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The Blake Collection

In Memory of Nancy M. Blake

BELLINI'S NORMA featuring CECILIA BARTOLI

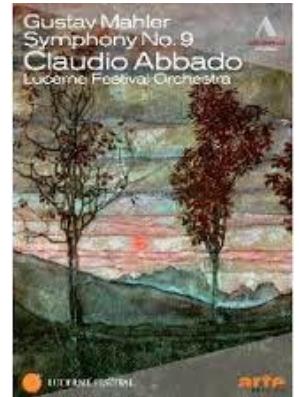


This tragic opera is set in Roman-occupied, first-century Gaul, features a title character, who although a Druid priestess, is in many ways a modern woman. Norma has secretly taken the Roman proconsul Pollione as her lover and had two children with him. Political and personal crises arise when the locals turn against the occupiers and Pollione turns to a new paramour. Norma “is a role with emotions ranging from haughty and demanding, to desperately passionate, to vengeful and defiant. And the singer must convey all of this while confronting some of the most vocally challenging music ever composed. And if that weren’t intimidating enough for any singer, *Norma* and its composer have

become almost synonymous with the specific and notoriously torturous style of opera known as *bel canto* — literally, ‘beautiful singing’ (“Love Among the Druids: Bellini’s *Norma*,” NPR World of Opera, May 16, 2008). And Bartoli, one of the greatest living opera divas, is up to the challenges the role brings. (New York Public Radio’s WQXR’s “OperaVore” declared that “Bartoli is Fierce and Mercurial in Bellini’s *Norma*,” Marion Lignana Rosenberg, June 09, 2013.) If you’re already a fan of this opera, you’ve no doubt heard a recording spotlighting the great soprano Maria Callas (and we have such a recording, too), but as the notes with the Bartoli recording point out, “The role of Norma was written for Giuditta Pasta, who sang what today’s listeners would consider to be mezzo-soprano roles,” making Bartoli more appropriate than Callas as Norma. Making this performance even more compelling is the fact that the Orchestra La Scintilla used a new critical edition of the score and performed on period instruments. The CD contains extensive liner notes and the complete libretto. This is truly a history-making recording.

MAHLER under the baton of CLAUDIO ABBADO

One of the premier additions to our collection is a recent recording of Gustav Mahler’s Symphony No. 9. The 9th, Mahler’s last (he died before completing his 10th), was also his most complex and compelling. In it we hear the voice of “a vibrant, passionate man who, facing a foreshortened life, tries at one and the same time to confront death and to evade it. Brave and terrified in turn, Mahler . . . plays hope against despair” (*Why Mahler?* p. 168—this book is also a new addition to our collection). The Camden Library now owns this phenomenal work on DVD, the 2010 recording of the Lucerne Festival Orchestra under the baton of the legendary Claudio Abbado. (In 2003, Abbado, dedicated to Mahler, formed the Lucerne ensemble, and they have now recorded eight of his symphonies.) We also have a 1999 CD recording of the Berlin Philharmonic with Maestro Abbado at the helm.



RACHMANINOV performances by VALENTINA LISITSA



Truly a musician for the 21st century, Valentina Lisitsa turned to YouTube when her concert career seemed to be faltering. The online response was tremendous—40 million hits since 2007! This 2013 CD from Decca Classics showcases Lisitsa performing Rachmaninov's four Piano Concertos and the Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini with conductor Michael Francis and the London Symphony Orchestra. Given the praise she has garnered online, it's not surprising that the critics also love her. Rachmaninov wrote passionate piano music, and Lisitsa does these works justice. “What a heart-melting performance of the first concerto this is . . . [and] Lisitsa’s control of rhythm, touch and phrasing in Piano Concerto No. 3 is just as miraculous . . . The LSO are pin-sharp in their responses

and there’s a powerful sense of the players sitting in rapt attention during the solos. Lisitsa’s is not a big, muscular sound but it is a lithe, well-toned one, and she lights up this most familiar concerto in ways I scarcely thought possible” (Dan Morgan, MusicWeb International). Not the heavy-handed performances one sometimes hears of Rachmaninov, these are lush, intelligent, and stirring. Reviewer Norman Lebrecht found this set to be “the most compelling full set of Rachmaninov concertos since Vladimir Ashkenazy’s with André Previn 40 years ago.”

VERDI's OTELLO and MESSA DA REQUIEM

2013 is the 200th anniversary of the birth of Giuseppe Verdi. We have just purchased a DVD of Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* that is described as “a Verdi Requiem with a dream line-up of soloists and the forces of La Scala, Milan, directed by one of the greatest maestros of our time. . . . Barenboim and his magnificent partners recorded this masterpiece around a live performance at La Scala, Milan, in 2012. A superb quartet of soloists – Jonas Kaufmann, Anja Harteros, Elīna Garanča and René Pape – stamp their authority on this terrific performance” (MDT). This is “one of the enduring masterworks of the choral repertory” (Voix des Arts).



The first time conductor Riccardo Muti recorded with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the resulting album—also music of Verdi—garnered two Grammys. Muti and the CSO again joined forces in 2011 for a live recording of Verdi’s penultimate opera, *Otello*. This has been described as a “benchmark [recording] in Verdi performance and interpretation by one of today’s finest conductors” (ArkivMusic). The *Chicago Tribune* describes Muti as “the greatest Verdi conductor of our time” and Krassimira Stoyanova (Desdemona) as possessed of “a rich, gleaming lyric soprano.” “The performance on this recording . . . is a precious instance of all members of a large musical team being fit, focused, and dedicated to the task of making music at the highest possible level of excellence” (Voix des Arts).



MOZART's DON GIOVANNI and COSI FAN TUTTE

Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducted the 2011 Baden-Baden Festspielhaus performance of *Don Giovanni*. “A better-cast *Don Giovanni* than this one would be hard to find nowadays. With ideal or near-ideal singers in six of the eight roles, this recording has to be considered among the best available” (Robert Levine, ClassicsToday.com). The singers, he says “are truly dramatic animals, and each of them gives us a vivid portrait.” “*Don Giovanni* has been widely regarded as the greatest opera ever composed. That's a pretty bold statement, but however you rank it, Mozart's opera is a brilliant combination of stark human tragedy and touching comedy, set to music of limitless genius” (NPR’s “World of Opera, November 2, 2007). This is the first of a landmark series of Deutsche Grammophon recordings of Mozart's operas.

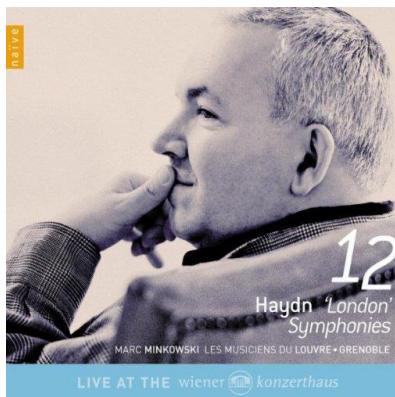


The second of DG's Mozart operas spotlights Conductor Nézet-Séguin with lighter Mozart fare in the form of the charming *Così fan tutte*. “*Così fan tutte* enchanted the Baden-Baden Festspielhaus audience when recorded in concert in 2012, with Nézet-Séguin inspiring his stellar cast to feats of vocal derring-do. . . . Youthful exuberance tempered by depth of insight make[s] this a rare *Così*, a must for even the most seasoned opera lover” (ArkivMusic). Set in 18th-century Naples, Mozart's 2-act *opera buffa* is a tale of youthful love, flirtation, and tested fidelity. As part of a wager, two callow soldiers challenge the virtue of their beautiful fiancés in a comic plot that relies on multiple disguises. Although light and brimming with beautiful music, *Così* “bluntly reminds us that our most cherished relationships can often be fragile and tenuous, and in doing so it shines a harsh light on the barest of our vulnerabilities” (NPR’s “World of Opera,” May 4, 2007).

The most successful and innovative composers of their era, Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) lived in the same city, shared family connections, joined the same Masonic lodge, and over the years became friends. Stanley Sadie, in *The Cambridge Music Guide* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University of Cambridge, 1985), describes them as masters of “the mature Classical style” (p. 242). They also admired each other’s work.

This month’s additions to the Blake Collection include recent acquisitions of works by these two 18th-century greats: symphonies, piano concertos, and an opera—as well as works by Wagner, Elgar, and Britten.

Haydn: 12 London Symphonies



“It would take readings of an ultimate dullness to snuff out the variety, inventiveness, colour, urbanity and sheer *joie de vivre* of the 12 wonderful symphonies that Joseph Haydn composed for his two triumphant 18-month London visits in the early 1790s. And these latest recordings are never dull.” (Bayan Northcott, BBC Music Magazine). Marc Minkowski and his Les Musiciens du Louvre performed these symphonies in 2009 in Vienna (Haydn’s hometown). And there is a Maine connection here: Minkowski studied at the Pierre Monteux School in Hancock! In his July 31, 2010, review, *The Observer*’s Nicholas Kenyon described these recordings as “a really fresh look at Haydn’s masterpieces.”

Mozart: Symphonies Nos. 35-41

Haydn’s and Mozart’s music, “though clearly of the same era, is remarkably different in character Mozart composed a lesser quantity of music, but he excelled in every sphere” (Sadie, p. 242). Judge for yourself by listening to Deutsche Grammophon’s classic recordings of Mozart’s Symphonies 35 through 41 performed by the Berlin Philharmonic under the direction of Karl Bohm. These are Mozart’s late symphonies and include the “Prague” (Symphony No. 38)—“A piece designed to entertain, but from its slow introduction the ‘Prague’ symphony is set apart as something slightly more brooding. Tense and mournful in places, wistful and beautiful in others, Mozart shows us once and for all that his music is capable of a wide range of emotions” and his last, the great “Jupiter” symphony, “A pinch of playful naivety, a dash of European grandeur, and a hint of operatic humour thrown in for good measure: the majestic C major blaze of the ‘Jupiter’ symphony takes the best features of Mozart’s style and fits them all together in a fantastic five-movement musical jigsaw. . . . It’s a fantastic conclusion to Mozart’s symphonies; perhaps he knew it would be his last” (Classical FM). Although the performances are from the ‘60s, “they still represent ‘big orchestra’ Mozart at its most congenial” (Edward Greenfield, *Gramophone*, 1995).



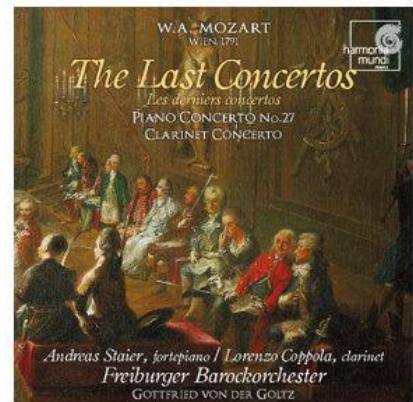
Mozart Piano Concertos 14, 20 & 25 and 22-24



Mozart displayed his compositional skills in concertos for numerous instruments—27 for the piano—and we now have some of the later piano concertos in a pair of DVDs featuring Rudolf Buchbinder conducting the Vienna Philharmonic from the piano. These live performances were part of the 2006 Vienna Festival celebration of Mozart's 250th birthday. "Buchbinder's are performances of admirable composure and his evident joy in the music making is very appealing" (Michael Greenhalgh, MusicWeb International). And no orchestra "know[s] their Mozart better than the Vienna Philharmonic" (Jeremy Siepmann, DVD liner notes).

Mozart: The Last Concertos

Gramophone gave this CD its "Editor Choice Award," describing it as "Two late favourites beautifully recorded - the piano concerto particularly telling. The great glory of this set is the work of Andreas Staier on the fortepiano. The German delivers one of the most satisfying readings of the Piano Concerto No 27 on record." The Clarinet Concerto is the only one Mozart wrote for the instrument, but he wrote it for the bassett clarinet, an instrument different from the modern clarinet (primarily, in that it has a lower range). Lorenzo Coppola, performing on this disc, is "one of the most sought-after clarinetists in the field of historical performance practice" (CD liner notes). For both pieces on this disc, "the performers have gone back to the original manuscripts to unearth the detailed traces of the composer's own performing practice" (CD liner notes).

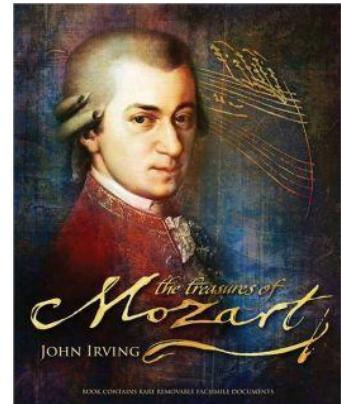


Mozart: *Le nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*)



Last month we added *Cosi fan tutte* to our collection. This month, we have another—and perhaps the most well-known—Mozart *opera buffa*, *Le nozze di Figaro*. This outstanding DVD was recorded live in February 2006 at the Royal Opera House, London, and garnered rave reviews. "This . . . is in some ways the ultimate *Le nozze di Figaro*. . . [it] seems to get to the heart of arguably Mozart's greatest opera more successfully than almost any other production of the composer's stage works I've seen in the last two or three years. As day turns to night and the characters leave the house to resolve their disputes in Tanya McCallin's verdant garden set, the performance takes on a warm glow; it's just so emotional, so involving, so poignant. Shot in high definition and in surround sound, this is a luxury package and one that should be purchased and treasured by every opera lover" (Dominic McHugh, MusicalCriticism.com). "The sound is splendid and the video direction excellent. . . This is one of those DVD operas that requires to be seen again and more than once" (Goran Forsling, MusicWeb International). This compelling production reminds us that opera can be beautiful, moving, and loads of fun.

If you find yourself more and more in love with Mozart's music, please have a look at the newly acquired book *The Treasures of Mozart* by John Irving.



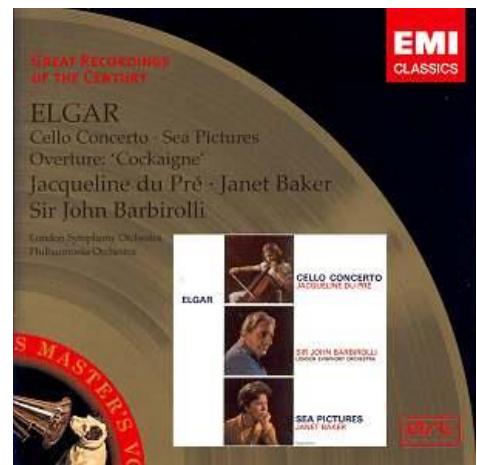
Wagner: *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*



Acknowledging the bicentennial of Richard Wagner, we've added his *Meistersinger* to our collection. *Die Meistersinger* "alone among his operas, leads to a happy ending, and only here does love's happiness prove to be lasting" (CD liner notes). With a literally more down-to-earth storyline than most of Wagner's operas, *Die Meistersinger* nonetheless exhibits the "atmospheric intensity" for which Wagner is renowned. And this is a superlative recording: "the finest *Meistersinger* available. . . . confirms Kubelik's claim to be one of the great Wagner conductors. . . . The music flows effortlessly with superb clarity and with that amazingly flexible long line that remains the hallmark of accomplished podium work in Wagner. . . . Don't miss this incomparable musical event" (David Hurwitz). "If there's a better *Meistersinger* on record, I've yet to hear it. [It] exudes wonderfulness on every level" (Jed Distler, ClassicsToday.com). If you'd like to watch this opera rather than simply listen to it, we have a Met Opera performance of *Die Meistersinger* on DVD. And if you'd like to explore further, actor Stephen Fry examines his love/hate relationship with Wagner in a DVD entitled *Wagner and Me*.

Elgar: Cello Concerto

"This is a 'Great Recording of the Century' if ever there was one. Recorded more than forty years ago it sounds as fresh as ever. . . . Elgar's Cello Concerto is a standard work in concert halls around the world. . . . I believe that this is to a certain extent thanks to the present recording. From the very start one can feel the almost transcendental rapport between the young soloist [Jacqueline du Pre], barely turned twenty, and the ageing maestro [Sir John Barbirolli]. One can dip into the recording at almost any point and feel the magic. . . . this recording [goes] directly to the heart. And that is exactly what Janet Baker's singing of *Sea Pictures* also does. . . . Behind and above Jacqueline du Pre and Janet Baker looms Sir John's spirit, loving and sensitive" (Goran Forsling, WebMusic International). Du Pre made her mark on the world with her performance of Elgar's Cello Concerto. This is a one-of-a-kind recording, and you won't want to miss a chance to hear it.



Britten: War Requiem



For the 100th anniversary of the birth of composer Benjamin Britten, we've acquired the CD of the remastered 1963 recording of Britten's *War Requiem* under the direction of Britten himself. According to the original album liner notes, the *War Requiem* "was an immediate critical and popular success and seemed to give people something they wanted and needed to hear." From the Latin text from the *Missa pro defunctis* and the poetry of Wilfred Owen, Britten created a timeless masterpiece. Along with the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, this performance features the Bach Choir, the Highgate School Choir, organist Simon Preston, and singers Galina Vishnevskaya, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, and Britten's partner and muse, Peter Pears. "The performance itself comes over superbly . . . The boys' voices float down from a distant heaven just as Britten asked. Anyone who cherishes this masterly work should have this version. It is hard to think of another piece of music that was fixed so firmly in the composer's own interpretation as this work has been" (FANFARE: J. F. Weber) For a history of the composition of the *Requiem* and a detailed analysis of this recording, read MusicWeb International's review.

This month, we bring you a lot of **Beethoven** and a dash of **Dvorak**!

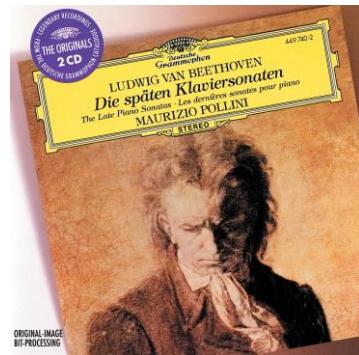
Dvorak: Violin Concerto



In his [review at Classics Today](#), David Hurwitz labeled this disk “Mutter’s Miraculous Dvorak Concerto.” He goes on to declare this “the finest version yet to appear outside of the classic Czech tradition.” Mutter, he says, “treats the work in the grand style, turning in a performance of bold gestures, hugely contrasted in tone, tempo, and dynamics. . . . Mutter truly ‘speaks’ through her instrument, and what she says sheds an entirely new light on Dvorak, and repays the closest attention.” Michael Cookson was rapturous in his praise: “The boldly melodic and lavishly coloured romanticism of the opening *Allegro* is matched here by the soloist’s richly lyrical playing. It’s hard to fault and her unerring sensitivity in the central *Adagio* conveys a dreamy rhapsodic quality without resorting to sentimentality. She raptly underlines the optimism of the memorably upbeat *Finale: Allegro* resisting any temptation to drive the music over hard or too fast” ([MusicWeb International](#)). This combination package contains June 2013 studio recordings on the CD and a live February 2013 concert recording on the DVD. (If you’d like to have a brief online sample of Mutter’s performance, check out [her YouTube video](#).)

Beethoven: The Late Piano Sonatas

In the final years of his career, Beethoven wrote five piano sonatas of profound and monumental brilliance, including the famous *Hammerklavier*, which Richard Osborne in the CD liner notes describes as “less the ‘Mount Everest’ of sonatas, more the Mount Etna, the concluding fugue an act of Titanic rage. More than anything else Beethoven wrote in his entire career the sonata was a conscious attempt to write of work of uncompromising greatness.” All the pieces on this recently remastered disk are wonderful. “Pollini’s recordings of the late sonatas, which won the 1977 Gramophone critics’ award for instrumental music, contain playing of the highest mastery” (Penguin Guide).



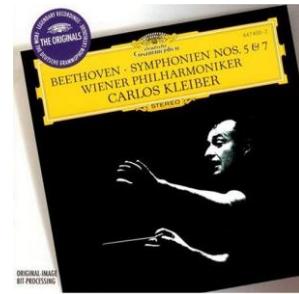
Beethoven: The Symphonies

“It was with the explosion of the genius of Ludwig van Beethoven . . . that the classical era reached both a climax and a dissolution. . . . Beethoven’s music embodied a new dynamism and power which not only demanded that it be listened to in different ways but also symbolized the changing role of the composer in society—no longer a servant . . . but its visionary, its hero-figure” (Stanley Sadie and Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, Cambridge, UK, 1985, p. 261). Power, dynamism, heroic are all words that come to mind when listening to Beethoven’s music, and his nine symphonies span much of his career, from 1800 to 1824, and with some of these works—the Symphonies No. 5 and No. 9—breaking new ground in startling ways.

We've added to the Blake Collection legendary recordings of Beethoven's Symphonies 5 and 7, by the Vienna Philharmonic with conductor Carlos Kleiber; and the Ninth performed by the Bayreuth Festspielhaus Orchestra and Chorus under the direction of the legendary Wilhelm Furtwangler. The liner notes for the Kleiber tell us that "in these recordings, Carlos Kleiber and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra united the inspiration of a live, concert



performance with the painstaking, detailed accuracy that can be achieved only in the studio The critics responded with superlatives." And superlative is the word for the Furtwangler recording of the Ninth. "Just as it was for the laying of the foundation stone in 1872, so Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was on the programme for the reopening of the Bayreuth Festival in 1951. Under Furtwangler's overwhelmingly emotional direction, all the performers—including the Festival soloists in the final chorus—gave their all" (CD liner notes).



To immerse yourself in Beethoven's symphonies, we recommend the complete symphonies on DVD performed live between 2008 and 2010 by Christian Thielemann at the helm of the Vienna Philharmonic. Thielemann and his orchestra give us a Beethoven who is "responsive and alive rigorous, intellectual and well considered . . . and the playing is outstanding throughout a bold attempt to recapture and redefine Beethoven for the 21st century" ([Simon Thompson, MusicWeb International](#)). In addition, this set contains a series of nine one-hour documentaries, one for each for each symphony, "analysing the background of the work and deconstructing Thielemann's interpretation. The presenter of each documentary is Joachim Kaiser, the grand old man of German music criticism. In each film he gives his own view of the symphony and then engages Thielemann in a conversation to tease out why Thielemann has come to the interpretations he has" (Simon Thompson).



