging performances under John Andrews, captured in a natural sound. This is a major work which belongs among the

very greatest British oratorios. [Full review](#)

Friedrich GERSHEIM String Quartets Vol. 1 - Diogenes Quartet rec. 2017 **CPO 777 387-2**

The first of two recordings of largely ignored string quartets seemed to me outstanding: lovely pieces touched by genius, in committed and secure performances. [Full Review](#)



Nancy DALBERG String Quartets - Nordic String Quartet rec. 2018 **DA CAPO SACD 6.220655**

The second: strong, lean works superbly played by the Nordic Quartet. Dalberg was a pupil and friend of Carl Nielsen but is a significant and distinctive voice in her own right. [Full Review](#)

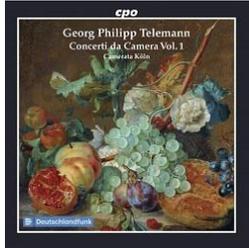
Mieczysław WEINBERG Symphonies 2 & 21 - City of Birmingham O, Kremerata Baltica/Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla rec. 2018 **DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 483 6566**

Remarkable works, gloriously conducted (and sung) by Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Kremerata Baltica in performances unlikely to be bettered. [Full Review](#)



BRIAN WILSON

With eight recordings that I really wanted to choose, two have had to go; eventually I jettisoned Berlioz *Harold in Italy* (Harmonia Mundi) and Shostakovich Symphonies Nos 6 and 7 (DG).



Georg Philipp TELEMANN Concerti da Camera - Camerata Köln rec. 2015 **CPO 555131-2**

The first volume in CPO's latest distinguished recordings of Telemann matches the quality of their earlier series of his music; their Grand Concertos for Mixed Instruments concluded with Volume 6 this year. [Full Review](#)

Giovanni CARBONELLI Chamber Sonatas - Illyria Consort/Bojan Čičić rec. 2019 **DELPHIAN DCD34214**

These little-known sonatas emerge as very fine music in the distinguished completion of a set, the first six concertos from which were released in 2017. [Full Review](#)

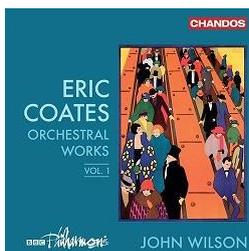
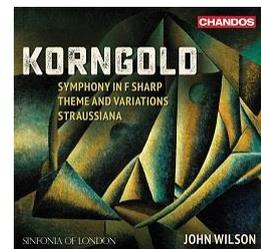


Jean SIBELIUS Symphony No.1 - Gothenburg Symphony/Santtu-Matias Rouvali rec. 2018 **ALPHA 440**

I was far from alone in thinking that the symphony emerges as a finer, more mature work than usual from this recording. [Full Review](#)

Erich Wolfgang KORNGOLD Symphony, Theme and Variations, *Straussiana* - Sinfonia of London/John Wilson rec. 2019 **CHANDOS CHSA5220 SACD**

An important reminder that Korngold was just as fine a composer of symphonic-scale music as he was of film music. [Full Review](#)



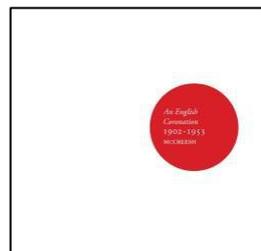
Eric COATES Orchestral Works Vol. 1 - BBC Philharmonic/John Wilson rec. 2019 **CHANDOS CHAN20036**

This is the first of what promises to be the definitive modern series of the music of a composer of the most accomplished light classical music. That's the second of two first-class recordings from John Wilson and Chandos in short succession.

[Full Review](#)

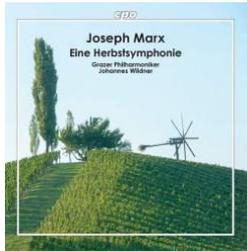
An English Coronation 1902-1953 Simon Russell Beale, Rowan Pierce, Matthew Martin, Gabrieli Consort; Gabrieli Roar; Gabrieli Players; Chetham's Symphonic Brass Ensemble/Paul McCreesh rec. 2018 **SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD569**

So many of us enthused over Paul McCreesh's latest and most adventurous reconstruction that it has to be the top of my choices this year. [Full Review](#)



JONATHAN WOOLF

No historic recordings from me this year; something's gone very badly wrong!

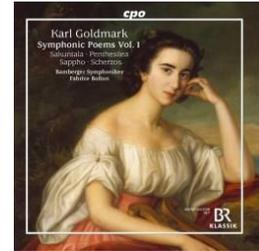


Joseph MARX *Eine Herbstsymphonie* - Grazer Philharmoniker/Johannes Wildner rec. 2018 **CPO 555 262-2**

Here it is, then, at last, and it's been worth the wait. Marx's *Eine Herbstsymphonie*, charted by Johannes Wildner and the Graz Philharmonic, is ravishing and memorable, 67-minutes of triumph and my undoubted recording of the year. [Full Review](#)

Karl GOLDMARK *Symphonic Poems Vol. 1* - Bamberg SO/Fabrice Bollon rec. 2017 **CPO 555 160-2**