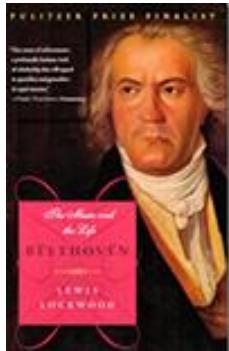
Beethoven: *Fidelio*



Beethoven wrote only one opera, *Fidelio*, and the library now owns a remastered 2-CD set of a remarkable 1978 performance of this work performed by some of the great voices of the time with the Vienna Philharmonic and Vienna State Opera Chorus conducted by none other than Leonard Bernstein. [Hilary Finch, in Gramophone](#), described this performance as "a brilliant coup, typical of Bernstein as a man of the theatre." This *Fidelio*, according to the liner notes, was "a fresh and powerful vision of Beethoven's masterpiece" and "marked one of Leonard Bernstein's greatest triumphs in Vienna."

Beethoven: Piano Concertos 1-5

“As a pianist Beethoven, according to reports of the time, had immense fire, brilliance and fantasy, as well as depth of feeling. In no other musical medium could he be so bold or so wholly himself” (Stanley Sadie and Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, Cambridge, UK, 1985, p. 263). In a recent 2-DVD set, Daniel Barenboim performs the Piano Concertos 1-5 live with the Berlin Staatskapelle Orchestra. “These concertos . . . are models of emotional consistency, technical wizardry, and tasteful enunciation,” says [Steven E. Ritter of FANFARE](#), who goes on to say, “I don’t think I can recommend this set highly enough” and that the camerawork “is excellent, appropriate, and non-intrusive, only adding to the experience.”



And if all this Beethoven music leaves you wanting to know more about this incredible composer, we direct you to Lewis Lockwood’s first-rate biography, [*Beethoven: The Music and the Life*](#).

This month's FEATURED NEW RELEASE: *Cosi fan tutte* on DVD



Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke took an Oscar last year for *Amour*, and last April he turned his hand to a new production of Mozart's *Cosi fan tutte* at Madrid's Teatro Real. According to one reviewer, Haneke's elegant, modern take on this beloved classic is "one of the best Mozart productions I have ever witnessed. . . . Rarely is a production so understatedly intelligent and intriguing Haneke transforms the work into an anxious, contemporary drama simply by changing the way the lines are delivered" without compromising the comedy ("We Left at the Interval" reviews). We are delighted to have this as part of The Blake Collection. (You might also want to check out Thomas Assheuer's interview with Michael Haneke for *Zeit Online*.)

Last month we brought you several works by the great Classical composer Beethoven. This month, we bring you works from two great composers of the Romantic era, Schubert and Brahms, as well as a number by Bruckner. "In the Classical world, form and order come first, in the Romantic, expressive content does. . . . Romantic artists tended to . . . fill out the traditional Classical patterns with ideas ever more arresting, attractive, and laden with emotion" (Stanley Sadie and Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, Cambridge, UK, 1985, p. 281).

SCHUBERT

The Rough Guide to Classical Music says of Franz Schubert that "in his late chamber music piano sonatas and symphonies Schubert created works that mark him down as the first great Romantic" (*Classical Music: The Rough Guide*, Joe Staines, Ed., Rough Guides, London, UK, 2001, p. 442). Stanley Sadie says he's been called a "Romantic Classicist" (Stanley Sadie and Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, Cambridge, UK, 1985, p. 299).

The Late Piano Sonatas



Schubert's "piano music achieved a climax of greatness in [the] three last sonatas" (Stanley Sadie and Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, Cambridge, UK, 1985, p. 296). These three sonatas are featured in this 2-CD set from Deutsche Grammophon's "Legendary Performances." The set also contains the C-minor Allegretto and the "Three Piano Pieces (Deutsch catalog no. 946)." Maurizio Pollini, performing all these works, "reveals himself as a gentle lyricist" (CD liner notes).

Symphony No. 9

Schubert's Symphony No. 9, "known as 'the Great C major' . . . is on a large scale; all its ideas are extended and fully worked out" (Stanley Sadie and Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, Cambridge, UK, 1985, p. 295). It is a remarkably balanced mixture of Romantic and Classical elements, sometimes with an air of mystery, sometimes delicate, at other times full of energy. (It is likely that Schubert, who died at the age of 31, never heard this masterpiece performed.) This wonderful "double bill" CD from Deutsche Grammophon's "Legendary Recordings" series of remastered concert



performances contains the Berlin Philharmonic under the baton of the renowned Wilhelm Furtwangler, and in addition to Schubert's Symphony No. 9, contains Haydn's Symphony No. 88. The liner notes reveal that Furtwangler was a master of both works: “[A] distinguished German music critic . . . wrote . . . ‘Haydn was the only one of the Classics with whom Furtwangler abandoned himself to a relaxed balancing of the forces. . . . No one had a more monumental conception of Schubert’s ‘Great C major’ Symphony.”

BRAHMS

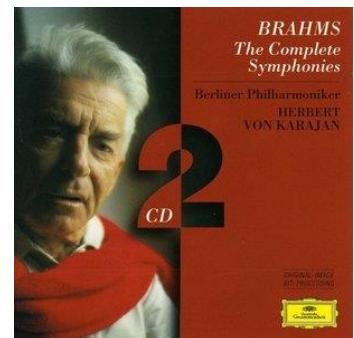
Piano Concertos and Fantasies



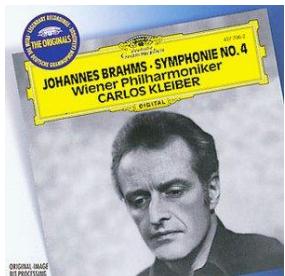
The First Piano Concerto is “a creative debate rooted in conflict” that makes “heavy demands on the pianist . . . Yet, temperamentally, Brahms [who was a pianist] was kinsman to his beloved Clara Schumann, a pianist noted for the clarity and restrain of her playing” (Richard Osborne, CD liner notes). The Second Piano Concerto is “a very different work, loftier and yet at the same time more playful” (Osborne, liner notes). Emilio Gilels performs with the Berlin Philharmonic and conductor Eugen Jochum. In addition to the two concertos, this 2-CD “Legendary Recordings” set contains the Fantasies, Op. 116, also performed by Gilels. A *Gramophone* review that appeared at the time of the recordings said that Gilels and Jochum bring to these performances “a rapt songfulness that in no way detracts from Brahms’s heroism” (Jerrold Northrop Moore, quoted in liner notes).

Complete Symphonies

Brahms “clearly saw himself as Beethoven’s successor in the role of the 19th-century symphonist” (Ivan March, liner notes). It took him over 20 years to complete the composition of his first symphony. But when he finally premiered it in 1876, it was worth the wait. It contains elements of “heroic triumph,” passages that are “contemplative” and “lyrical” (Stanley Sadie and Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, Cambridge, UK, 1985, p. 360). When he found that his first symphony was met with acclaim, Brahms felt free to continue composing symphonies. “His Second Symphony [is] an altogether gentler and more relaxed work than his First, though no less rigorously put together” (Sadie and Latham, p. 361). It was composed in 1877, with the Third and Fourth shortly thereafter, in 1883 and 1885, respectively. These recordings of the four symphonies were made in 1977 through 1978, by Herbert Von Karajan at the helm of the Berlin Philharmonic. Karajan “felt himself the natural bearer of the German tradition of Brahms interpretation” and he had a “great, almost unique gift of consistently achieving a sense of spontaneity in the recording studio” (CD liner notes).



Symphony No. 4



We provide a contrast to the Karajan recording of the Symphony No. 4 with an offering from Deutsche Grammophon’s “Legendary Recordings” series—Carlos Kleiber conducting the Vienna Philharmonic. “Carlos Kleiber’s famous version is a performance of real stature and much strength, with the attention to detail one would expect from this great conductor. A gripping and compelling performance . . . DG have successfully remastered the 1981 sound, which now has more than sufficient weight in the bass and more bloom than before” (*Penguin Guide*).

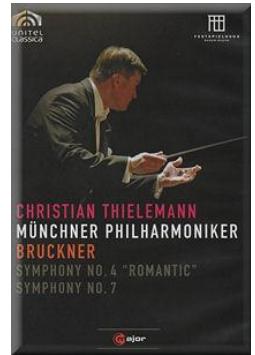
And if you want a bit more Brahms, have a listen to a CD that was already in our collection—Brahms's [Violin Concerto in D](#) and his [Double Concerto in A minor](#), performed by Julia Fischer and Daniel Muller-Schott with the Netherlands Philharmonic and Orchestra Amsterdam conducted by Yakov Kreizberg.

BRUCKNER

Almost an exact contemporary of Brahms, Anton Bruckner began his career primarily as a church organist. His style of symphonic composition was influenced greatly by Beethoven (whose Ninth "gave him the basic outline") and Wagner (who "provided the time-scale and some of the harmony"), but "Schubert was his nearest predecessor in matters of form. The result, however, is wholly original" (Stanley Sadie and Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, Cambridge, UK, 1985, pp. 388-89). "I've always heard that [Bruckner] is underrated. But most everyone I know reveres him as a master, one of the most valuable, lovable, and necessary composers we have. If his symphonies aren't canonical, there is no canon" (Jay Nordlinger, "[Musical Love Letters to God](#)," *The New Criterion*, Sept. 2011). (And did you catch the Bruckner reference in season 4 of "Downton Abbey"? To the Dowager Countess's comment that "You can always rely on Puccini," Mrs. Crawley responds, "I prefer Bruckner.") This month we add to the Blake Collection four Bruckner symphonies on DVD.

Symphonies 4 & 7

This DVD contains live recordings by the Munich Philharmonic with music director/conductor Christian Thielemann from 2006 and 2008. Thielemann "is widely regarded as the leading Brucknerian of our age, and his performances with the Munich Philharmonic . . . enjoy cult status all over the world. This DVD features a world premiere of Bruckner's two most popular works, the Symphonies No. 4 and 7, which he interprets as sublime cathedrals of late Romantic music, impressing his listeners in ways that few other conductors can do" ([ArchivMusic](#). We invite you to read Richard Maynard's detailed review headed "These are performances that should be heard by all lovers of Bruckner's music" at that site as well.)

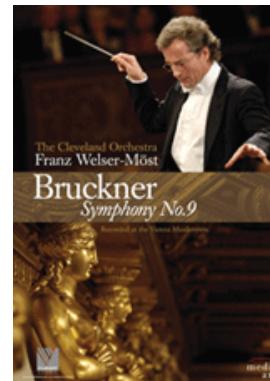


Symphony 5 and Symphony 9



Bruckner "is apt to create internal echo effects that demand the depth of a spacious acoustic. Nothing is more damaging to his orchestral imagination than the dry and clinical acoustics of present-day concert halls. The sound of the great church at St. Florian is always in his ears, and the silent pauses he so frequently makes are not really such—they should be filled with awesome reverberation" (Robert Simpson, *The Essence of Bruckner*, London: Gollancz, 1992, pp. 233-34)

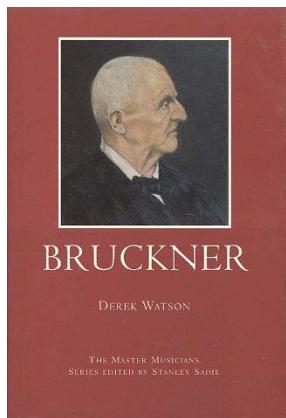
We now have a live recording of Bruckner's Symphony No. 5 performed in Bruckner's beloved home church, St. Florian, as well as the Symphony No. 9 performed in Vienna. Both are by the great Cleveland Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Franz Welser-Most. "When Franz Welser-Most is good, he is very, very good. . . . Bruckner's natural element here seems [to be] a quiet intensity that proves all the more striking as the huge sonorities grow out of it or subside back into it. Bruckner's many silences are gripping, and Mr. Welser-Most is fearless in extending them



to the full” ([James R. Oestreich, *New York Times*](#)). Each of these DVDs includes a brief discussion by Welser-Most about the symphony on the disk.

Symphony 8 was already in the library’s collection. This 2-CD set features Herbert von Karajan with the Vienna Philharmonic.

Bruckner by Derek Watson

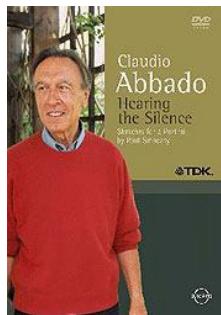


Composer, pianist, broadcaster, and lecturer Derek Watson, who has also written books on Liszt and Wagner, brings his prodigious skills to bear on Bruckner, whom he describes as having “no parallel . . . among creative artists.” See for yourself in this biography, part of the “Master Musicians Series” edited by Stanley Sadie.

CLAUDIO ABBADO, 1933-2014

This month we are highlighting additions to the Blake Collection that feature Claudio Abbado, who died in January at the age of 80. *The New York Times* described Abbado as “a conductor whose refined interpretations of a large symphonic and operatic repertory won him the directorships of several of the world’s most revered musical institutions — including La Scala, the London Symphony Orchestra, the Vienna State Opera and the Berlin Philharmonic.” Born in Milan, Abbado served there as the music director of La Scala for 18 years. So beloved was he in Milan, that thousands came to honor him after his death, and appreciations of his talent and influence appeared from all quarters. Of special note are the extended appreciation by Jessica Duchen of the Independent, who wrote that “Claudio Abbado’s Mahler Symphony No.9 with the Lucerne Festival Orchestra is among those rare concert experiences that will stay with me forever. . . . No wonder he was widely considered the finest conductor of his day; he was certainly the best-loved of them all. It was not the monumental in music that set him apart, but his humanising of it. He approached orchestral works as chamber music, giving his players space to contribute their own artistry, drawing them out with his ability to listen – and often with his sense of humour – rather than imposing a will of iron.” In a tribute in the Strad, Stanley Dodds who performed with the Berlin Philharmonic under Abbado, said of the conductor that “as a source of inspiration he shall live on to the many of us he touched for the rest of our lives.”

Claudio Abbado: Hearing the Silence



This DVD biography *Claudio Abbado: Hearing the Silence* is an “intensely moving” documentary about one of the world’s great musicians. This film, described as “sketches,” was drawn from multiple interviews in which the conductor talked about artistry, music, and his personal history. David Billinge of WebMusic International says that over the course of the film “Fascinating facts emerge, such as how Abbado and his student friend Zubin Mehta joined the Vienna Musikverein chorus as a means of getting in to watch normally closed rehearsals by some of the great conductors of the previous generation.” In the booklet that accompanies the DVD, Peter Esterhazy speaks at length about what he calls Abbado’s “elegance”: Elegance and drama are not mutually exclusive. Perhaps it is not proper, but I wish to talk about his face, his new face, the face after his illness, because it is relevant to the subject—not to Abbado as a private individual, but as a musician. If I were romantically or nostalgically inclined, I’d say that his face has become more spiritual, that it has come even closer to the essence of music, to use an old expression.

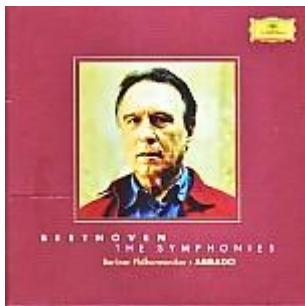
FROM ABBADO’S EARLY CAREER—Verdi: Six Great Operas

The operatic gem we are adding this month is a set of six Verdi operas, five of which were recorded at La Scala, where Abbado was the conductor/musical director for many years. “Claudio Abbado’s Verdi recordings with La Scala, Milan, have gained iconic status in the course of time. Here, along with a magnificent *Falstaff* . . . they are presented complete in a single box for the first time” (George Hall, BBC Music Magazine). The set contains *Aida*, *Un Ballo in Maschera*, *Don Carlos*, *Falstaff*, *Macbeth*, and *Simon Boccanegra*, which feature performances by such greats as Placido Domingo, Shirley Verrett, Jose Carreras, Piero Cappuccilli, and many others, all in top form. (Visit George Hall’s review for the details.) Should you want more details about Verdi’s operas than you find in the booklet that accompanies the CD set, we recommend Julian Budden’s fine biography of the composer.



If you want yet more Verdi as brought to life by Abbado, you should listen to his recording of [Verdi's Messa da Requiem](#).

[ABBADO AT MID-CAREER—Beethoven: The Symphonies](#)



Claudio Abbado assumed the podium of the Berlin Philharmonic following Herbert von Karajan, who recorded the Beethoven Symphonies there three times.

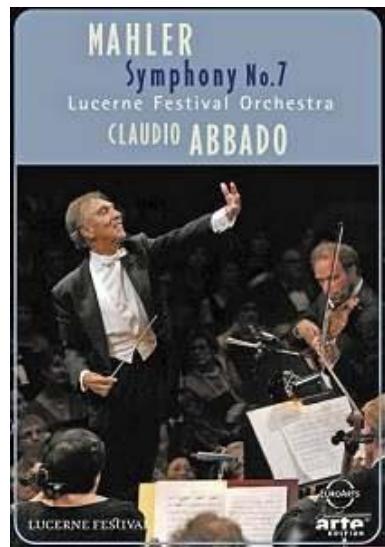
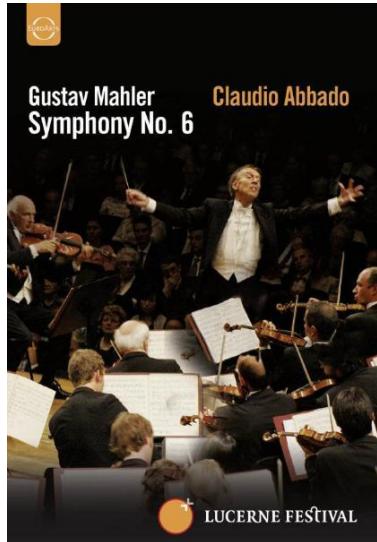
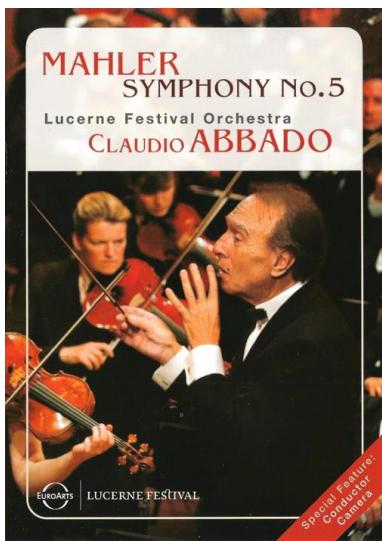
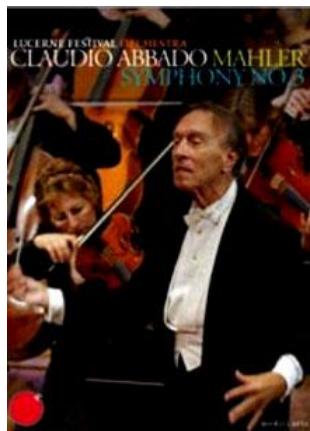
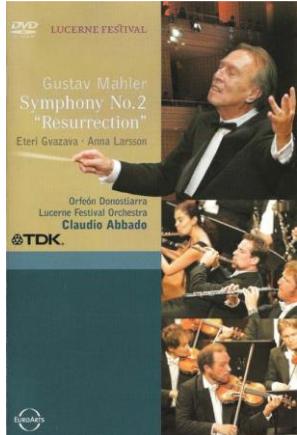
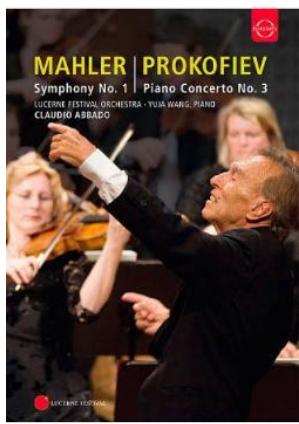
Nonetheless, Abbado's recordings feel new, fresh: his “conducting seems to have re-invigorated the orchestra . . . [these recordings are] more taut and ‘classical’” than Karajan’s ([Dominy Clements, MusicWeb International](#)). The review goes on to say “I suspect most listeners will become as addicted to these recordings in the same way as the reader of a good novel will find it hard to put the book down without finding out how the story continues, relishing what happens next, and being reluctant to finish.

Abbado’s attention to detail, his clear affection for the phrasing and shape in the music at both micro and macro levels and his connection to the freshness of Beethoven’s ideas are all aspects which make this set a highlight in its own right. Abbado is at home as much in the sensitively intimate as the overtly heroic.” ([This lengthy review](#) goes into great detail about the performances.)

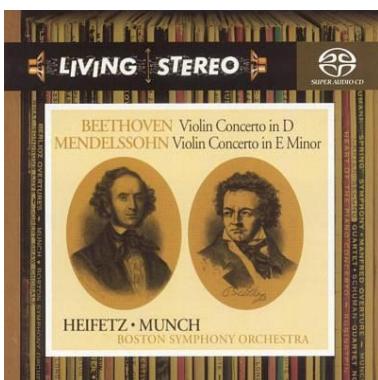
[ABBADO'S LATE CAREER—Mahler Symphonies 1-7/Prokofiev Piano Concerto No. 3](#)

Abbado founded four orchestras: The Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, the Orchestra Mozart, and the Lucerne Festival Orchestra. “The Lucerne Festival Orchestra isn’t any ordinary orchestra. It’s an ensemble made up of the finest players in Europe, many of them big names on their own, but this is no rock star type line-up. What makes an orchestra is the players’ ability to interact in ensemble. Many of these musicians play together regularly at Lucerne but not always in the same combination. The mixture seems to ignite because the atmosphere, at Lucerne, is electric. These are players who can achieve with chamber-like intimacy, yet understand their role in the broad sweep of orchestral perspective. In Mahler’s own time, orchestral standards were not as high as they are now, and the music relatively unfamiliar. Musicianship like this shows just how visionary Mahler was, for players like these are so technically assured that they can focus on the spirit of the music. The more we know Mahler, the more, perhaps, we can appreciate the intelligence and complexity in his music” ([Anne Ozorio, MusicWeb International](#)).

“Mahler followed Bruckner in expanding the dimensions of the symphony . . . [and Mahler’s symphonies represent] diverse stages in a spiritual autobiography” (Stanley Sadie and Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 391). Dave Billinge of [MusicWeb International](#) has written a lengthy review of this DVD set. He says that “as video recordings there is nothing better on the market at this time. . . . As for Abbado’s approach to Mahler, it is accepted by most that with his Lucerne Festival Orchestra he has achieved both technical and emotional insight, something done by very few, if any, other current conductors. . . . This set is as good as it gets.” As for the Prokofiev Piano Concerto that shares space on the DVD with the Mahler Symphony 1, “Yuja Wang and Claudio Abbado combine youth and experience in the Prokofiev and the combination is extremely successful. It transpires that Abbado saw Wang play the Liszt Piano Sonata on French television and was so impressed, comparing her with Martha Argerich no less, that he invited her to perform with him in March 2009 and again at that year’s Lucerne Festival. The Prokofiev Concerto was apparently Abbado’s choice of repertoire, but in the event he could not have chosen more happily as an opening for the concert” ([Brian Wilson, MusicWeb International](#)). (And if you want to hear what Abbado heard when he attended Yang’s performance of the Liszt sonata, we have [a performance on CD](#).)



This month the Library's Blake Collection shines the spotlight on the concerto and several important solo piano pieces. The concerto "began, in the seventeenth century, as a composition in which a small group of players or singers was set against a much larger group. It developed into the solo concerto and the concerto grosso of the early eighteenth century. The Italian composer Vivaldi was one of its leading figures; he composed several hundred concertos, any for a solo instrument (usually violin) and orchestra. Some, for two or more soloists, are called 'concerto grosso' ('large concerto'). . . . With the nineteenth century, the concerto increasingly became a vehicle for the virtuoso—first in Beethoven's often stormy concertos for the piano, then in those of Liszt, Schumann, Brahms and Tchaikovsky. The violin concerto too flourished in this period: there are splendid examples by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms and Tchaikovsky. The fine comradeship balance of Mozart's concertos is replaced by a sense of the lone soloist striving to hold his own against the full weight of the orchestra, an exciting contest although we know he is always bound to win, whether it is a thundering piano or a gently poetic violin. There are also examples for cello and a few for wind instruments. Almost all concertos are in three movements, on the fast-slow-fast pattern." (Stanley Sadie and Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985, pp. 70-71). If you want to know more, we recommend [Michael Steinberg's excellent *The Concerto: A Listener's Guide*](#).

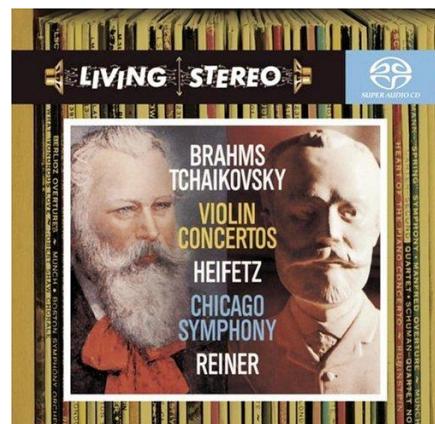


Beethoven & Mendelssohn: Violin Concertos

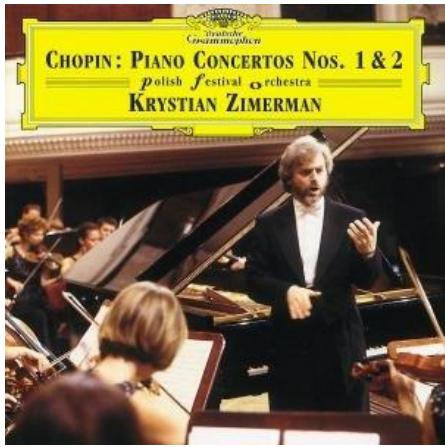
The legendary Jascha Heifetz takes the stage with the Boston Symphony and conductor Charles Munch for these performances of the Beethoven and Mendelssohn violin concertos. "These classic recordings need little comment from me on artistic grounds. Heifetz's account of the Mendelssohn never has been bettered for sheer dazzling virtuosity and . . . I love [the Beethoven's] unaffected, truly classical purity. Besides, you also get Munch and the Boston Symphony, no mean bonus" ([David Hurwitz, ClassicsToday.com](#)).

Brahms & Tchaikovsky: Violin Concertos

This classic recording showcases violinist Jascha Heifetz, with his distinctive, influential "blend of fire and ice," backed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and conductor Fritz Reiner. "Little need be said about these justly famous performances from 1955 and 1957. The Brahms has great drive. . . . From soloist and orchestra alike, this is a note-perfect performance in a vivid recording. . . . The Tchaikovsky offers more of the same. . . . The performance is extroverted yet elegant, truly debonair, benefiting from the soloist's rich tone and sustained phrasing and Reiner's incisive partnership" ([James Reel, Fanfare](#)).



Chopin: Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 2



Awarded a “*Gramophone’s Choice*” designation, this recording is “essential.” “Krystian Zimerman was in his early twenties when he recorded the Chopin concertos for DG two decades ago, with Carlo Maria Giulini conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic. For his long-anticipated remakes the 43-year-old virtuoso directs the Polish Festival Orchestra from the keyboard, an ensemble he founded and trained from scratch. . . . Zimerman’s ultra-polished fingerwork and colouristic gifts stress Chopin’s jewel-like symmetry and lyric beauty. [Recorded in 1999], a year rich with offerings to celebrate Chopin’s 150th anniversary, Zimerman’s achievement stands out like a proudly hand-crafted valentine” (*Gramophone Magazine*).

Chopin: Piano Sonatas Nos. 2 & 3

We offer this recording of Maurizio Pollini’s performance of Chopin’s Piano Sonatas 2 and 3. As Joan Chissell of *Gramophone* wrote, “Authoritative is the key word here. Whatever Pollini does is done with conviction as firm as his tone. . . . Pollini’s aristocratically authoritative way of doing things is superb.”



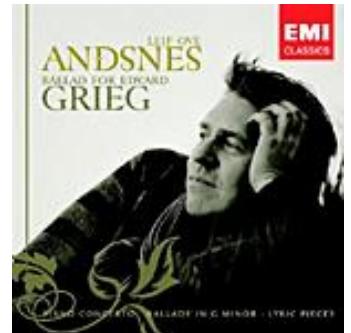
Dvorak Cello Concerto & Tchaikovsky Rococo Variations



This digital remastering from Deutsche Grammophon’s “Legendary Recordings” series features real legends: Cellist Mstislav Rostropovich and the Berlin Philharmonic under the baton of Herbert von Karajan. “The Rostropovich/Karajan partnership is an inspired one and these are great performances. Rostropovich’s sense of nostalgia in the secondary material of the finale of the Dvorak Concerto is quite memorable (especially towards the close) and he brings a comparable feeling of Russian melancholy to the lyrical pages of Tchaikovsky’s splendid variations. Musically this is in a class of its own” (Ivan March, *Gramophone*). The recording brings us “the incandescent brilliance of Rostropovich, a virtuoso of the emotions as well as the cello; . . . the peerless powers of coordination and motivation of the world-renowned conductor; and . . . the animation and colour [of] the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra” (Peter Cosse, CD liner notes).

“Ballad for Edvard Grieg”

This disk was released in 2007 to mark the 100th anniversary of the death of Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg. A compilation of recordings made at different times, it includes the Piano Concerto, the Ballade for Piano, and the Lyric Pieces, all performed by Grieg’s countryman Leif Ove Andsnes with the Berlin Philharmonic, Mariss Jansons conducting. The performance of the concerto displays “strength and bravura in abundance” ([Jonathan Woolf, Musicweb International](#)). Woolf saves his greatest praise, however, for Andsnes’s performance of the Ballade: “The Ballade . . . is what elevates this disc. It’s a superb performance of a very tricky piece to gauge. He plays the rather angular Norwegian folk tune with incipient introspection and a feeling of growing gravity. It’s a performance of commanding sweep and tremendous brio in the sprightlier dance variations and he manages to balance refinement with bravura, sure pacing with control of incident. . . . a terrific performance” ([Jonathan Woolf, Musicweb International](#)).



Krystian Zimerman—The Liszt Recordings



“Krystian Zimerman made two Liszt discs for Deutsche Grammophon . . . one of the two Piano Concertos and *Totentanz*, with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Seiji Ozawa, the other of solo piano music, comprising Liszt’s masterwork, the B minor Sonata, and a selection of late piano works – spooky, often unnerving pieces, such as *Nuages gris* and *La lugubre gondola II*. Both are generally regarded as benchmark recordings . . . Of the Concertos disc, The Penguin Guide wrote: ‘It has poise and classicism and, as one listens, one feels that this music could not be played in any other way’” ([ArkivMusic.com](#)). “Zimerman brings to bear a combination of ardour, forcefulness, drive and sheer technical grasp which are tremendously exciting and for which I can think of no direct rival” ([Gramophone](#)).

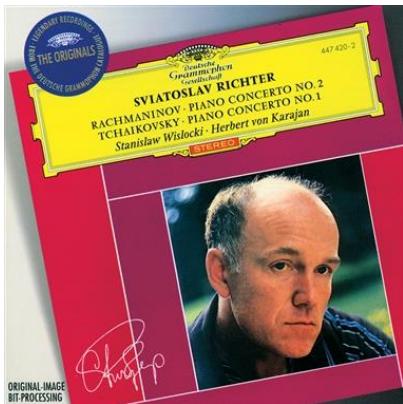
Prokofiev & Ravel: Piano Concertos

This great disk—performances of Serge Prokofiev’s Piano Concerto No. 3, Maurice Ravel’s Piano Concerto, and Ravel’s “Gaspard de la nuit” melodic poems for piano—from the Deutsche Grammophon’s “Legendary Recordings” collection is a true classic, teaming the young Martha Argerich with Claudio Abbado conducting the Berlin Philharmonic. “There have been others to match the bustle and brilliance of Argerich’s Prokofiev, her coloristic range, her drive, her flashiness, her straining at the leash. But I’m not sure I could name anyone who has so satisfactorily combined all those qualities, who has given us such a rocket-launched recapitulation in the first movement, such circus-routine vividness in the following variations (Prokofiev grew up in a Russia where ‘circusization of the arts’ was one of the ‘in’ concepts), or such monstrous, hyperbolic fairy-tale imagery in the



finale, and all done with the most engaging reckless abandon. The Ravel Concerto is another bundle of energy. I had forgotten how miraculous is the blend and interplay of piano and orchestra, and how ecstatically Argerich weaves around the cor anglais restatement in the slow movement. . . . Argerich's *Gaspard* . . . is a version of Ravel's devilish triptych which is unusually faithful to his subdued dynamic markings, quite apart from its breathtaking agility. The results ring poetically true at the same time as defying criticism in pianistic terms" (*Gramophon*).

Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No. 2/Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 1



Another in DG's "Legendary Recordings" series, this disk showcases Sviatoslav Richter playing these two great Russian concertos. The Rachmaninov, performed with the Warsaw Philharmonic and conductor Stanislaw Wislocki, "surely qualifies as a 'great performance on record'; the CD catalogue would have been incomplete without it" ([Joan Chissell, Gramophone](#)). "I'd have to have this with me on a desert island. It's one of the best examples of a master getting to grips with a popular work and recreating it anew—it's sensational" ([Huw Edwards, Helen Wallace, BBC Music Magazine, June 1, 2007](#)). The Tchaikovsky, performed with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Herbert von Karajan, is equally compelling; the CD liner notes describe it as "powerfully contained, intent on looking inwards—[creating] a new shade to add to the palette of Tchaikovsky on record."

Schumann/Mozart Piano Concertos

This CD from EMI's "Great Recordings of the Century" collection featuring renowned pianist Dinu Lipatti. The Schumann is the first on the disk, a 1948 studio recording with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Herbert van Karajan. A certain tension between the conductor's "super-classicism" and the pianist's romanticism results in "rather effective tightening [of] the music's drama and making the most of its range"—not surprising, since "there is always a special balance of classicism and romanticism in Schumann" ([Terry Barfoot, MusicWeb International](#)).

Lipatti teamed up again with Karajan for the Mozart, a live performance with the Vienna Philharmonic at the 1950 Lucerne Festival—just a few weeks before Lippatti died. "The music gains from [the] close liaison [of conductor and pianist]. Mozart's concertos are miracles of subtle interplay and the balances are beautifully made. There is a compelling intensity and sense of occasion which soon makes the dim sound recede in the listener's consciousness" ([Terry Barfoot, MusicWeb International](#)).



THE GLORIES OF ITALIAN OPERA

Opera may be “the most powerful of all theatrical experiences, one where emotion, that most precious of human commodities, is distilled to purity, and character is crystallized in a few lines of music” (Ted Libby, *The NPR Guide to Building a Classical CD Collection*, NY: Workman, 1994, pp. 441). This month the Library’s Blake Collection focuses on Italian opera. “The story of Italian music in the nineteenth century is essentially the story of opera, and the story of Italian opera is essentially the story of the music of four men: at the beginning of the century, Rossini; in the early Romantic years, the 1830s and 40s, Bellini and Donizetti; and thereafter Verdi” (Stanley Sadie and Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 334).

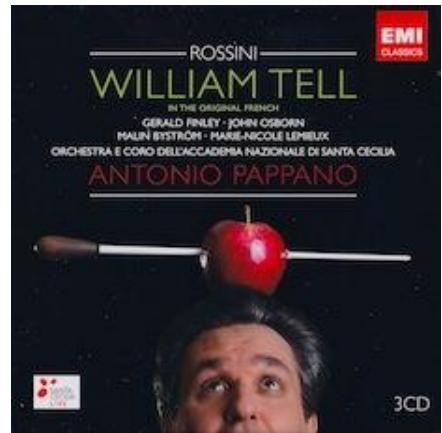
Rossini: Il barbiere di Siviglia and William Tell



“*The Barber of Seville* was commissioned by the impresario of the Teatro Argentina at the end of 1815, when Rossini was nearly 24 years of age. In deference to Giovanni Paisiello, a popular Italian composer who in 1782 had himself based an opera on the Beaumarchais play, Rossini called his own work *Almaviva*. (The title was permanently changed to Il barbiere di Siviglia for the Bologna revival August 10, 1816, after Paisiello’s death.) Nonetheless, the production was viewed by Paisiello’s supporters as an affront; a group of them came to Rossini’s premiere, and they booed and hissed throughout the performance. Take out “overall sentence Not surprisingly, for the opera’s second performance Rossini decided to stay home. But this time the audience—presumably lacking Paisiello’s disruptive fans—was wildly

enthusiastic Before long, productions were mounted across Europe and beyond; in 1825 the opera became the first to be sung in Italian in New York City” ([Britannica Academic Edition Online](#)). “Rossini’s choice was risky but successful No comic opera has ever been as much loved or performed. . . . The music sparkles from start to finish” (Sadie and Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, p. 335). “Cecilia Bartoli made this recording when she was still in her early 20s, a mezzo with a rich, vibrant voice who not only copes brilliantly with the technical demands but who also gives a winningly provocative characterization. Like the conductor [Giuseppe Patane], Bartoli is wonderful at bringing out the fun” (*The Penguin Guide*).

The Barber of Seville was one of Rossini’s early operas, and William Tell was his last. Of the concert performances recorded for this EMI Classics set, critic [Jack Buckley of MusicWeb International](#) said that conductor Antonio Pappano “is an acknowledged master of immediacy, and this occasion was no exception. Guillaume Tell is the grandest of Grand Opera. . . . On that occasion, William Mann (then *The Times* music critic) was sitting next to me. ‘I had no idea that Rossini could be so magisterial, I’m speechless,’ he said. With Pappano’s freshness, immediacy, vitality (call it what you will), the dignity, nobility, majesty and grandeur of the score’s musical architecture takes second place. That is not to say that it is lost. . . . But with Pappano, never fear. For all his attention to detail, he never loses vision of the overall structure. And Guillaume Tell is multi-structured in its magic, not least in its architectural conception. . . . Gerald Finley could hardly be bettered in the title role. His French is



impeccable, his tone round and filled with warmth, like the personality of Tell. He has a magnetic legato, which colours his delivery with a noteworthy musical intelligence, and is also supremely respectful of all Rossini's indications."

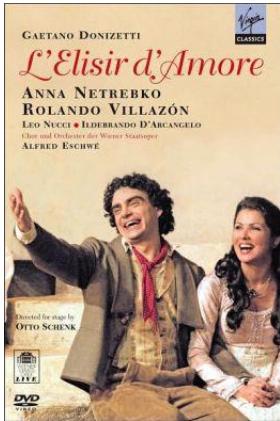
Bellini: La Sonnambula

Who knows what Vincenzo Bellini might have given the world had he lived more than 34 years? He was a "refined Romantic" whose "strength lay in exquisitely shapely vocal lines" (Sadie and Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, p. 336). In this CD of Bellini's *La Sonnambula*, those shapely vocal lines are sung by Cecilia Bartoli "joined by Decca's other big opera star, Juan Diego Florez, and they make a striking pair. He is all vocal fireworks and liquid tone, she luxurious of voice, dramatically intense. . . . [a performance] full of life" (*Joel Kasow, Fanfare*). This recording of won an Editor's Choice award from *Gramophone* magazine.



Donizetti: L'Elisir d'Amore and Lucia Di Lammermoor

Gaetano Donizetti outlived his rival Bellini "by more than a decade and it was he above all who carried Italian opera into the era of full-blooded Romanticism. . . . Donizetti began his career as the natural successor to Rossini: a prolific composer ready to apply his skills to the creation of works that singers could effectively perform and audiences enjoy. . . . Donizetti's ability to control dramatic tension, using line, harmony or color, was remarkable" (Sadie and Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, pp. 336-37).



Our DVD recording of *L'Elisir d'Amore* features tenor Rolando Villazon and soprano Anna Netrebko with the Vienna State Opera Orchestra and Chorus. "Villazon is a remarkably versatile tenor. . . . [His] voice gleams at the top, the baritonal bottom adds tenderness in introspective moments, and he handles the coloratura handsomely. . . . Villazon makes everything the bumpkin Nemorino says and does seem spontaneous. With his mop-top hair and big eyes he seems to be channeling Harpo, Chico, and Chaplin at once. He's a born ham--he juggles three pieces of fruit while singing one aria--and he offers one of the most delightful portrayals of the role ever. The gorgeous Russian superstar Anna Netrebko is his beloved Adina and she seems likewise relaxed; she executes endless streams of coloratura with beautiful tone and ease, and she's truly alert and appealing. The two share a one-minute-long kiss that has the

audience erupting in applause. Bass Ildebrando d'Arcangelo makes a nicely snide, mellifluous, younger-than-usual quack Dr. Dulcamara, and veteran baritone Leo Nucci still has it as the boastful soldier, Belcore. Conductor Alfred Eschwe clearly realizes he has struck gold with the casting . . . and he leads an energetic and tight reading of the score. . . . A real treat" (*Robert Levine, ClassicsToday.com*).

Our CD recording of *Lucia Di Lammermoor* is an incomparable classic: a 1971 recording featuring Dame Joan Sutherland and Luciano Pavarotti, with conductor Richard Bonynge leading the Royal Opera House Orchestra and Chorus at Covent Garden. This is the legendary Sutherland "in probably her best role. . . . Pavarotti sings with predictable elan as Edgardo, and with great feeling in the last act. Ghiaurov makes a sonorous Raimondo. Bonynge conducts with buoyancy. . . . [This recording] is an essential" (*Alan Blyth, Gramophone*).



Verdi: Four Operas

Giuseppe Verdi (along with Richard Wagner) “dominated opera in the high Romantic era . . . The operas of these two provide the backbone of the repertory of the world’s opera houses, and . . . they have in common—a search for the profoundest and most telling expression of dramatic truth through music” (Sadie and Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, p. 337).

Nabucco



Verdi’s second opera was a failure, and recently widowed with two children to support, he “went into a depression and resolved to give up composing. He was nursed through it by the Scala director, who found a libretto, on the biblical story of Nebuchadnezzar, to fire him. The result, *Nabucco*, was a triumph when, in 1842, it reached the stage; within a few years it had carried his name to every important musical center in Europe, and then beyond, to America, south as well as north” (Sadie and Latham, p. 338). This 1965 recording was with the Vienna State Opera Orchestra and Chorus under the direction of Lamberto Gardelli. “Elena Suliotis was only twenty-two at the time of this recording and with hindsight she should have been discouraged from such a voice-killer as Abigaille. But when the records arrived she was The Sensation. Fearless, whole-hearted, intense and with a voice that put practically every other soprano at the time - bar Birgit Nilsson - into the shade. She wasn’t the subtlest of singers but the world hailed her as the natural heir to Maria Callas. She even surpassed Callas in a couple of respects: steady tone and greater beauty. Returning to her reading so many years later it is the same thrill and the same astonishment that overcomes me” ([Goran Forsling of MusicWeb International](#)). He goes on to say that he has at least two dozen recordings of *Nabucco* in his collection but that “but none has surpassed Gardelli’s. Throughout the opera there is a natural flow in Gardelli’s reading that still makes it irresistible. . . . so committed and well sung a performance as Gardelli’s it stands out as a great work. This recording should be in every Verdi-lover’s collection.”

Rigoletto

Based on a Victor Hugo story, *Rigoletto* is one of Verdi’s finest operas from his middle years. This recording of Carlo Maria Giulini conducting the Vienna State Opera Orchestra and Chorus with “with [Piero] Cappuccilli, [Elena] Cotrubas and [Placido] Domingo is exceptional: searching, humane, powerfully registered. . . . With Giulini in rapt attendance, Cotrubas has a head start over her rivals as Gilda . . . Domingo’s is one of the greatest accounts of the role ever recorded. . . . [This set is] necessary listening for anyone interested in Verdi” ([Gramophone](#)).