The first volume in a Goldmark symphonic poem series from CPO brought as high a quotient of lyric warmth as you could hope for. From rustic drones to proto-Korngoldian sumptuousness this disc has a huge amount to like and admire – and that includes the outstanding performances. [Full Review](#)



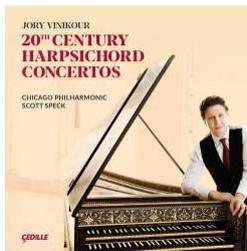
Dutch Cello Sonatas Vol. 8 Doris Hochscheid, Frans van Ruth rec. 2018 **MDG SACD 903 2094-6**

The Dutch Cello Sonata series from MDG has been flying below the radar for too long. For me, volume 8 is the finest to date, with invigorating and delightful sonatas by Witte and Hutschenruyter. Never heard of them? Take a chance. And let's take a moment to salute Doris Hochscheid and pianist Frans van Ruth.

[Full Review](#)

Gabriel DUPONT *Complete Symphonic Works* - Royal PO Liège/Patrick Davin rec. 2018 **FUGA LIBERA FUG751**

The tragically short-lived Gabriel Dupont left a slender portfolio of works but what poignant and passionate intensity courses through them. Eight years younger than Lekeu, he shared something of his quivering and passionate intensity and somehow even the few more inchoate moments ring true – of life, of love, of striving. [Full Review](#)



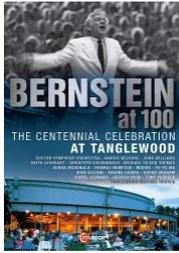
20th Century Harpsichord Concertos Jory Vinikour, Chicago Philharmonic/Scott Speck rec. 2016/18 **CEDILLE CDR90000188**

Viktor Kalabis, Walter Leigh, Michael Nyman, Ned Rorem. Four Harpsichord Concertos. Add to that Jory Vinikour and top-notch accompaniments and recording quality and you have a truly classy disc, magnificently articulated and interpreted. If you want vitality, playfulness and flair, here's your disc. [Full](#)

[Review](#)

LESLIE WRIGHT

I have reviewed quite a variety of music this past year, but found less difficulty than heretofore in selecting my favourite recordings. Ones that almost made the list include Britten choral works with the RIAS Kammerchor (Harmonia Mundi), the Frankfurt Opera recording of Janáček's *Cunning Little Vixen* (Oehms), and Lutosławski and Dutilleux Cello Concertos performed by Johannes Moser (Pentatone).



Bernstein at 100: The Centennial Celebration at Tanglewood Boston SO, Tanglewood Festival Chorus rec. 2018 **C MAJOR DVD 747608**

This concert DVD, a celebration in honor of Leonard Bernstein's centenary that took place on his birthday at Tanglewood, the Boston Symphony's summer home, is essential for all fans of the composer. The concert comprises music of Bernstein and other composers closely associated with him. It is indeed an occasion worth preserving and the powers that be did Bernstein proud with this production.

[Full Review](#)

Manuel de FALLA *El amor brujo, El retablo de Maese Pedro* - Esperanza Fernández, Alfredo García, Jennifer Zetlan, Jorge Garza, Perspectives Ensemble/Angel Gil-Ordóñez rec. 2018 **NAXOS 8.573890**

Falla's *El amor brujo* is usually heard in its abbreviated full-orchestra version, but here we have the original score for 15 instruments and narrator/singer (*cantaora*), vividly performed by Esperanza Fernández and the crack Perspectives Ensemble. Accompanying *El amor brujo* is the neo-classical mini-opera *El retablo de Maese Pedro* in an equally delightful performance. [Full Review](#)



Leoš JANÁČEK Piano Works - Jan Bartoš rec. 2019 **SUPRAPHON SU4266-2**

Czech pianist Jan Bartoš performs the bulk of Janáček's rather slim output for solo piano in highly idiomatic accounts. With his beautifully pellucid and warm piano tone, Bartoš's interpretations can easily stand comparison with those of the authoritative Rudolf Firkušný. [Full Review](#)

Blue Hour Andreas Ottensamer, Yuja Wang, Berliner Philharmoniker/Mariss Jansons rec. 2018 **DEUTSCHE**

GRAMMOPHON 4836069

Berlin Philharmonic principal clarinetist Andreas Ottensamer joins star pianist Yuja Wang for a most engaging programme of short pieces of Brahms and Mendelssohn arranged for clarinet, but the highlights are undoubtedly Weber's Grand Duo concertant and his First Clarinet Concerto, the latter with the Berlin Philharmonic under Mariss Jansons. [Full Review](#)



Mieczysław WEINBERG Symphonies 2 & 21 - City of Birmingham O, Kremerata Baltica/Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla rec. 2018 **DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 483 6566**

Although I did not review this disc myself, I had read so much about it that I had to hear for myself. The music of Mieczysław Weinberg was new to me, but these accounts encourage me to investigate further. I am particularly impressed with the composer's final symphony, whose complexities blew me away, and with the outstanding performance by the CBSO and its new music

director. [Full Review](#)

Compiled by David Barker