Il Trovatore



“This recording is the stuff of legend. . . if you could choose to be present at only one evening in the history of the Salzburg Festival, it would surely be this one. . . we hear the great maestro [Herbert van Karajan] at his greatest in the element in which he thrived the most: the live performance. . . Never have I come across a live opera recording with such a palpable sense of electricity. . . The soloists are all at the peak of their form. . . [Leontyne Price’s] voice is caught in full flow. The rich, creamy tone is ravishing. . . yet she also summons all of her dramatic powers for her. . . confrontation with the Count. . . As the Count himself, [Ettore] Bastianini has never sounded better on disc. He achieves the almost impossible by making this stock character sympathetic and believable. . . The stand-out star among the soloists, however, is

Giulietta Simionato who redefines the role of Azucena. It is well known that Verdi was originally going to name the opera after Azucena and he saw her as the principal character. Simionato hammers home her primacy in the drama. . . Caruso famously said that all you need to perform *Trovatore* is the four best singers in the world. On this recording you get them” ([Simon Thompson, MusicWeb International](#)). He calls this recording “sheer theatrical magic produced by the best in the world in live performance.”

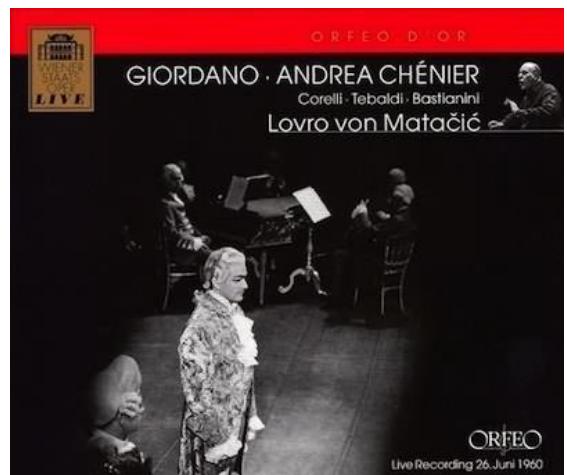
La Forza del Destino

Supposedly Verdi retired in 1860, but as evidenced by the fact that *La Forza del Destino* premiered in 1862, he was ambivalent about abandoning opera. This is “a fascinating but rambling opera, in which a tragic personal drama—an accidental killing and the vendetta that arises from it—is set against a rich pageant of military and monastic life. . . the music is thrilling and varied” (Sadie and Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, p. 342). This recording from La Scala, released in 1990, features Placido Domingo, Mirella Freni, and Giorgio Zancanaro with conductor Riccardo Muti. “Domingo’s Don Alvaro is as memorable. . . a performance which will guarantee the set a lasting importance. . . Domingo’s partnership with Zancanaro is a great success, Zancanaro’s Carlo—brutal, sullen, earthbound—the ideal foil for Domingo’s chivalrous Alvaro. . . Throughout, Freni is every inch the experienced singer” ([Gramophone](#)). ([Gramophone](#) listed this as one of Domingo’s top ten recordings.)



Giordano: Andrea Chenier

Umberto Giordano was roughly a contemporary of Giacomo Puccini, and *Andrea Chenier* is considered his masterpiece. This classic recording is of a live 1960 performance with the Vienna Philharmonic and the Vienna State Opera Chorus. “This was one of those nights when everything in the opera house was ‘on.’ The conducting is splendid throughout. . . . The two truly great modern Chéniers since World War II have been Mario Del Monaco and Franco Corelli. . . . [The great Renata] Tebaldi . . . is at home in one of her signature roles. If there was ever a more beautiful natural soprano voice, I haven’t heard it in 50 years of listening to live and recorded opera, and her natural feel for the shape of this kind of music was inborn. Gerard was also one of [Ettore] Bastianini’s signature roles, and I’ve never heard him sing it any better than he does here. . . . In every way, this is a classic recording of the *verismo* school of Italian opera. *Andrea Chenier* is, first and foremost, about thrilling grand operatic singing—and you get that for every minute” of this performance ([Henry Fogel, Fanfare](#)).



Puccini: Tosca



“The age of Debussy in France, Mahler in Austria and Elgar in England was in Italy the age of Puccini, whose operas dominated the Italian stage from [his] first production . . . in 1893 to his death 30 years later” (Sadie and Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, p. 419). And in *Tosca*, Puccini proves himself “master at playing with the audience’s emotions” with “a remarkable sense of theater: a sense that is manifested in his command of color, motif (and especially its use for raising dramatic tension) and harmony” (*The Cambridge Music Guide*, p. 420-21). “It is no exaggeration to say that the 2 performances of *Tosca* at the Royal Opera House in July 2011 - with Angela Gheorghiu, Jonas Kaufmann and Bryn Terfel as the leads - were opera history in the making and by far the hottest tickets in town. For the majority of us who weren’t lucky enough to be there, it has been captured on this DVD” ([Arkivmusic](#)).

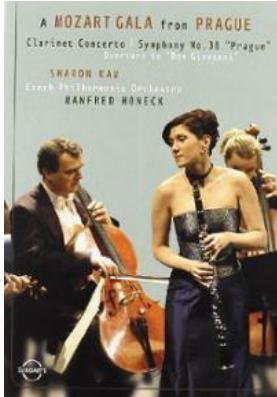
We also have the classic 1953 [Callas recording of Tosca](#). This recording was included in EMI’s “Great Recordings of the Century.”

A Marvelous Musical Mix!

This month, the Library's Blake Collection brings you a marvelous mix of composers (Mozart, Brahms and Bruckner, Wagner, Schuman and Mahler), genres (symphonies, operas, lieder), and formats (CDs and DVDs).

MOZART—A Birthday Party and Three Operas

"A Mozart Gala from Prague"



"Prague's Estates Theatre is tantamount to the most sacred of cathedrals to Mozart-lovers, the luxuriant setting for the premieres of Symphony No. 38, the lone clarinet concerto, and Don Giovanni . . . This particular release recreates those galvanizing occasions, and with a notable commitment to fealty. Sharon Kam performs her part in K 622 on basset rather than standard clarinet, in keeping with Anton Stadler's original October 1791 performance. . . Nominally, this DVD—titled, ever so accurately, "A Mozart Gala from Prague"—is a celebration of Mozart's 250th birthday, but the disc's actual, guiding concept would work in any year: an homage and re-imagining of Mozart-specific events, in a specific locale, with broad historical implications." ([Colin Fleming, Fanfare](#)).

"Mozart composed happily and eagerly for every medium, but it was in opera that his chief passion lay. . . The operas . . . which have always stood firmly in the public taste are three: *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *The Magic Flute*. Like Shakespeare's comedies, Mozart's comic operas (as all these three are) are not simply funny. . . Mozart . . . [infused his operas] with a new humanity and depth of feeling. . . For the characters Mozart drew . . . are not the pasteboard caricatures generally found in the theater [of his time] but recognizable human beings. Mozart's music gives them life" (Stanley Sadie & Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 256-57).

Le Nozze Di Figaro

This 1955 recording from the Decca Legendary Performances series features the Vienna Philharmonic with conductor Erich Kleiber and soloists Hilde Gueden, Suzanne Danco, Hilde Rossi-Majden, and Cesare Siepi. "The Vienna Philharmonic were in wonderful shape . . . Kleiber . . . had the ability to let the music unfold and breathe naturally. There isn't a single tempo on this set that doesn't sound right. . . Siepi's, Gueden's and Della Casa's assumptions of their respective roles have never been surpassed . . . No *Figaro* has more humour and more black wrath than Siepi's, no Countess has a creamier voice or a more noble bearing than Della Casa, no Susanna is more lovely and warmer than Gueden" ([Goran Forsling, ArkivMusic](#)).



Don Giovanni



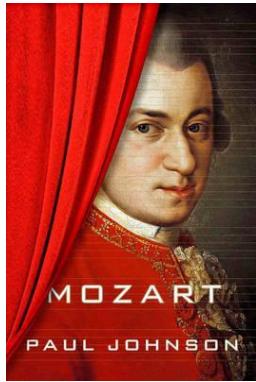
Like *The Magic Flute*, *Don Giovanni* “deals with the tensions of class and sex: Giovanni is a Spanish nobleman with an insatiable desire for sexual conquests. Ultimately he is consigned to eternal damnation in a great scene where the statue of a man he has murdered (the man was defending his daughter’s honor) comes to sup with him and drags him, unrepenting, down to the flames of hell . . . [Clearly] *Don Giovanni* touches on serious issues; but [Giovanni’s servant] Leporello’s presence, and his common-man’s comments, wry or facetious, ensure that we don’t treat it as tragedy” (Sadie & Latham, *Cambridge Music Guide*, p. 258). Despite the unquestionably serious elements of the opera, Goran Forsling describes this as “one of the most joyous productions of the opera [he has] ever seen. Stage director Francesca Zambello hasn’t missed an opportunity to make something enjoyable out of every comic point and there is a freshness and vitality about the whole performance that is infectious. . . . American bass-baritone Kyle Ketelsen makes a superb Leporello. The mercurial and charming Miah Persson is the Zerlina to the life and Joyce DiDonato is a wholly believable Donna Elvira. All four are also vocally on top and Ms. DiDonato is a wonder of vocal beauty and expressivity. But there isn’t a weak member in the cast. . . . Ramon Vargas . . . delivers his two arias with elegance and style. Sir Charles Mackerras is a renowned Mozartean and he paces the performance to perfection. The video direction is cleverly observant and when something extraordinary happens the cameras are there” ([MusicWeb International](#)). For a taste of the glories of this *Don Giovanni*, have a look at the [YouTube Video](#) of the “Masked Trio” from Act II.

Die Zauberflöte

The last of Mozart’s opera’s, “*The Magic Flute* is a *Singspiel*, a German-language opera with spoken dialogue—indeed it is the supreme example of the genre” (Sadie & Latham, *Cambridge Music Guide*, 259). Mozart was a Mason, and *The Magic Flute* is filled with Masonic symbolism, and with its evil magician and the Queen of the Night, it has a fairy-tale feel. But “this is a philosophical opera, about two people’s lofty quest for realization and ideal union” (Sadie & Latham, *Cambridge Music Guide*, p. 259). The music is incredibly varied and undeniably gorgeous. “The principal jewel [in this production] is Fritz Wunderlich’s Tamino, incomparable in its lyric ardour, musicality and tangible characterisation. There is a rock-like Sarastro from Franz Crass and fine Sprecher from Hans Hotter. Evelyn Lear is a radiant Pamina, and Roberta Peters has the stratospheric measure of Queen of the Night” ([Patrick Carnegy, BBC Music Magazine](#)).



Mozart: A Life

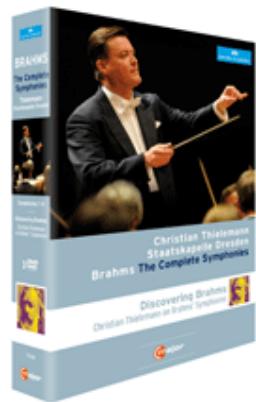


If all this Mozart music has made you hungry for details about the composer, we direct you to [*Mozart: A Life*](#), by biographer and historian Paul Johnson. It will “give pleasure to and increase the understanding of old Mozart hands as well as those reading for the first time about the man. . . . Johnson outlines Mozart’s life, focusing on the music. He also economically portrays Mozart’s relationship with his wife, with other composers of his time, with the librettists and musicians with whom he worked, with the sometimes demanding and stingy royal patrons who employed and abused him, as well as with his musician father, Leopold, who abandoned his own career to promote that of his precocious son. . . . Like his . . . subject, Johnson never strikes a false note” ([Larry Thornberry, The American Spectator](#)). In his review, [Jay Nordlinger](#) says, “Johnson argues that some of what people ‘know’ about Mozart is wrong. Mozart’s life, though short, and acquainted

with grief, was not especially tragic. Mozart had troubles with money, yes, but he was far from poor and in fact lived very well. Furthermore, people make too little of the religious element in his life: He was a religious man (as well as a Mason). . . . Mozart is pleasant, and after you read this biography, you might listen to the piece that Johnson considers the most perfect Mozart work of all: the Clarinet Concerto in A major, K. 622.”

BRAHMS--Complete Symphonies & Discovering Brahms

Conductor Christian Thielemann is “capable of great sensitivity and of a passion that borders on ecstasy,” an approach that “allow[s] Brahms to evoke the most sublime impressions of nature” (Julia Spinola, DVD liner notes). And Thielemann has enjoyed a long and happy history with Staatskapelle Dresden, whose “distinctive sonority . . . coincides exactly with [his] particular predilections: the strings form an altogether homogeneous group in every one of their registers, producing a velvety and fully rounded tone even when playing extremely quietly, while the horns have a golden sheen to them and the woodwinds blend together wonderfully well, evincing an aura all of their own. . . . Thielemann brings out the youthful ardour and . . . exuberance of this music . . . placing it firmly in the world of nature. . . . Thielemann takes all the liberties he needs . . . in order to bring Brahms’s cosmos to life” (liner notes). On DVD bonus disk, *Discovering Brahms*, Christian Thielemann describes his approach to the music, demonstrated with selections from the performances.



BRUCKNER

The Mature Symphonies: Symphony No. 6

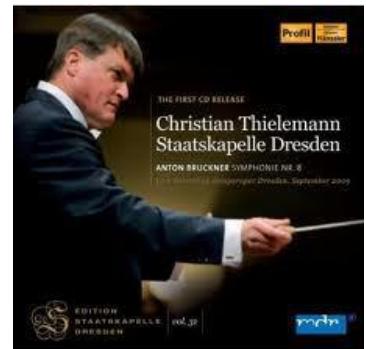


Daniel Barenboim directs the Berlin Staatskapelle Orchestra in this live 2010 video recording of Bruckner's little-known Symphony No. 6. “The musicians clearly love Bruckner: the tender slow movement simply glows and every section leader excels. The camera strikes a judicious, unfussy balance between overviews and close-ups, in a way that supports the musical argument. Barenboim's relaxed, unshowy direction concentrates on the big picture, contouring and terracing the musical edifice rather than commenting on detail or ratcheting up the crescendos. In short, the least familiar of Bruckner's mature symphonies is allowed to speak for itself, and the result is unexpectedly powerful” ([Andrew Clark, Financial Times](#)). “Barenboim brings a real sense of direction to the musical argument. The narrative can be seen moving inexorably towards a thrilling and purposeful coda...the Berlin Staatskapelle plays superbly

throughout, and special mention should be made of the absolutely marvellous solo horn playing of Patricia Gerstenberger” ([BBC Music Magazine, May 2014](#)).

Symphony No. 8

We benefit again from Conductor Christian Thielemann's mature and comfortable relationship with Staatskapelle Dresden in this recording of Anton Bruckner's Symphony No. 8. "The Staatskapelle Dresden certainly hasn't lost its touch with Bruckner, and happily Christian Thielemann also does his best work in this live performance. He paces all four movements just about perfectly . . . as a live production it really does convey the thrill of having been there in person" ([David Hurwitz, ClassicsToday.com](#)).



WAGNER--*The Flying Dutchman*



"The idea of salvation through love is a common theme in Wagner's work, and it first emerges in *Der fliegende Hollander*, a work inspired by the legend of a Dutch sea captain whose blasphemy led to his being condemned to sail the sea for eternity, unless he could be redeemed by a faithful woman" (*The Rough Guide to Classical Music*; London: Rough Guides, 2001, p. 562). This disk offers a live 1955 Bayreuth Festival performance "justly famed as one of the finest performances of this opera ever recorded" ([James A. Altena, Fanfare](#)). Among the production's strengths, "foremost is Hermann Uhde's Dutchman . . . [who is] second to none in vocal and interpretive prowess. The production is rock-steady and seamless from bottom to top; his breath control, dynamic shading, and diction, exemplary; his characterization, one of utterly haunted, centuries-weary desperation forlornly in search of his angelically promised

shred of hope. . . . Ludwig Weber provides a rich-voiced, secure Daland, who . . . is properly presented as a sympathetic character, whose fixation on the Dutchman's riches stems from a desire to free both himself and his beloved daughter from a life of grueling toil. Rarity of rarities, both tenor roles are well cast, with Wolfgang Windgassen a forceful . . . Erik, and Josef Traxel a sweetly winning steersman, while Elisabeth Schartel offers an appropriately vinegary Mary. The chorus sings superbly, projecting intoxicated exhilaration, stark terror, and ghostly menace as required, while the orchestra plays with discipline and commitment. . . . a definite first choice as a performance of the standard one-act version." ([Altena](#)).

SCHUMANN--"Schumann at Pier 2: The Symphonies"

"It's hard to know what to call this immensely invigorating, good natured and artful DVD set! *Project* doesn't remotely do it justice. But it seems film director Christian Berger and conductor Paavo Järvi undertook to film and explain the Schumann symphonies in a special camera-friendly venue, literally constructing a 'set' in an old warehouse down by the Bremen docks. The river setting is gray and atmospheric—oddly right for the down side of Schumann's psyche. The hall acoustic, conversely, is luminous and bright, perfect for an orchestra of 50 or 60. Backdrops are attractive colored projections that change with each symphony. The stage is set low and appealingly illuminated. This is industrial modernism at its most tasteful and inviting. The audience is real, and one notices that couches filled with



young people are in the forefront. Grayer members inhabit more traditional seating away from the cameras' attentions—not a complaint! But there is, in fact, something youthful and alive about the whole endeavor. This is due to the best video work I have ever seen in a concert setting. . . . My biggest pleasure in reviewing this DVD set is simply to say there is not one phony moment in it. These DVDs represent what ‘music appreciation’ ought to be” (*Steven Kruger, Fanfare*).

MAHLER



Das Lied von der Erde

This “valedictory song cycle . . . is one of Mahler’s most personal works and is perhaps his most beautiful, combining symphonic scale and structure with the narrative clarity of a song cycle. The six songs are settings of translated Chinese poems conveying the relationships between death and nature, with human life presented as a transient stage in the ever-renewing processes of the earth. . . . The cycle calls for a tenor and mezzo-soprano, who alternate between songs of defiance and resignation. . . . In terms of the vocal quality of both soloists, this 1964 recording has never been bettered” (*The Rough Guide to Classical Music*, London: Rough Guides, Ltd., 2001, 297). “Fritz Wunderlich [is] the greatest tenor who has ever recorded the music, and . . . Christa Ludwig a mezzo soprano scarcely less impressive. Sonics are glorious, and the conductor’s measured direction imparts a striking sense of grandeur”

(Ted Libby, *The NPR Guide to Building a Classical CD Collection*, New York: Workman Publishing, 1994, p. 104). This disk is one of EMI Classics’ “Great Recordings of the Century.”

Symphony No. 10

An unfinished masterwork—like Mahler’s Tenth Symphony—presents unusual challenges to performers (What did the composer intend here? How would he resolve that?), but it also presents enormous creative opportunities for the right conductor and his orchestra, and this recording of the Tenth brings together the right conductor, Simon Rattle, and the right orchestra, the Berlin Philharmonic. “Over the years, Rattle has performed the work nearly 100 times, far more often than anyone else. . . . [and his] technical standards are unprecedentedly high. . . . Rattle makes the strongest possible case for an astonishing piece of revivification” (*David Gutman, Gramophone*). “This is a performance where every accent, trill and instrumental interjection means something. The beauty and sheen of the strings, the beautiful flute-playing in one of Mahler’s longest and most poignant melodies, Rattle’s control of the multi-tempo second movement, and his ability to obtain some magical pianissimos all add up to a special performance. The close, vivid recording is very fine: the performers’ intensity and concentration is palpable. Rattle’s is a 5-star performance because of his unflinching belief in the music—he knows every contour of it” (*Colin Anderson, MusicWeb-International*).



RUSSIAN & CZECH MUSIC

“We should use technology for good to make classical [music] more accessible — not meaning cheap or too light, but just to have a closer emotional connection to music. There is a moment of love, a moment of despair, a moment of sadness, a moment of drama, a moment of humor in every piece of music. We want to show that music is about us, each of us, and each of the artists who are playing have the same emotions and are exactly the same human beings as any of the audience members. Of course, they have different talents and different qualities, but still, the music is about our lives. I don’t want to have this feeling that classical music is something that is only like a museum, or 200 years ago, and something that we can’t touch.” (Boston Symphony Orchestra Music Director-Designate Andris Nelsons, [Jeremy D. Goodwin interview in Boston Globe, July 10, 2014.](#))



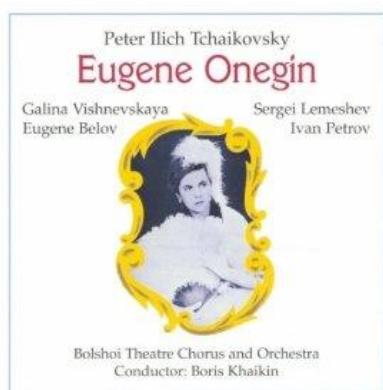
This month the Blake Collection brings you the beauty and passion of great Russian and Czech music.

“Apart from the products of the eccentric genius Mikhail Glinka (1804-57), Russian music before the middle of the nineteenth century was provincial affair. . . . there was the emergency of a highly gifted generation of creative individuals, led by [among others] Modest Mussorgsky (1839-81) . . . and Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840-93)” (Stanley Sadie & Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 369).

TCHAIKOVSKY

“Of Tchaikovsky’s ten operas only *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades [Pique Dame]* are part of the repertory” (Sadie & Latham, p. 371).

[*Eugene Onegin*](#)

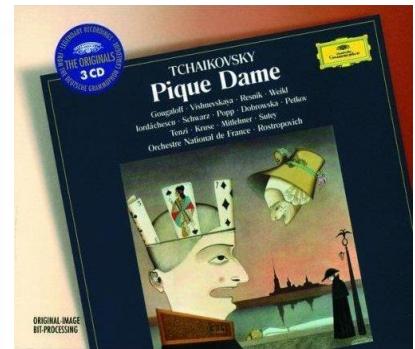


“*Eugene Onegin* is one of Tchaikovsky’s supreme masterpieces. I find it an almost painfully moving piece, and this not only because of Tchaikovsky’s superb music: though it has its grand scenes with big drama, it is also a very intimate piece. Indeed, three of its seven scenes involve only two people onstage, and I find quite extraordinary the intensity with which Tchaikovsky focuses upon the fraught personal situations that are played out in these scenes. . . . Indeed, *Eugene Onegin* is one of the trio of works by Tchaikovsky that I would choose to keep if (heaven forbid!) I were forced to sacrifice all except three of his compositions” (David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: The Man and his Music*, New York: Pegasus Books, 2007, p. 155). Based on Pushkin’s prose poem of the same title, *Eugene Onegin* tells of Onegin’s love for Tatyana, the young, romantic daughter of a country landowner. Because of ill-considered decisions and unhappy happenstance, Onegin must flee Russia, returning many years later to his homeland and Tatyana, only to learn that she can never be his. This historic 1956 performance with the renowned Bolshoi Orchestra and Chorus under the direction of Boris Khaikin features Eugene Belov as Onegin and the legendary Galina Vishnevskaya as Tatyana. This is a performance not to miss!

If you’d like to see *Onegin*, the Library has a DVD of the wonderful [2007 production—one of the MetOpera HD-Live performances—featuring Renee Fleming, Ramon Vargas, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky](#).

Pique Dame

Like *Eugene Onegin*, *Pique Dame* is also based upon a story by Pushkin. In his obsessive pursuit of the secret to success in gambling, the protagonist, Gherman, causes the death of two women, one of whom is his lover. “The opera was premiered in St. Petersburg in 1890, over ten years after *Onegin*, by which time Tchaikovsky’s technique had become far more sophisticated. In *The Queen of Spades* he combines nineteenth-century realism with the elegance of Mozart’s world and the Rococo style of Catherine the Great’s St. Petersburg. . . . as [Tchaikovsky] wrote to his brother Modest (his co-librettist)—‘Unless I’m terribly mistaken, the opera is a masterpiece’” (*The Rough Guide to Classical Music*, London: Rough Guides, Ltd., 2001, p. 521). “The reason this set remains . . . near the top is Rostropovich, who underlines the sickly quality of the story and whips the orchestra into a frenzy that’s similar to Gherman’s dementia. There’s little upper-class gentility here; this is a cruel story of relatively vicious people, madness, and greed. The love music is euphoric in such an intense fashion that it also seems sick—the obsessive character of Gherman overrides anything sane. In other words, this is a thrilling *Pique Dame*” ([Robert Levine, Classics Today](#)).



Symphonies 4-6

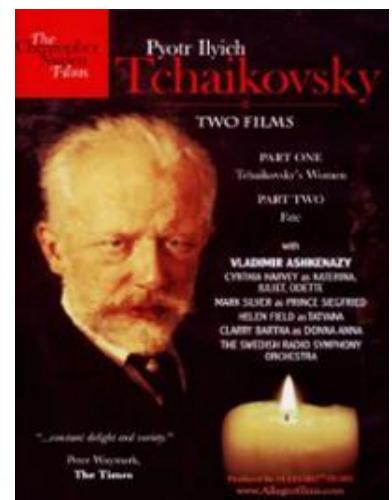


“Tchaikovsky composed three supreme masterpieces. . . . the Opera *Eugene Onegin* . . . the ballet *The Sleeping Beauty* . . . [and the] B minor Symphony, his Sixth, the Pathetique. The originality and power of the piece are prodigious; it is also one of Tchaikovsky’s most consistent and perfectly composed. But it is no wonder that some in its first audience were evidently bewildered by it, for the total experience it presents is unique, and some passages may still provide something of a challenge. But its totality is overwhelming” (David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: The Man and his Music*, New York: Pegasus Books, 2007, p. 417).

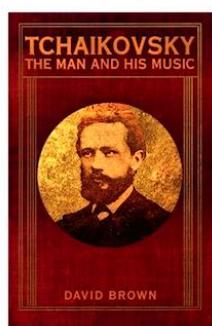
These three symphonies—including the Pathetique—were performed live in Salzburg and Vienna by the Vienna Philharmonic with Valery Gergiev at the helm. [Gergiev](#) believes in this project: “I think Tchaikovsky was always ready for immortality . . . and with his final three symphonies he secured his place in the pantheon of Great Composers . . . When recording live we go for energy, we go for excitement, and still, hopefully, we go for good musical quality.” And according to [Michael Cookson of MusicWeb International](#), these are “Opulent, dramatic and powerful performances. This well recorded Philips set would be a welcome addition to any collection.”

Two Films: *Tchaikovsky's Women and Fate*

These two recent films by director Christopher Nupen “encourage us to look afresh at Tchaikovsky’s tormented life. . . . *Tchaikovsky's Women* . . . covers Tchaikovsky’s heightened sensitivity and his fraught relationship with women beginning with his close, obsessive attachment to his mother. . . . sympathetic, emotionally charged performances of well chosen excerpts from [a selection of Tchaikovsky’s works] demonstrate how the composer so



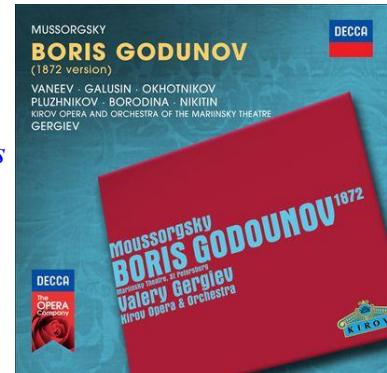
closely empathized with the plight and anguish of his heroines. . . . The second film, *Fate*, begins where Tchaikovsky's *Women* ends. . . . Most anguished of all is the story of the difficult development of the 6th 'Pathetique' Symphony which at length Tchaikovsky recognized to be his masterpiece." These films provide "a frank and harrowing portrait of a misunderstood and, still, a too little appreciated genius" ([Ian Lace, MusicWeb International](#)).



And for a more in-depth examination of the man behind the music, we recommend [David Brown's first-rate biography of Tchaikovsky](#), quoted above. Brown is an expert's expert: Among the numerous books on English and Russian composers Professor Brown wrote was a four-volume study of Tchaikovsky, "the largest life-and-works of a Russian composer ever published," of which "the official Soviet review acknowledged: 'Frankly we have nothing like it'" (from the jacket copy).

MUSSORGSKY: *Boris Godounov*

Mussorgsky's "musical education was erratic, he toiled as a civil servant and wrote music only part-time, influenced few if any of his contemporaries, died early from alcoholism, and left a small body of work. Yet Modest Mussorgsky was a towering figure in nineteenth century Russian music. His works exhibit a daring, raw individuality, a unique sound" ([James Reel, All Music Guide](#)). "*Boris Godunov* alone . . . would be enough to establish Modest Mussorgsky's place as [an] outstanding composer. . . . *Gudonov*, based on Pushkin's play about the tsar who followed in the wake of Ivan the Terrible, provided Mussorgsky with opportunities for great splendor in his ancient Russian style, using the old modes and the sounds of great bells; it also gave him the chance to explore some highly contrasted varieties of musical character, from the saturnine, possessed tsar himself to his lively children . . . , or the solemnly chanting historian monk Pimen to [a] vulgar, folksong-singing pair of itinerant friars" (Sadie & Latham, pp. 376-77). This 1997 recording showcases Valery Gergiev leading the Kirov Theater Orchestra and Chorus.



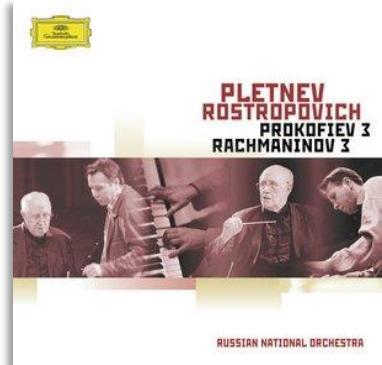
PROKOFIEV: Symphony No. 5



"The tide of World War II had turned by 1944, the year Prokofiev set to work on . . . his Fifth Symphony, which he described as 'the culmination of a long period of my creative life.' . . . The *enfant terrible* whose iconoclastic creations had left audiences electrified and confused through the 1920s had been replaced by a new composer—one who, in his own words, had 'gone down into the deeper realms of music' in search of a more direct and simpler style, with emphasis on emotional expression rather than novelty The symphony . . . with its rugged grandeur and wealth of material, its strong motivic connections between movements and supple orchestration, remains one of the great works of the literature. Prokofiev rightly considered it his finest creation" ([Ted Libby, The NPR Guide to Building a Classical CD Collection](#), New York: Workman, 1994, pp. 131-32). This disk features the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra with conductor Mariss Jansons.

PROKOFIEV: Piano Concerto No. 3/RACHMANINOV: Piano Concerto No. 3

“Although at first they may seem odd bedfellows, Prokofiev and Rachmaninov make a splendid pair in these absolutely superb and riveting performances of their respective Third Piano Concertos. Pletnev and Rostropovich (who conducts the pianist's erstwhile orchestra) together juxtapose the "rhythmic" and "melodic" elements of Prokofiev's spiky work with a view to Rachmaninov's flair for romantic thrust, allowing the listener to make remarkable but not readily evident associations between the two composers that stretch beyond their shared Russian heritage. . . . Rarely do you hear the orchestra and piano so together as an ensemble Pletnev's technique is so fine that the climactic third-movement glissandos sound as if they are played note for note, rather than with hands sliding back and forth. . . . [T]hese are personal, richly characterized performances unlike any others, captured in wonderful sound, and should not be missed” ([Michael Liebowitz, ClassicsToday.com](#)).



SHOSTAKOVICH: Symphony No. 5

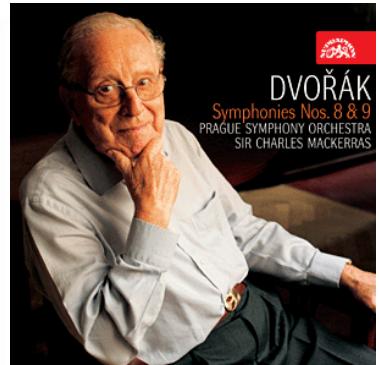


Dmitri Shostakovich was a young rising star who fell from grace in the face of Stalin’s condemnation of his opera *Lady Macbeth*. In a frantic attempt to regain his standing, Shostakovich created his Fifth Symphony, “a conventionally styled and structured symphony . . . beginning on a tragic note and leading to a heroic conclusion. . . . Completed in 1937, symphony No. 5 works brilliantly as pure music, and it has justifiably become Shostakovich’s most frequently performed symphonic work” (*The NPR Guide to Building a Classical CD Collection*, p. 166). This live 1979 performance by the New York Philharmonic under the baton of the legendary Leonard Bernstein is a “CBS masterworks” recording.

Czech composers Antonin Dvorak and Leos Janacek were part of the late nineteenth-century eastern European movement to assert national identity.

DVORAK: Symphonies No. 8 and 9

Much influenced by his countryman Smetana, Dvorak employed Slavonic dance rhythms and even a polka in his early work, and his Bohemian-influenced music was beloved by audiences at home and abroad. He traveled widely across Europe, and from 1892 to 1895 lived in New York, directing the National Conservatory of Music there. Dvorak’s Eighth Symphony was composed before his time in the United States, but his well-known Ninth, often called his “New World Symphony,” was inspired by his time there. “At 80 years young, Charles Mackerras remains one of the great conductors of our era. . . . His unfailing musicality, intelligence, and sheer joy in performing communicate vividly in these two glorious performances, beautifully recorded live in September, 2005. . . . What really distinguishes these performances is their sheer excitement and vital sense of flow, a function of rhythmically characterful phrasing allied to ideally



transparent textures. . . . The Prague Symphony Orchestra responds to Mackerras' direction with amazing gusto, as if it doesn't already know the music backwards and forwards . . . this truly is as good as it gets" ([David Hurwitz, ClassicsToday.com](#)).

JANACEK: *Kat'a Kabanova*



Like his fellow Czech, Leos Janacek was influenced by both his country's traditional music and the modern sounds arising around him at the turn of the twentieth century. *Kat'a Kabanova* is "a story of adultery in a tyrannical family setting . . . This is probably Janacek's best-constructed work, and it contains some quite extraordinary love music. The opening is especially fine—a brooding orchestral prelude in which the melodic line keeps turning in on itself before reaching the glorious melody that is associated with Kat'a throughout the opera" (*The Rough Guide to Classical Music*, p. 252). *The Rough Guide* recommends this recording featuring Sir Charles Mackerras with the Czech Philharmonic and a cast of outstanding Czech singers.

And don't forget these marvelous Russian and Czech masterworks featured in earlier newsletters:

[Dvorak Cello Concerto & Tchaikovsky Rococo Variations](#) (cellist Mstislav Rostropovich)

[Dvorak: Violin Concerto](#) (with violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter)

[Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No. 2/Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 1](#) (pianist Sviatoslav Richter)

ROMANTIC FRENCH WORKS & MORE

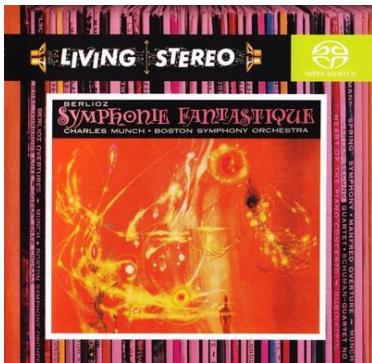
Classical music “has the potential to speak to everyone at some point in their lives. And we need to make sure that people know it’s there. That it’s there for them. This is not the kind of music you listen to for background or for dance. This is music that is by its very nature both thought-provoking and invites repeated listening” (Concert pianist Orli Shaham, on “The Diane Rehm Show,” WAMU 88.5, Washington, DC, July 22, 2014).



The Blake Collection’s thought-provoking and inviting offerings for August include a selection of French masterworks from the Romantic Period and the early 20th century, as well works from a pair of undeservedly underappreciated composers, and a trio of fabulous Verdi operas on DVD.

BERLIOZ

Symphonie fantastique, etc.

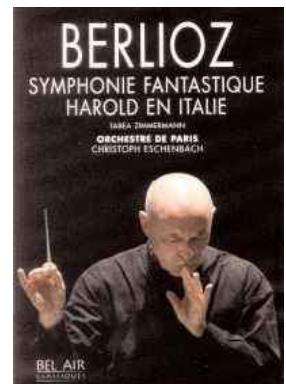


The “quintessential Romantic” composer (*The Rough Guide to Classical Music*, London: Rough Guides Limited, 2001, p. 64), Hector Berlioz was passionate about Goethe and Shakespeare, influences reflected in this RCA “Living Masters” disk of the *Symphony Fantastique* and the “Love Scene” from *Romeo and Juliet* performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra with conductor Charles Munch. Berlioz composed the *Symphony* in 1830, after having immersed himself in Goethe’s poetry and Beethoven’s symphonies. It is “a staggering achievement. . . . the first symphony to make thorough use of . . . a single melody that reappears in different guises through the work. . . . Furthermore, although composers had written scenic music before . . . and simple musical onomatopoeia had been common for centuries . . . no composer

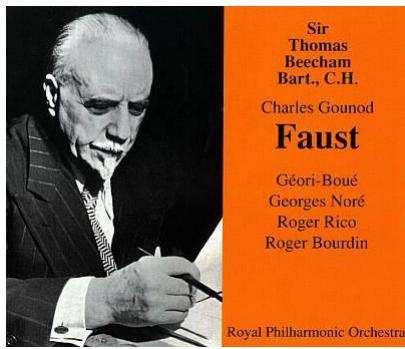
used instrumental music to present so specific a narrative drama. In short, this symphony is an opera without words” (*The Rough Guide to Classical Music*, pp. 67-68). This performance by the BSO of the *Symphony Fantastique* “has fire in its belly. . . . RCA’s 20-Bit remastering has wrought wonders. You can feel the bass in the floor. The inner details are delicious. The whole thing is a sonic wonder experience that tickles the back of my brain. . . . As for the coupling [of the “Love Scene” with the *Symphony*], I happen to like it a lot” (Robert Stumpf, II, Classical.net).

Symphonie Fantastique and Harold en Italie

For a different take on *Symphonie Fantastique*, we offer this DVD of Christoph Eschenbach at the helm of the Orchestre de Paris. This disk pairs the *Symphony* with *Harold in Italy*, inspired by Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. Eschenbach’s direction evokes “intoxicated rapture. . . . [He] is not only a great conductor but also a great actor whose podium presence projects both control and an excited awareness—an animated satisfaction—at the creatures of air he’s evoked and compelled; he validates, as no other, the visual medium. . . . [violinist] Tabea Zimmermann’s entrance [in *Harold in Italy*] establishes absolute authority with an articulately serried croon breathing life into Childe Harold’s soliloquies while evincing a Byronic swagger. . . . Primary. Indispensable. . . . ‘romantic agony’ at full strength” (Adrian Corleonis, Fanfare).



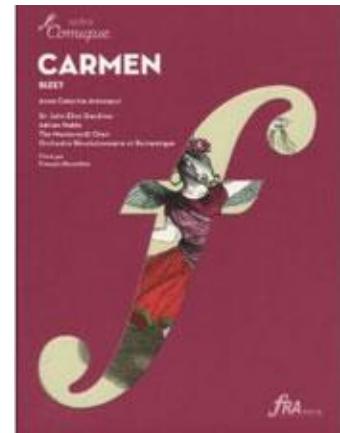
GOUNOD: *Faust*



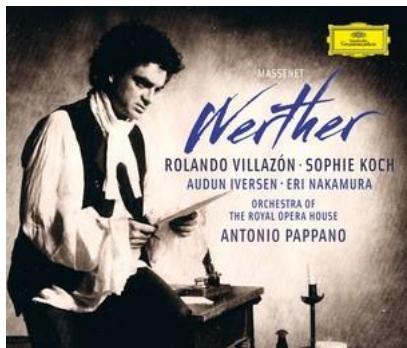
We see Goethe's influence again in Charles Gounod's *Faust*. "Best known among [Gounod's] operas . . . its lyrical expressiveness and its sense of the theatrically effective made it for many years the most loved of French operas" (Stanley Sadie & Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, London: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 333-34). However, "*Faust* is a lyric French opera first, and only second a tragedy based on Goethe. [Conductor Sir Thomas] Beecham, ever mindful of the proper spirit of things," gives us a *Faust* that is "graceful and appealing . . . The singing is wonderful too. [Georges] Nore's voice is exciting, with a tight vibrato that enlivens Gounod's most traditional phrases, and his Faust is a believably romantic figure. . . . [Margarite/Georgi Boué's] voice is a perfect match for Nore's . . . Her high notes—tremulous with passion, not weakness—send shivers down my spine (the good ones) in the final trio. . . . Finally, praise also must be given to Roger Rico. . . . His is a gentlemanly Mephistopheles in the best French tradition. He is charming and sophisticatedly mocking. . . . It is one of the best *Faust* performances on disc" ([Raymond Tuttle, Classical.net](#)).

BIZET: *Carmen*

Faust was displaced as the most beloved French opera by Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, "recognized as a masterpiece for its powerful portrayal of emotion (especially jealousy and female sexuality), its brilliantly colorful and varied score and its Spanish atmosphere. It brought to the lyric stage a new realism in its handling of passionate feeling" (Sadie & Latham, p. 334). This DVD set is a 2010 recording of live performances by soprano Anna Caterina Antonacci with the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique and Monteverdi Choir directed by Sir John Eliot Gardiner. "Behind the near-mythical figure of the emancipated woman, the dazzling spectacle of the group tableau and vibrant seduction of the Spain of dreams, all its authenticity and brilliance have been restored to the world's most performed opera in the opera house where it was first performed in 1875. . . . By presenting it here in a brand-new version with instruments of the period, in an endeavour to rekindle the original musical and theatrical flame, Sir John Eliot Gardiner and Adrian Noble have reconstructed the unusual movement of the chorus and difficult dialogue between characters as a human, carnal tragedy" (DVD liner notes). "It's a joy to see and hear a cliche-free Carmen . . . Soprano Anna Caterina Antonacci . . . is ideal in the role . . . Don Jose is American tenor Andrew Richards, who makes the character utterly human: his transformation from a nice country boy in Act 1 . . . to a raving loony in Act 4 progresses as it should—organically, from the situations he's faced with. . . . The remainder of the cast, most of whom are home-grown French, is excellent, and their enunciation is glorious. Picture and sound, as well as direction for the small screen, could not be better, and subtitles are in all major European languages. A 20-minute interview with Gardiner, Jerome Deschamps (the Comique's director), and Agnes Terrier (the dramaturg) is an interesting bonus" ([Robert Levine, ClassicsToday.com](#)).



MASSENET: *Werther*



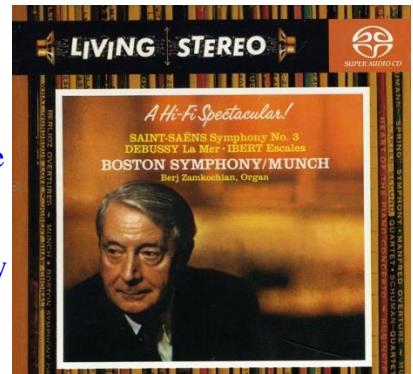
Goethe's fingerprints are also on this opera by Jules Massenet, based upon Goethe's autobiographical novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. "Like Puccini, Massenet was obsessed with melody. Tender, sweetly sensuous, never violent or uncomfortably dramatic, his melodies determine the texture of the music as a whole . . . With *Werther* . . . he achieved a perfect balance between drama, characterization and beauty of sound. . . . The opera is remarkable for the pathos of much of the music, and it boasts moments of thrilling atmosphere" (*Rough Guide*, p. 304). This production of *Werther* was recorded live in 2011 at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden conducted by Antonio Pappano and features Rolando Villazon in the title role. It is

"stunning . . . [Villazon sings] with emotional abandon . . . the top notes ring

true and grand, the rest of the voice is both beautiful and filled with his usual dark resonance. And as always, he sings the words as if they are happening in real time . . . The rest of the cast and Covent Garden Orchestra, led with a combination of Italianate passion and French orchestral filigree by the remarkable Antonio Pappano, make this a must-have recording of this opera" ([Robert Levine, ClassicsToday.com](#)).

SAINT-SAENS/DEBUSSY

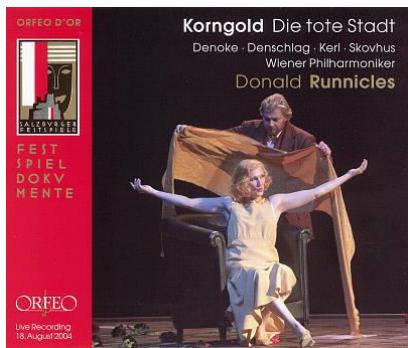
Camille Saint-Saens said that he lived "in music like a fish in water," that he composed as naturally as "an apple tree producing apples" (*Rough Guide*, p. 421). He had been an off-the-charts prodigy with a childhood that "suggested Mozartian potential" (*Rough Guide*, p. 421). Saint-Saens's contemporary, Claude Debussy, "by reason of his influence, . . . could be classed as perhaps the most important composer of the twentieth century—figures as diverse as Stravinsky, Bartok, Ravel, Webern, Messiaen and Boulez all admitted a debt to him. He is also one of the most approachable" (*Rough Guide*, p. 141). Works by these two French luminaries share space on this disk from the RCA "Living Stereo" series. "Still the greatest recording of the [Saint-Saens] Organ Symphony ever made, this latest remastering sounds even grander than the previous Living Stereo incarnation, with a more present and bass-rich organ making a positively cataclysmic experience out of the finale (sound sample attached). Fun as the loud bits are, to be honest it's the sweetness of the strings in the slow movement, and the amazing way [Conductor Charles] Munch gets the orchestra [the Boston Symphony] to really dig into the agitated rhythm of the first movement's main theme, that together set the seal on this interpretation. He gives the theoretically coolly 'classical' Saint-Saens a remarkable range of expressive depth . . . The same general observations apply to this remastering [of the Debussy]" ([David Hurwitz, ClassicsToday.com](#)).



KORNGOLD

Like Saint-Saens, Erich Wolfgang Korngold was an astonishing musical prodigy, composing works in his pre-teen years that won enthusiastic responses from the likes of Mahler, Puccini, and Strauss (*Rough Guide*, p. 259). Born in Vienna, the son of music critic Julius Korngold, Erich wrote works that were performed to great acclaim across Austria and Germany before he was 30. He moved to Hollywood in the mid-1930s, where he wrote much of the music for which America remembers him, including the scores for the swashbucklers *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *The Sea Hawk*, and *Captain Blood*. Sadly, the music from his Hollywood years has overshadowed his more accomplished works, some of which we feature this month.

Die tote Stadt

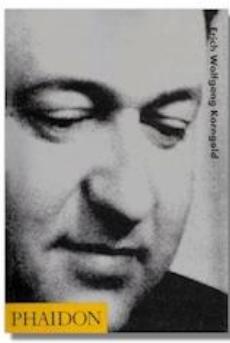


Korngold wrote his most famous opera, *Die tote Stadt*, in 1920, when he was just 23! Puccini declared it to be “among the most beautiful and the strongest hope of new German music” (*Rough Guide*, p. 261). The opera is based on a French symbolist novel about the tragic love affair between a widower and a dancer who resembles his late wife, and “the score veers between a quasi-religious profundity and a honeyed sweetness” (*Rough Guide*, p. 261). This 2004 Salzburg Festival production “created something of a sensation, and now makes its welcome arrival on CD. . . . the sound quality here is exceptionally vivid for a live event. . . [Soprano Angela] Denoke has an attractive voice and joins [tenor Torsten] Kerl sweetly in the famous duet *Glück, das mir verblieb*. They both hurl themselves into the increasingly violent scenes as the fantasy affair progresses. [Baritone Boje] Skovhus is his usual glamorous self, doubling the roles of Fritz and Frank, the faithful guardian of his friend’s sanity. [Conductor Donald] Runnicles and the Vienna Philharmonic play the piece with fire, bringing out every one of Korngold’s ragbag of Puccini, Strauss and Wagner allusions. . . . [W]hen it works, as it does here, *Die tote Stadt* still packs a punch” (*Gramophone*, 2010).

Symphony in F sharp major & Much Ado about Nothing Suite

Winner of the 1998 "Critic's Choice" award from *Gramophone* magazine, this disk pairs an early work, Korngold's *Much Ado About Nothing* Suite, composed in Vienna before 1920, with his masterpiece, the Symphony in F sharp major, composed in the States about 30 years later. “It’s good to see Andre Previn championing the music of Korngold . . . [giving] us yet another different view of this magnificent work, which is good for a symphony that, after 40 years, is still only just beginning to acquire the status it so justly deserves. . . . [H]e coaxes wonderful playing from the [London Symphony Orchestra]. The sombre Adagio is superbly controlled and beautifully crafted . . . , and in the finale Previn responds readily to the movement’s optimistic and playful spirit. Overall he achieves a very satisfying and balanced interpretation of this symphony. As a filler Previn gives us the short but genial *Much Ado about Nothing* suite, Op. 11, for chamber orchestra. . . . Previn once again secures deftly shaped performances and reveals himself as a very fine Korngold conductor. . . . a strong recommendation” (*Michael Stewart, Gramophone*).





We have also added Jessica Duchen's biography, [Erich Wolfgang Korngold](#), to the Library's collection. "It is an intriguing life story and in Jessica Duchen's highly readable new biography, the first comprehensive book on the man in English, he emerges as a sigClassical music "has the potential to speak to everyone at some point in their lives. And we need to make sure that people know it's there. That it's there for them. This is not the kind of music you listen to for background or for dance. This is music that is by its very nature both thought-provoking and invites repeated listening" (Concert pianist [Orli Shaham](#), on "The Diane Rehm Show," WAMU 88.5, Washington, DC, July 22, 2014).

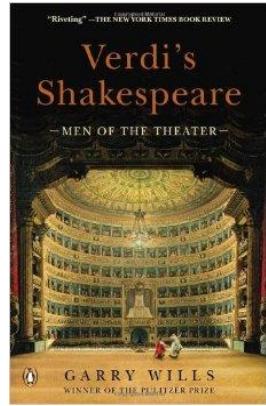
SCHMIDT: Symphony No. 4 and selections from *Notre Dame*

If you've never heard of Franz Schmidt, you're not alone. "Far better known within Austria than outside it, Franz Schmidt (December 22, 1874 - February 11, 1939) has long been regarded by his countrymen as Bruckner's natural successor" ([Steve Schwartz, Classical.net](#)). "Schmidt's successful [professional] career is sharply contrasted to his rather less fortunate personal destiny. The composer was dogged by bad health. The woman he married, his childhood sweetheart Karoline Perssin, was not equipped to deal with life and was placed in a mental institution in 1919. Ten years later followed the death of their only daughter, Emma. This was yet another heavy blow for Schmidt, but it also formed the nucleus for what is generally considered to be his best work. In his Symphony No. 4, Schmidt found an artistic outlet for the grief he felt at his daughter's death. The subtitle he gave the symphony was: '*Requiem für meine Tochter*' (Requiem for my daughter)" (CD liner notes). "Franz Schmidt is the composer of four symphonies, three of them among the strongest this symphony-rich twentieth century has produced. . . . [I]f Bruckner speaks to you and if in general you are susceptible to expansive utterance, it may well be music for you. The Fourth Symphony especially is an eloquent and arresting document. . . . [It] happened to be the first music by Schmidt that I ever heard . . . and I can recall only a few other occasions when I was so gripped at first encounter by the opening of a work" ([Michael Steinberg, The Symphony: A Listener's Guide](#), New York: Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 454-60). An "excellent performance of Franz Schmidt's masterful Fourth Symphony . . . a disc worth hearing on purely musical grounds . . . I highly recommend it" ([David Hurwitz, ClassicsToday.com](#)).



VERDI

In Italy, in the first half of the 19th century, opera “had been dominated by the comic genius of Rossini; later, [Giuseppe] Verdi with his powerful handling of drama and his appealing use of the human voice, emerged as a figure comparable in stature to Wagner—and more widely admired because of the directness of his music”



(Sadie & Latham, p. 84). And while it is always great to listen to such glorious music, opera is a *theatrical* form, and it may best appreciated when a wonderfully staged performance is seen and heard. We have, therefore, added to the Library’s collection DVDs of Verdi’s three wonderfully staged operas adapted from Shakespeare plays, and to enrich your enjoyment of these operas, we offer Pulitzer-Prize winner Garry Wills’s *Verdi’s Shakespeare: Men of the Theater*. “In this dazzling study of the three operas that Verdi adapted from Shakespeare, Pulitzer Prize winner and lifelong opera devotee Garry Wills explores the writing and staging of these triumphant works: Macbeth, Othello, and Falstaff. An Italian composer who could not read a word of English but adored Shakespeare, Verdi devoted himself to operatic productions that incorporated the playwright’s texts. Wills delves into the fast-paced worlds of these men of the theater, as they contended with every possible obstacle while bringing these tours de force to the stage. The two men worked in theatre conditions with many similarities. Both were

supplying pieces on a heavy schedule to audiences with a voracious appetite for what they wrote. Both were producing two major theatrical works a year at the most intense times and were engaged in other poetic or musical compositions, as well as managerial and directorial duties along the way. Both were busy in the companies they worked with, active at each stage of the production of the plays and operas, Shakespeare as an actor in his own and others’ plays, Verdi as a vocal coach and director. Theirs was a hands-on life of the stage, and this is a close study of the three stories that moved both men to produce some of their greatest works” (book jacket).

Macbeth

“This is a DVD release of [the Royal Opera House’s] *Macbeth* that was relayed into cinemas in 2011. It’s very good all-round, well filmed and well captured in excellent sound but, as it should be, it’s the performances of the two leads that will capture the attention. Simon Keenlyside and Liudmyla Monastyrskaya give one of the finest portrayals of the couple that I have come across. In both cases what lifts them into the category of the very special is the way they manage to chart the character’s development. Macbeth is a role that Keenlyside has grown into. He has the depth, the charisma and the energy that make the role complex and interesting; more than a great soldier laid low. His baritone is rounded and complex, just right to capture the many facets of the character’s journey. . . . He is partnered by an equally exciting soprano in Liudmyla Monastyrskaya. . . . She, too, charts the character’s development brilliantly, but she does so with quite extraordinary vocal tools. . . . For these two alone this DVD would be required viewing. . . . The chorus, so important in this opera, are very good indeed, whether playing witches, murderers, soldiers or refugees. The orchestra are fantastic too. [Conductor Antonio] Pappano’s direction is thrilling throughout. . . . He shapes a compelling, dark vision of the score and has a whale of a time while doing so. . . . An excellent release, altogether, and something that any fan of the opera would enjoy” ([Simon Thompson, MusicWeb International](#)).



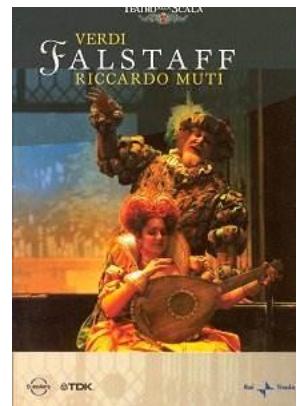
Otello



This not-to-be missed recording from La Scala features Placido Domingo in his final incarnation as Otello, a role he has continued to grow into over 26 years. “La Scala’s opening night of 2001 signaled Domingo’s last *Otello* in the vastly stylized Graham Vick production. It is a highly emotionally charged event and he sang miraculously well . . . His coolly restrained Desdemona is the excellent Barbara Frittoli, showing lustrous tone . . . As expected, the veteran Leo Nucci delivers a subtly powerful if cautious Iago. The undoubted hero of the evening is Riccardo Muti who gave one of the most electrifying versions of *Otello* on record. The austere, exquisite cylindrical stage and rich costumes . . . makes an effective contrast between the abstract and the figurative, at times evoking Pre-Raphaelite images. Sound and image are excellent” ([Chicago Classical Review](#)).

Falstaff

Like the *Otello*, this *Falstaff* is from La Scala’s 2001 season and is directed by “Verdi specialist and Musical Director of La Scala Opera House . . . Riccardo Muti. . . . The mainly young singers included 31-year-old shooting star Ambrogio Maestri in the title role, exciting young tenor Juan Diego Florez as Fenton and internationally acclaimed Barbara Frittoli as Alice. Recording was made at a performance in Busseto, Verdi’s birthplace. There, in 2001, a whole series of events marked the 100th anniversary of the composer’s death. This *Falstaff* performance constituted the high point of the anniversary celebrations. Scenery and costumes were recreated from a historical performance of 1913” ([Arkivmusic](#)).



“Music . . . will help dissolve your perplexities and purify your character and sensibilities, and in time of care and sorrow, will keep a fountain of joy alive in you” ([Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#), 20-century German Protestant theologian, pastor, writer, musician, and poet, perhaps most well known for his participation in an attempt to assassinate Hitler, for which he was executed).



This month the Blake Collection celebrates two turn-of-the-last century composers loved the world over and revered in their home countries—Jean Sibelius and Richard Strauss.

JEAN SIBELIUS

“Strauss’s near-contemporary Jean Sibelius was responsible for the main Nordic extension of the symphonic tradition,” most notably capturing the *Kalevala*, the national epic of his homeland, Finland, in his choral symphony *Kullervo*, “whose successful premiere in Helsinki in 1892 immediately established him as his country’s leading composer. That position was his for the rest of his life” (Stanley Sadie & Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, London: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 405-6).

Violin Concerto, Serenades

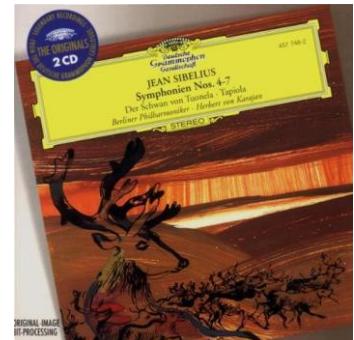


Sibelius was a promising violinist as a youngster and originally planned to pursue a career performing on that instrument. It’s only fitting therefore, that we have some of the composer’s violin works. We have selected this CD of Anne-Sophie Mutter, with Andre Previn and the Dresden Staatskapelle, performing selections of the composer’s works for the violin. “Gaunt, severe and craggy, there’s an implacable, ice-cool resilience about Anne-Sophie Mutter’s reading of the Sibelius Violin Concerto which is mightily impressive. . . . Mutter unfolds the desolate opening paragraph with chilling resignation; her ferocious, case-hardened technique belittles every monstrous violinistic obstacle, and the cadenza is dazzling. Mutter goes deep and support from Previn and the Staatskapelle is eloquent. . . . Mutter’s heartrending Adagio (she sounds vulnerably human for once) is deeply

communicative in its mingled passion and fragility. The finale finds her in defiant mood, and the spirit and bravura with which she dispatches this fiendishly taxing movement underscore the sure-footed objectivity of this performance. . . . Mutter proves herself a worthy and distinguished Sibelian” ([Michael Jameson, Classical-music.com](#)).

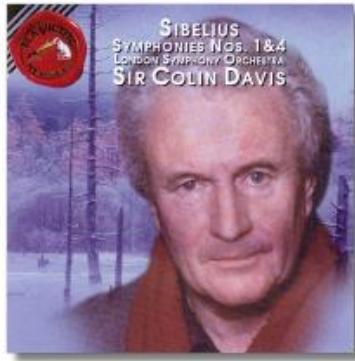
Symphonies 4-7

“It is a pleasure to hear this kind of emotion in a Karajan performance. . . . Sibelius is said to have considered Karajan the best conductor of his music The Berlin Philharmonic manages Sibelius’s rough-hewn phrases with uncharacteristic directness I found these performances to be fully worthy of their legendary status” (Christopher Abbot, Fanfare, November, 1999). The set also includes the tone poem *Tapiola* and *the Swan of Tuonela*.



We have added three CDs of Sir Colin Davis directing the London Symphony Orchestra in Symphonies 1-6 of Sibelius.

Symphonies 1 & 4

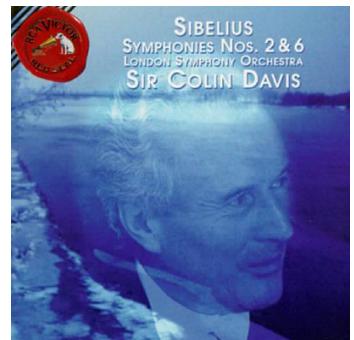


“Although influenced by Tchaikovsky, Sibelius drew on his native Finland for much of the inspiration for his first symphony and began to develop a distinctive style that would lead to him being considered one of the great symphonists. The fourth symphony was written following successful treatment for cancer and is his darkest symphony, in which he confronts his own mortality” (London Symphony Orchestra). Winner of the 1997 Gramophone award for “Best Orchestral Recording,” this CD brings us Sir Colin Davis at the podium, directing The London Symphony Orchestra. “It is in terms of imaginative insight that Davis scores. . . . Davis takes us completely inside [the world of the symphony] — we become part of it and feel we inhabit it. To

my mind Sir Colin’s Fourth is the finest and most powerful reading of the work to have emerged since the days of Karajan” (Gramophone, January 1997).

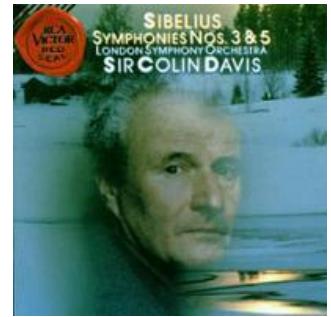
Symphonies 2 & 6

“This second installment of Davis’s . . . Sibelius cycle is purest gold. Hardly a phrase in these performances passes without new light being shed on it, and yet there is a strong feeling of spontaneity throughout. Davis’s readings are far from conventional; he often focuses on the darker sides of these symphonies, bringing out rarely heard depths in the Second and adding a fascinating new dimension to the Sixth. . . . Davis is admirably served by the LSO. The strings respond to the detail of his interpretation with superb flexibility, and wind and brass groups are richly voiced. There is a wealth of magically observed orchestral detail These performances command attention and will satisfy listeners for many years to come” (Jan Smaczny, BBC Music Magazine).

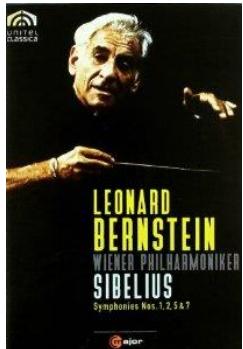


Symphonies 3 & 5

“Nowhere is Sibelius’s logic more apparent than in the Third Symphony . . . [with its] general simplification of style and greater subtlety of utterance The Fifth [Symphony] was accepted throughout Europe as the supreme work to date of the greatest living symphonist The popularity of the Fifth Symphony has much to do with its remarkable variety of moods, textures and sonorities, with the ‘new’ form—lean, clarified, refined—in evidenced in the Third Symphony” (Herbert Glass, CD liner notes).



Symphonies 1, 2, 5 & 7

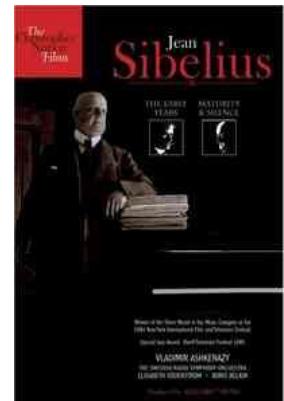


“In the mid 1980s, Unitel began recording a complete cycle of Sibelius symphonies with Leonard Bernstein and the Vienna Philharmonic. Bernstein’s death in 1990 unfortunately cut short this project after the release of Symphonies Nos. 1, 2, 5 and 7. Recorded live at Vienna’s Musikverein, these ecstatic performances were the object of stellar reviews. On this double-disc set, Bernstein’s unique and by now legendary interpretations of Sibelius are released for the first time on DVD” ([Arkivmusic](#)).

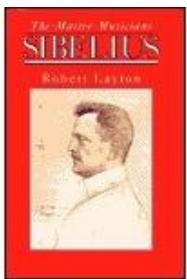
We also offer a DVD and a biography to provide you with greater insight into the life and works of Jean Sibelius.

Sibelius: The Early Years; Maturity & Silence

“This is an intimate account, using film and Sibelius’s music and words, of a great artist’s struggle with his medium, with the world and with himself. The films set out also to try and free Sibelius’s reputation from some of the unnecessary encrustations of history by looking at the composer’s own declared intentions, so poetically expressed, which are earning the increasing attention and respect of composers today” ([Allegrofilms.com](#)). “The visual elements of the films are striking. As to be expected, there are many views of Finland’s lakes and forests through the seasons There is archive film of Sibelius walking near Ainola and many portraits of the composer at different times of his life. . . . The essence of these films is Nupen’s telling selection of quotes from the composer’s and [his wife] Aino’s letters and writings. These show the pains and triumphs of the progress of a creative genius. . . . Vladimir Ashkenazy conducts the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra in powerful, illuminating performances of well-chosen excerpts from all the seven symphonies except No. 6 and Tapiola. The orchestra is joined by the talents of Boris Belkin as soloist in the Violin Concerto and by the expressive voice of the renowned Elisabeth Soderstrom in two songs including Sibelius’s orchestral song, ‘Since then I have questioned no further’ a work that mourns the transience of life and love” ([Ian Lace, Musicweb-International](#)).



Sibelius



No less than the [UK Sibelius Society](#) considers Robert Layton “the Sibelius authority.” “A senior member of the BBC music staff from 1959 to 1990 . . . [Layton] has received the Sibelius Medal and the Order of the White Rose of Finland [Sibelius’s homeland] for his services to Finnish music. . . . He is the general editor of the *BBC Music Guides* and co-author of the annual *Penguin CD Guide*” (jacket copy). “Robert Layton’s *Sibelius* is a revealing guide to the life and to the works. Above all, he provides illuminating analyses of the music, both tracing the formal means that Sibelius developed at each new phase of his career, and identifying the events and experiences that left an imprint on this extraordinary musical personality” (jacket copy). The volume is part of Schirmer Books’ “Master Musicians” series.

RICHARD STRAUSS

Richard Strauss “enjoyed almost from the first a generous measure of public acclaim, so that for more than 60 years he was regarded as the outstanding German composer of the age” (Sadie & Latham, p. 399). “Richard Strauss’s career withstood two world wars and irreversible shifts in musical aesthetics. The Staatskapelle Dresden [performing on two of the offerings below], with which he maintained a relationship for over 60 years, has similarly weathered the forces of history. Germany’s oldest continuing orchestra, it never disbanded during World War II, clinging to tradition even after its house, the Semperoper, was reduced to rubble. While Strauss never served as director of the company nor lived in Dresden, over half of his operas were unveiled here” ([New York Times, April 10, 2014](#)).

Don Juan, Till Eulenspiegel, Metamorphosen

Strauss was only 25 when he published his tone poem *Don Juan*, and it “established him as the most important young composer in Germany” (Sadie & Latham, p. 402). *Till Eulenspiegel*, another tone poem, followed about five years later. Strauss wrote *Metamorphosen* in 1945 as “an elegy for the Germany that was being destroyed in the bombing raids on Dresden, Berlin and other cities” (Sadie & Latham, p. 405). This disc’s “justly acclaimed performances” ([Raymond Tuttle, Fanfare](#)) are part of EMI’s “Great Recordings of the Century” series. “Nothing is done merely to create an effect, and yet the music’s dramatic and pictorial potential is not shortchanged. . . . One can’t find an orchestra that understands Strauss better than the Staatskapelle Dresden. These recordings have the stamp of authenticity” ([Tuttle](#)).



Ein Heldenleben, Tod Und Verklärung

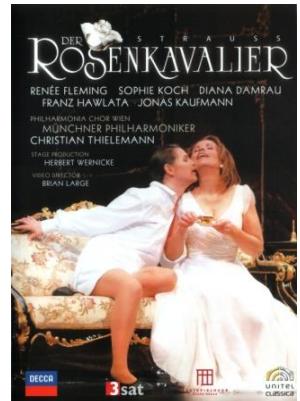


Another from EMI’s “Great Recordings of the Century” series, this disk also features Rudolf Kempe directing the Dresden Staatskapelle. “Rudolf Kempe’s *Ein Heldenleben* stands with the best What it has is tremendous character, a genuine sense of fun, and a certain ‘Gemutlichkeit’ [a sort of cozy sociability] that’s really the essence of Strauss. . . . The same virtues apply equally to the other two items. *Death and Transfiguration* . . . is swift, dramatic, and at its conclusion aptly luminous. Once again Kempe proves himself to be a master of Straussian syntax. . . . A vastly entertaining

disc, then, and an excellent introduction to what arguably remains the greatest series of Strauss recordings ever made" ([David Hurwitz, ClassicsToday.com](#)).

Der Rosenkavalier

The opera *Der Rosenkavalier* is a "highly sophisticated, sentimental, and humane comedy" (Sadie & Latham, p. 400). "We have Christian Thielemann's immaculately bittersweet conducting and Renée Fleming's Marschallin, sung and acted with superb conviction. . . . Wernicke's staging, updating the opera to the years before the first world war, has a brittle, cool quality: the set, a whirling hall of mirrors, continually reminds us that we are in a world soon to be irrevocably shattered, while the shotgun-toting thugs that form the retinue of Franz Hawlata's charming, if sinister Ochs hint at the dangerous emergence of the postwar far right. Watch out, meanwhile, for Jonas Kaufmann's brief, but sensational appearance as the Italian Tenor" ([Tim Ashley, The Guardian, December 10, 2009](#)).



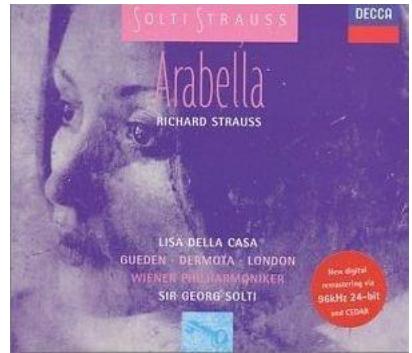
Die Frau ohne Schatten



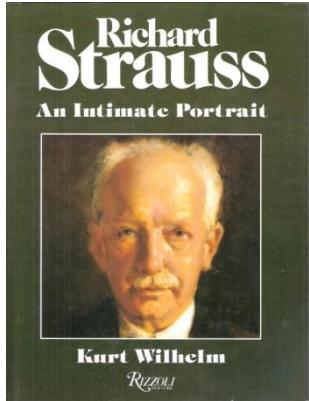
Strauss again teamed up with librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal (who wrote the book for *Rosenkavalier*) for this "symbolist fairytale" opera (Sadie & Latham 402), the title of which translates to *The Woman without a Shadow*. Conductor Karl "Bohm's direction has 'a fantastic, absolutely appropriate dynamism' . . . throughout the Vienna strings play with an unmatchable Straussian glow, while the rest of the orchestra cope unflinchingly with this unbelievably complex score. . . . [the legendary Birgit Nilsson] gives a performance of a role that demands a rich lower register as well as a gleaming top [surpassing her earlier roles] in sheer involvement and moving utterance. Anyone who may have thought her a cold singer needs to hear her remorse when she realizes the anguish she has caused her husband, Barak, sung here—as it was a few years ago at Covent Garden—with sympathetic warmth and generous breadth by Walter Berry. . . . [who] is so obviously singing from deep within himself. Leonie Rysanek has remained unrivalled as the Empress . . . [giving] an interpretation of . . . depth and understanding . . . and soars to the heights [Other recordings are] hardly likely to surpass the conductor, orchestra and cast assembled here, all of whom had benefited by career-long experience of the work, and convey with entire conviction the moral dilemmas and psychological confusions of Hoffmannsthal's involved scenario. Strauss is well served by them" ([Gramophone, February 1986](#)).

Arabella

"This recording is a marvel! . . . Being in the Decca catalog for many years, it has long since become a legendary recording [and] it still stands as one of the very best. . . . *Arabella* was the last collaboration between the composer and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, librettist of Strauss's most successful operas. . . . The cast is the real highlight here; Lisa Della Casa was a phenomenal Mozart and Strauss interpreter, ranking among the finest singers of her time. She performed and recorded the role of Arabella frequently, each time with great success. Here, she's in the prime of her career; fresh and perceptive—without any unnecessary exaggerations. Otto Edelman is simply terrific as Graf Waldner, as is George London as Mandryka, the mistrustful, rich stranger. Both Hilde Gueden as Zdenka (Arabella's sister) and Ira Malaniuk as Adelaide (their mother) sound very fresh, singing with astounding virtuosity. Conductor and orchestra are in great shape, too. Georg Solti obviously feels comfortable



with Strauss's orchestration, and he leads the Vienna Philharmonic with fire and insight. His ever-forward pushing approach to the music works particularly well—bringing great passion and excitement. As always with Strauss, the score is tricky for both singers and orchestra; but isn't that what we have the Vienna Philharmonic for? It produces a gorgeous sound with full basses and warm strings . . . this performance has been . . . wonderfully re-mastered and [includes] synopsis and libretto" ([Bart Verhaeghe, Fanfare](#)).



To broaden your understanding of the man behind all this marvelous works, we have also added Kurt Wilhelm's biography *Richard Strauss: An Intimate Portrait* to our collection. "A delightful and very informative study of the composer and his life in music. The author is a personal friend of the Strauss family, and so the book is filled with anecdotes, quotations, and personal reminiscences by the family and many contemporaries. In addition, nearly every page contains photographs of Richard Strauss and the Germany and Austria of his time. Many are family snapshots never before published. There are eight pages of color photographs of the composer's home in Garmisch, which today houses the Strauss Archive. The wealth of information, verbal and pictorial, as well as the lively prose style, makes this book one that can be enjoyed and appreciated by the scholar as well as the general reader. Highly recommended" (W. Ross, University of Virginia).



What Makes the Vienna Philharmonic So Distinctive?

"How different do great orchestras really sound from one another in the 21st century? If you closed your eyes and opened your ears for a blind, Pepsi-challenge-type sound test, could you really identify who was playing — given the high level of musicianship at top ensembles, the same core repertoire and the influence of a cadre of jet-setting conductors who shape orchestras all over the world? Ask musicians about this, and many will lament that a kind of homogeneity has crept into orchestral playing, and that the idiosyncrasies that once distinguished ensembles have faded. They will often exempt their own orchestras from this critique and then point to a handful of others that retain distinctive, recognizable styles. Those shortlists may vary, but one orchestra is almost always mentioned: the Vienna Philharmonic." We invite you to learn more about this world-class orchestra in "[A Sound Shaped by Time and Tools: What Makes the Vienna Philharmonic So Distinctive](#)" from *The New York Times* (August 3, 2014). Two of the recordings featured this month—[*Die Frau Ohne Schatten*](#) and [*Arabella*](#)—are performances by the Vienna Philharmonic.

The following recordings were previously donated to the Library by Mr. Blake and are now being added to the collection.



SYMPHONIES, CONCERTOS & SOLO PIANO

BEETHOVEN

Violin concerto/romances



Anne-Sophie Mutter first recorded the Beethoven violin concerto with Herbert Karajan when she was still a teenager. In this recording, she revisits that piece, under the direction of Kurt Masur, and also performs Beethoven's Romances No. 1 and 2. "The playing is, as ever, technically and stylishly stunning. [Mutter] has the kind of tone that forces you to listen" ([Stephen Johnson, Classical-Music.com](#)).

BRAHMS

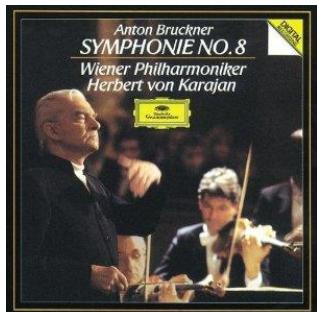
Violin concerto in D, op. 77

Winner of *Gramophone*'s "Editor's Choice" Award, this recording pairs Brahms's violin concerto and double concerto and violinist Julia Fischer and cellist Daniel Muller-Schott in live performances with the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Yakov Kreizberg. "Now well in her stride as a recording artist, German violinist Julia Fischer offers this ideal Brahms coupling in strong and sympathetic readings, joined in the Double Concerto by her brilliant young compatriot cellist, Daniel Muller-Schott. . . . Fischer and Muller-Schott are relaxed and easily lyrical in the slow movement, brilliant and thrusting in the finale. An outstanding disc which stands high on the list of this perfect coupling" ([Edward Greenfield, Gramophone, August, 2007](#)).



BRUCKNER

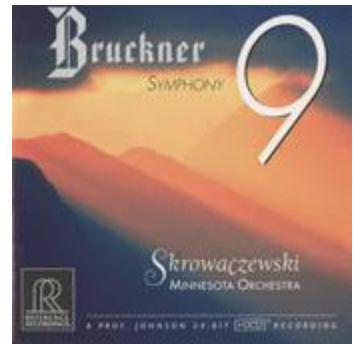
Symphonie no. 8



"As if by some strange act of providence, great conductors have often been remembered by the immediate posthumous release of some fine and representative recording. With Beecham it was Strauss's *Em Heldenleben*, with Bruno Walter it was Mahler's Ninth Symphony, and with Karajan it is the Eighth Symphony of Bruckner, perhaps the symphony he loved and revered above all others. It is also, happily, an exclusively Austrian affair, the music of the country's finest symphonist played by their finest orchestra under Bruckner's finest Austrian-born interpreter" ([Robert Osborne, Gramophone, October, 1989](#)).

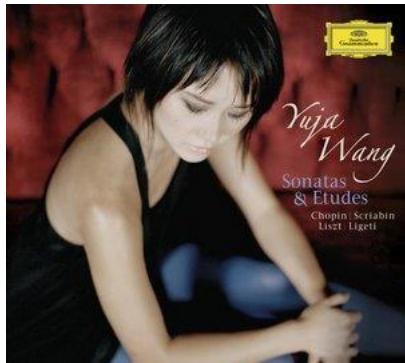
Symphony No. 9

"This disc is . . . a marvel. The Minnesota Orchestra outplays the Concertgebouw, and the recording really blows away all the competition" ([David Hurwitz, CD Finder](#)). "The performance is massively authoritative. The playing of the Minnesota Orchestra should cause concern in those European centers that have traditionally claimed preeminence in Bruckner performance" ([Michael Jameson, Fanfare](#)).



CHOPIN/LISZT/OTHERS

Sonatas and Etudes

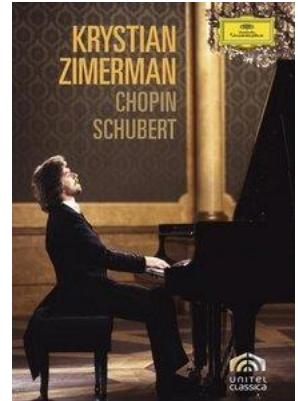


This selection of piano works of Chopin, Ligeti, Scriabin, and Liszt, was the debut recording of then-22-year-old Chinese pianist Yuja Wang. "Make no mistake, Yuja Wang is one hell of a pianist. Born in 1987, she's still got a lot of development ahead of her . . . but she has all the equipment to be one of the most exciting pianists of her generation. As well as a stunning technique she has a fabulous range of sonority and colour (and she's been superbly caught by DG's engineers). She is also very comfortable with extremes of dynamic and expression, and this gives her playing a striking intensity" ([Tim Parry, Classical-Music.com](#)).

CHOPIN/SCHUBERT

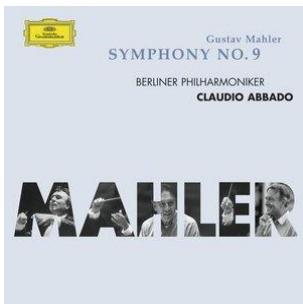
Krystian Zimerman Plays Chopin & Schubert

"Humphrey Burton's beautiful filming from 1987 of the 30-year-old Krystian Zimerman has a wonderfully timeless quality. The playing is a marvel of finely balanced sensitivity, fire and colour" ([Jessica Duchen, BBC Music Magazine, November 2008](#)). "This DVD contains some of the most magnificent piano-playing that I have ever heard. Zimerman's pianistic subtlety matches note-for-note his deep involvement with the music, which seems to grow out of him, creating itself as he plays. I completely concur with the British critic Jeremy Siepmann, who writes in his booklet note: 'The range of color, the extent of tonal control, the layering of contrasting levels and characters of sound on display here are as phenomenal as the sheer unalloyed beauty of tone Zimerman produces, from the softest to the loudest . . . The recital is a gold mine of great piano playing.' The filming, which took place in 1987 in the Rosenhugel Studio in Vienna, holds up very well, and the audio quality is superb . . . These are performances that burn with white heat, even in the quietest moments of the Nocturne and the Impromptus. In every piece there is a musical vision, an inner intensity that begins before the first note sounds and continues without interruption—through rests and fermatas—to the release of the final note" ([Charles Timbrell, Fanfare, January 2009](#)).



MAHLER

Symphony no. 9

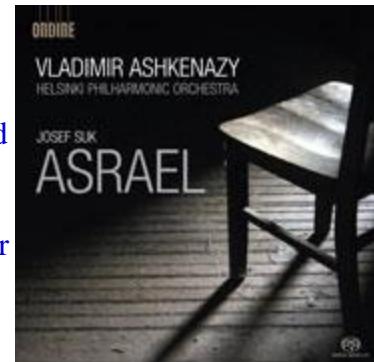


“This [recording] is superb without equivocation. . . . Abbado has made the work his own He has solved how it goes without stinting on detail or sacrificing structure I don't know another performance in this league” ([ClassicalCDReview.com](#)). “In playing and interpretation it takes its place among the finest and I recommend it warmly” ([Tony Duggan, MusicWeb-International](#)).

SUK

Asrael: Symphony for large orchestra in C minor, op. 27

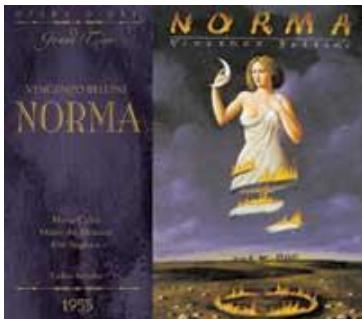
“This is the first totally non-Czech recording of [Josef] Suk's tragic masterpiece, and it's brilliant. In case you don't already know the story, Suk wrote this harrowing, five-movement symphony to expiate the pain and grief of the double loss of his wife and father-in-law (who happened to be Dvorak), both of whom died within about a year of each other. Asrael is the angel of death, and the music refers directly to Dvorak's Requiem (in its second movement) and seemingly to Slavonic church music as well. While often dark in tone, it is by no means lacking in color or contrast. The third movement reveals Suk as a master of the creepy scherzo to rival the Mahler of the Seventh Symphony, while the transfigured major-key ending is anything but facile, and achieves precisely the catharsis that Suk intended. This performance is magnificent. *Asrael* has been recorded before, and very well, by most major Czech conductors . . . [Conductor Vladimir] Ashkenazy's performance here is as fine as any of them; indeed, he brings more sheer excitement to the finale than any other conductor on disc, and the playing of the Helsinki Philharmonic gives nothing away to the Czechs If you love the symphonies of, say, Mahler or Tchaikovsky, then you really must hear *Asrael*” ([David Hurwitz, ClassicsToday.com](#)).



OPERA

BELLINI

Norma



“From 1950 to 1964 (and arguably both before and since) Maria Callas was the greatest Norma available Here she was in her vocal prime. The voice is in control at all volumes, and from blazing top to cruel/tragic low notes her coloratura is flawless, idiomatic, and always at the service of the music and text. And this security allows her to ‘read’ the role with searing insights, offering us equal parts Norma the Woman and Norma the Warrior. In short, it's as nearly perfect a performance of this role as we're ever going to hear” ([Robert Levine, ClassicsToday.com](#)).

BIZET

Carmen

This 2003 studio recording features Angela Gheorghiu in the title role, with Roberto Alagna as Don Jose, Thomas Hampson as Escamillo, and Inva Mula as Micaela. “Any Carmen depends on the contributions of conductor, soprano (or mezzo) and tenor. Michel Plasson draws some very fine playing indeed from the Toulouse orchestra, and his choice of speeds seems just right, never resorting to extreme effects. . . . Gheorghiu and Roberto Alagna have obviously worked very hard to achieve some fine moments. . . . Alagna . . . is really inside the character [of Don Jose] . . . Once I got to the final duet in this 21st-century Carmen, I was completely gripped – by Alagna, who, while sounding distraught, still manages to produce some lovely tone, and by Gheorghiu, who. . . is a remarkably dramatic lady-in-distress” ([Patrick O’Connor, Gramophone, March 2003](#)).



DONIZETTI

Anna Bolena

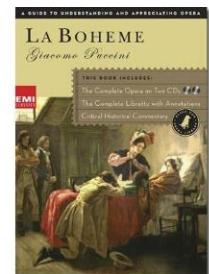


“Though Callas’s performances as *Anna Bolena* were limited—a dozen in all—the role stands as one of her most exacting characterizations. Her remarkable identification with Anna’s tragedy comes as a culmination of all the wronged, wounded characters she had previously portrayed, for the emotions of one role provided fuel to ignite another. But here the qualities of conflict, melancholy, and sacrifice are changed and chastened. Callas is aware that she is not dealing with a personal drama, but with the fate of a woman judged by history” ([John Ardoin, *The Callas Legacy: The Complete Guide to Her Recordings on Compact Disc, 4th Ed.*, Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1995](#) p. 117).

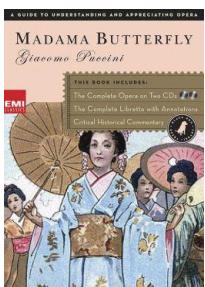
PUCCINI

La Boheme

“This recording of *La boheme* undoubtedly belongs to the best things [Conductor] Thomas Schippers ever recorded on disc. . . . It was eventually [Mirelli] Freni’s magnificent and disarming charm [in the role of Mimi] that made this performance so unique. . . . Nicolai Gedda, [an] ever-reliable and versatile tenor, was . . . Rodolfo. Together, Freni and Gedda formed quite a remarkable couple. . . . Schippers’ conducting is energetic and his eye for detail proves that he was a really great conductor” ([Bart Verhaeghe, Fanfare](#)). This is one of EMI’s “Great Recordings of the Century.”



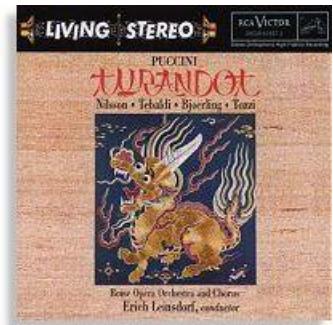
Madama Butterfly



“For years this has been the benchmark *Butterfly* . . . and re-hearing it now, it still is. . . . Renata Scotto was at the peak of her vocal powers . . . [and] she gets *Butterfly* magnificently. . . . Carlo Bergonzi, too, is at his honeyed best, with the voice beautifully produced from top to bottom. . . . Rolando Panerai’s Sharpless is well-drawn, and he’s very effective in the catastrophic second-act conversation with *Butterfly*. Anna di Stasio sings Suzuki sympathetically, blending well with Scotto in the Flower Duet. The sound is superb. This is a study in sadness that can’t be beat” ([Robert Levine, ClassicsToday.com, November 9, 2002](#)). This is another one of EMI’s “Great Recording of the Century.”

Turandot

“This set has been a crucial part of opera lovers' collections for more than 40 years, and it's still a necessity. . . . [The] the singing is ravishing. [Birgit] Nilsson is still the Turandot to equal . . . with blazing, secure high notes and an icy security that fairly knocks you for a loop. . . . [Renata] Tebaldi still had the high, floating pianissimos needed for Liu . . . and she treats the text sensitively. Giorgio Tozzi is thoroughly involved and gives a warm performance as Timur, and [Conductor] Erich Leinsdorf leads a thrilling, red-blooded account of the score” ([Robert Levine, ClassicsToday.com](#)).



ROSSINI

Il Viaggio a Reims



“Written as part of the festival programme surrounding the coronation of the Bourbon Charles X in 1825, *Il viaggio* has some claim to being the best of all musical parties . . . The array [of talent in this performance] is stunning. . . . Abbado's conducting is masterly. His ear for Rossini's sonorities cannot be faulted. The wind playing is exemplary and the strings of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe wonderfully catch that peculiarly Rossinian sound, fire and ice at the same time. Rhythmically, Abbado is exceptionally brilliant; it is a very alert performance, passionate and precise” ([Richard Osborne, Gramophone, January 1986](#)).

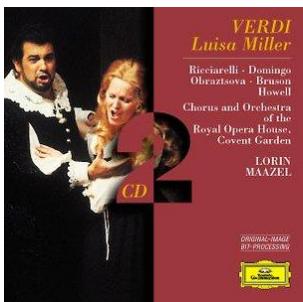
VERDI

Macbeth

From the 1964 Salzburg Festival, this performance of Verdi's *Macbeth* “was a musical event of the first order, exciting to hear and powerfully acclaimed at the end. This was due not least to Wolfgang Sawallisch's dramatically gripping conducting of the Vienna Philharmonic, but also to an exemplary pair of protagonists. In complete control of his formidable vocal gifts, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau provided a multifaceted portrait of the complex and unfathomable figure of Macbeth, while Grace Bumbry was no less impressive as Lady Macbeth, bringing to the part an unusual degree of demonism and proving to be in total command of the part's tremendous vocal difficulties in terms of stamina, range and artistry. This was Bumbry's debut role at the Vienna State Opera, also in 1964, and her first as a soprano, having started as a mezzo in 1960. She was the first black singer to sing at Bayreuth, eliciting 42 curtain calls . . . [Her] voice is in pristine condition here, aged only 27.” ([PrestoClassical](#)).



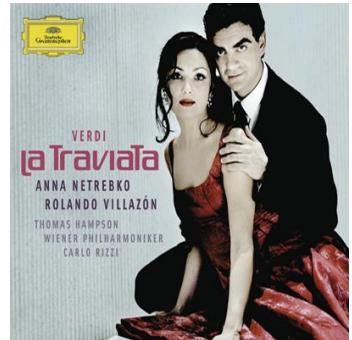
Luisa Miller



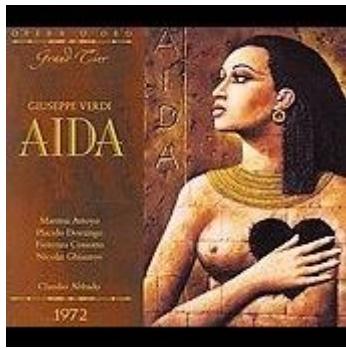
“The strength of this DG reissue is the singing of the three principals. The production of Luisa Miller at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, on which the set was based, probably marked the high point of Katia Ricciarelli's career. . . . [Placido] Domingo sings Rodolfo with a voice of metal as firm and glowing as bronze” ([Gramophone Classical Music Guide, 2010](#)). “Though taut in his control, [Conductor Lorin] Maazel uses his stage experience of working with these soloists to draw them out to their finest, most sympathetic form. Ricciarelli gives one of her tenderest and most beautiful performances on record” ([Penguin Guide, 2010 edition](#)).

La Traviata

A “stunning new *Traviata*, fresh from the stage of the [2005] Salzburg Festival Anna Netrebko’s Violetta is significant. . . . Her charisma comes through even on disc; the voice is gorgeous; she uses dynamics and breath to great dramatic effect She exudes an aura of fragility and melancholy even in the first-act duet with Alfredo There are no complaints to be made about the Alfredo of Rolando Villazon. . . . Throughout, he and Netrebko sing together as Nureyev and Fonteyn danced--ideal partners, full of similar subtleties--making the performance hard to resist. They have more chemistry than Gheorghiu and Alagna. Wow!” ([Robert Levine, ClassicsToday.com](#)).



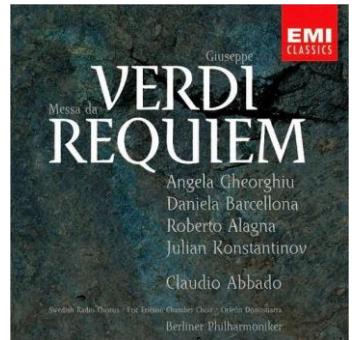
Aida



Placido “Domingo has recorded Radames commercially four times, but I dare say that this performance, taped live in Munich in 1972 under the baton of Claudio Abbado, then head of La Scala and arguably the finest Verdi conductor at the time, overall is the most satisfying Martina Arroyo was a superb, under-recorded soprano. . . . her plush, well-placed voice, utter commitment and sincerity, and superb musicianship made her a treasure, and we’re lucky to have this recording to prove it. She’s wonderful throughout, the voice big and ringing in climactic moments, gentle when it needs be. Domingo sings Radames with a freshness, ardency, and eagerness . . . that gives the impression that the drama is unfolding here for the first time. And his tone is golden. Fiorenza Cossotto’s Amneris is thoroughly convincing and as strong as steel Piero Cappuccilli sings handsomely Nicolai Ghiaurov’s Ramfis is terrifying--and beautifully intoned. . . . [Conductor Claudio] Abbado, here, on tour with his La Scala forces, [is] on fire, with the drama primary, the pacing ideal, and his entire cast a great ensemble” ([Robert Levine, ClassicsToday.com](#)).

Requiem

Not, of course, an opera. It has, however, been described as “operatic in style; . . . the kind of music [Verdi] wrote for the expression of strong emotion was inevitably operatic” (Sadie & Latham, p. 344). Recorded from live performances with the Berlin Philharmonic, this set features Angela Gheorghiu, Daniel Barcellona, Julian Konstantinov, and Robert Alagna, under the baton of Claudio Abbado. “Alagna . . . struck me as impressive, not least during the Ingemisco where his tone was both even and glowing. . . . Daniela Barcellona [is] thrilling Julian Konstantinov [is] surely one of the most exciting basses of recent years. . . . Angela Gheorghiu stands head and shoulders above her colleagues The voice is magnificent. . . . [Abbado’s] conducting . . . is a revelation. He coaxes the most sublime dynamics from both orchestra and chorus” ([Marc Bridle](#)).



This month the Blake Collection adds outstanding performances of music of Mozart and two Verdi operas on DVD.

MOZART

Piano Concertos no. 25 and 20

“Mozart’s middle years in Vienna reached a climax in the piano concertos of 1784-6 [when our featured concertos were written]. This was the time when the Viennese public recognized and admired his genius as composer and pianist and readily flocked to his concerts, which he gave during Lent, when the theaters were closed. In the 12 piano concertos of these years he greatly enlarged the concept of the concerto. . . . Mozart’s two minor-key concertos [one of which is his concerto no. 20] . . . are among his supreme achievements; both begin with materials that is essential orchestral in style, which the pianist cannot take up—so in each case the solo entry begins with a new, lyrical theme of particular pathos and gentle beauty. . . . There is an analogy between the piano soloist in a concerto and the singer of an operatic aria; it is no coincidence that Mozart excelled in writing for both” (Stanley Sadie and Alison Latham, *The Cambridge Music Guide*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 254).

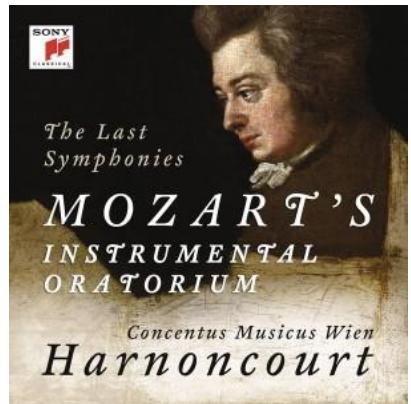


This disk contains two Mozart piano concertos performed by long-time collaborators pianist Martha Argerich and conductor Claudio Abbado. “The only problem with the artistry of Martha Argerich, one of the most brilliant pianists of modern times, is her occasional wild streak But with the right colleagues in chamber music and the right conductor in concertos, reined in just a bit, Ms. Argerich is often incomparable. She has an ideal colleague in the conductor Claudio Abbado, who recorded two Mozart concertos with her live last March at the Lucerne Festival, now issued as a recording. The performances of the Concerto No. 25 in C and No. 20 in D minor are phenomenal, with Ms. Argerich’s vibrant, colorful, imaginative playing held in check just enough by the masterly conducting of Abbado, who draws exciting playing from the festival’s Orchestra Mozart. That Abbado died in

January makes the recording even more special” ([Anthony Tommasini, New York Times, August 20, 2014](#)).

The Last Symphonies

“Mozart wrote few symphonies in his mature years, mainly because piano concertos served better for his public appearances in Vienna. . . . However . . . in the summer of 1788 he produced [the three on this disk]. . . . the finest manifestation of counterpoint in Mozart’s symphonic music comes in the [Symphony No. 41] This, called the ‘Jupiter’, stands in a tradition of ceremonial music in C. major, as the presence of trumpets and drums in the orchestra and the military rhythms attest. . . . a fitting culmination to his symphonic output” (Sadie and Latham, p. 256). “Nobody has done more to change the sound of Mozart than the Austrian conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt, a descendant of the Emperors for whom Mozart played. For over 60 years, Harnoncourt has been retuning our ears and expectations to the instruments, practices and tempi of Mozart’s lifetime – often (as here) with his wife, Alice, leading the first violins of their collegial ensemble, the Concentus



Musicus Wien. . . . [Harmoncourt's] premise in this recording is that the last three Mozart symphonies are a single work with 12 movements, designed to be consumed whole. 'I am now fully convinced of this unity,' the conductor declares. He has a point. . . . Heard here without interruption, the symphonies gain in cohesion what they lose in distinct character. . . . This is a truly historical set, practically indispensable" ([Norman Lebrecht](#)).

VERDI

Simon Boccanegra



"*Simon Boccanegra*, composed for Venice in 1857, is a grandly somber piece, concerned with political power in medieval Genoa, the rivalries of the nobles and the plebeians, and a love affair that crosses those barriers" (Sadie and Latham, p. 341). This DVD recording spotlights the legendary Plácido Domingo in the title role. "At age 69 Plácido Domingo remains a vocal miracle, as this release attests. . . . Just as important, he is never just a singer, but a true artist, ever expressive and alive to his text, always inflecting its nuances. . . . The sound quality is excellent, the camerawork free from fussiness" ([James A. Altena, Fanfare](#)). "As an acted portrayal Domingo's Boccanegra is among the finest on record. . . . Domingo conveys the totality of the character in his demeanour and acting and also vocally in the many more lyric pages of the score. Overall. . . . [he] gives a penetrating and convincing interpretation of one of the great Verdi roles. . . . The Royal Opera Chorus and Orchestra under Antonio

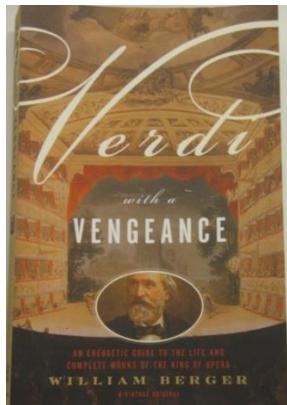
Pappano deservedly share the limelight with Domingo, the conductor seeming to have a natural flair for Verdi's drama with a fine balance between the lyric and more dramatic parts" ([Robert J Farr, MusicWeb International](#)).

Don Carlo

"Verdi had regarded himself as retired from composing from about 1860. Each opera composed thereafter was undertaken simply because he wanted, for one reason or another, to undertake it. . . . One particularly exciting challenge was offered by *Don Carlos*, a French *grand opera* after a play by Schiller. This work touches on all the themes that had appealed to Verdi: nationhood. . . . the rival power of church and state. . . . male courage and comradeship; the conflict of generations; and above all love" (Sadie and Latham, p. 342). "National Theatre director Nicholas Hytner's new staging of Verdi's grandest—and arguably greatest—opera *Don Carlo*, was the highlight of the 2007/2008 Royal Opera House season. This new production marked Rolando Villazon's much anticipated, triumphant return to the house. . . . With sets and costumes by Bob Crowley, direction by Nicholas Hytner and an enviable cast, this production of *Don Carlo* is worthy of the greatness of Verdi's original, masterful work" ([Arkivmusic](#)). "Villazon's stirring, beautiful sound caught one's breath, and he acted with gripping intensity. Poplavskaya revealed a powerful voice which mixed fire and ice in equal measure. In the pit, Antonio Pappano was in top form. There was thrilled applause" (Warwick Thompson, reviewing the performance recorded on this DVD, [Bloomberg News](#), June 9, 2008).



Verdi with a Vengeance: An Energetic Guide to the Life and Complete Works of the King of Opera



“Have you ever found yourself wondering who precisely Aidi is, and why all the fuss? Are you embarrassed to admit that you’ve no earthly idea what *Rigoletto* is about? . . . Whatever it is you could possibly want to know about Verdi—from the composer’s intense hatred of priests to historical sources for all the operas to a detailed discussion of what to expect from a performance—it is all in *Verdi with a Vengeance*. . . . a book as indispensable for the newcomer as it is for the expert, a unique book that is as fascinating as it is helpful, as funny as it is smart” (from book cover).

This month the Blake Collection features the incomparable **Herbert von Karajan** conducting works of Beethoven and Verdi.

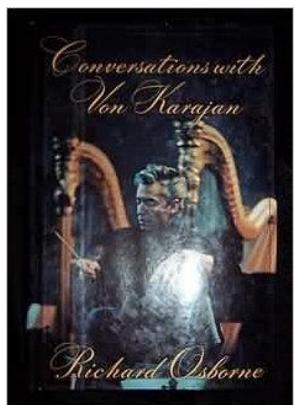


“I cannot teach you how to conduct, but I can show you how to rehearse in such a way, that when you come to the concert itself, you will barely need to conduct” (Herbert von Karajan).

“His art was to make the orchestra listen to itself. Critics sniped, but for musicians, what he did bordered on the miraculous” (Conductor Mariss Janson).

“Herbert von Karajan always rolled out a magic carpet for us, the singers. With him, our musical work took on another dimension” (American soprano Jessye Norman).

Conversations with Von Karajan



“Herbert von Karajan was one of the dominant figures in the performance of music between the end of World War II and his death [in 1989]; the world bought more than 100 million copies of his recordings. . . . One of the purposes of Richard Osborne's *Conversations with Von Karajan* is to bring the conductor into closer view as a human being, a personality and an anecdotalist, and as a thinker about music and the things music is about. Another of Mr. Osborne's aims is to correct widespread assumptions about Karajan and widespread reactions to his work, which made him a controversial figure throughout his career—the conductor's obsession with the elusive goal of perfection in performance, and his commitment to the perpetuation of his own work through several generations of technology. . . . In the conversations, which took place in 1977 and 1988-89, Karajan proves sage, provocative, charming and cagey”

(Richard Dyer, *New York Times*, August 5, 1990). In this book, “we meet a man with a passion for musical perfection, introspective, patient, kind, often amusing, always brilliant. A man one would have loved to meet” (jacket copy).

BEETHOVEN

“Beethoven is a singularity in the history of art—a phenomenon of dazzling and disconcerting force. He not only left his mark on all subsequent composers but also molded entire institutions. The professional orchestra arose, in large measure, as a vehicle for the incessant performance of Beethoven's symphonies. The art of conducting emerged in his wake. The modern piano bears the imprint of his demand for a more resonant and flexible instrument. Recording technology evolved with Beethoven in mind: the first commercial 33 1/3 r.p.m. LP, in 1931, contained the Fifth Symphony, and the duration of first-generation compact disks was fixed at seventy-five minutes so that the Ninth Symphony could unfurl without interruption. After Beethoven, the concert hall came to be seen not as a venue for diverse, meandering entertainments but as an austere memorial

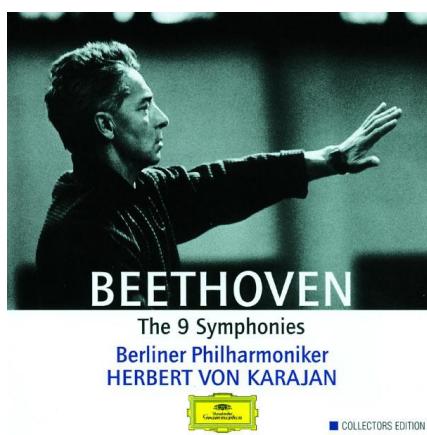
to artistic majesty. Listening underwent a fundamental change. To follow Beethoven's dense, driving narratives, one had to lean forward and pay close attention. The musicians' platform became the stage of an invisible drama, the temple of a sonic revelation. Above all, Beethoven shaped the identity of what came to be known as classical music." ([Alex Ross, "Deus ex Musica," *The New Yorker*, October 10, 2014](#)).

Violin Concerto

"By and large, Karajan's studio recordings with concerto soloists were not among his most important achievements on disc. This is not to belittle the distinguished artists he accompanied, who included the pianists Dinu Lipatti, Walter Gieseking, Sviatoslav Richter, Geza Anda, Alexis Weissenberg and Yevgeny Kissin, the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich and the violinist Christian Ferras. However, those partnerships rarely extended beyond a single project (sometimes involving several works), with one major exception: the first female German violinist of international standing, Anne-Sophie Mutter. She became his devoted collaborator, their recordings of major violin concertos being made over 11 years. The story of her discovery by Karajan is already legendary: how in 1976 the 13-year-old girl from Wehr near the German-Swiss border auditioned for the famous conductor, who listened raptly to her playing of the entire Bach Chaconne and movements from two Mozart concertos, and promptly invited her to play the Mozart works in Salzburg the following year under his direction. A best-selling recording followed and Deutsche Grammophon executives were impatient for another. But Mutter refused to be rushed, claiming she could learn only one concerto per year, so this, her second recording, was scheduled for late 1979. It is an unusually spacious Beethoven Concerto, but, as the Penguin Guide writes: "the slow basic tempi of Anne-Sophie Mutter's beautiful reading on Deutsche Grammophon were her own choice, she claims, and certainly not forced on her by her super-star conductor. . . . The purity of the solo playing and the concentration of the whole performance make the result intensely convincing" (Richard Osborne, liner notes).



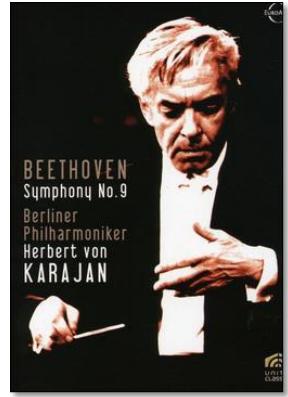
Symphonies



"Karajan 1963 set of Beethoven's symphonies was a landmark in the history of the gramophone. Never before had all nine symphonies been recorded and released in a integrally planned subscription set. . . . Fifty years on from its original release, this set remains the best-selling Beethoven cycle of all time" (Richard Osborne). "These performances were first released in 1963. The Berlin Philharmonic had by then developed to a point of virtuosity allowing Karajan to exploit a much more aggressive and precise approach to the nine symphonies of Beethoven. Comparable to Toscanini's recordings from over a decade earlier, this highly coveted Karajan stereo set, from the early 1960s is an exciting classic embodying of the art of conducting, performance and recording skills" ([Arkivmusic](#)).

Symphony No. 9

“Beethoven, Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic is one of the most perfect combinations ever to have emerged from the classical music world. When the Ninth Symphony is performed at a New Year’s Eve concert, it becomes an even more spectacular event. Karajan’s rousing interpretation of Beethoven’s most admired symphony has long acquired legendary status. Now Euroarts is releasing it in a recording made in Berlin’s Philharmonic Hall on New Year’s Eve 1977 in celebration of the conductor’s 100th birthday this year. Born in Salzburg on 5 April 1908, Herbert von Karajan was one of the most widely respected performing musicians appearing in the past century. He influenced fellow musicians and public taste for generations through his live appearances and recordings, especially in the role of Principal Conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, which he led for more than 30 years, moulding the orchestra into an ensemble of peerless power, tonal beauty and stylistic flexibility. The Ninth is an affirmation of optimism and beauty, written when Beethoven was almost completely deaf and the final movement is considered by many to be the composer’s crowning glory. It had been Beethoven’s lifelong dream to set Schiller’s ‘Ode to Joy’ to music, for the poem expressed the fulfillment of Beethoven’s most passionate desire: peace and brotherhood in the world. Giving eloquent voice to this plea are the world-renowned soloists Anna Tomowa-Sintow, Agnes Baltsa, Rene Kollo and Jose van Dam. This concert recording on DVD has all the elements that audiences came to expect from Karajan—strong, elegant conducting and a truly moving musical event” ([Arkivmusic](#)).



VERDI

Messa da Requiem



“Arturo Toscanini, who proved himself a radical and relentless reformer during his legendary reign as director of the Teatro alla Scala, died on 16 January 1957 at the biblical age of almost 90. On the tenth anniversary of his death, the chorus and orchestra assembled on the stage of the opera house for a commemorative concert. Herbert von Karajan, who had fallen under the Italian maestro’s spell in the early years of his own career and spoke of his great predecessor with veneration all his life, conducted Verdi’s Messa da Requiem in Toscanini’s honour, with a quartet of soloists whose names are inscribed in the roll of honour of the greatest Italian singing: Leontyne Price, Fiorenza Cossotto, Luciano Pavarotti and Nicolai Ghiaurov. In order that the theatre should not be flooded with the harsh light required by the television cameras during the commemoration itself, the recording was made before empty seats on 14 and 15 January 1967. The French director Henri-Georges Clouzot filmed the

simulated concert in a mixture of reportage, interpretative commentary and studio sequences. He decided to make conscious and artful use of the optical distractions and ‘inappropriate’ elements of filming: cables, microphones and spotlights got into the picture, sometimes the eye was led away to choir members silently listening, even to inattentive orchestral players, giving awkward smiles or gesticulating. This ironic, unconventional cool (very '60s) has acquired a distinctive historical charm in the intervening decades. It is as a study of Karajan as conductor, however, that Clouzot’s direction raises this film to the standing of a valuable document in the history of interpretation, even of music itself. We watch Karajan overseeing the entire performance with an unparalleled, paradoxically relaxed concentration, using fluent gestures, precise cues (no

baton) and discreetly sculptural movements of his fingers to allow the music to speak out in its own language. Not an Italian of course, but Karajan took it for granted that Verdi spoke to his God in Italian, and he himself testified that he had learnt the language of Italian phrasing from Toscanini himself as an awestruck attender of countless rehearsals. In 1967 however, Karajan himself embodied complete mastery, unbroken tradition and the radiant ideal of the beauty of Italian music” (Wolfgang Stahr, DVD liner notes).



More Change for a Traditional Force: The Berlin Philharmonic Comes to New York

“During Karajan’s 35-year tenure [with the Berlin Philharmonic], which ended just before his death in 1989, he buffed the ensemble’s sound to a cultivated sheen that could focus to fearsome concentration. [Anne-Sophie] Mutter, who made her professional debut with the orchestra in 1977, recalled a performance of Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony in which the slow second movement was so intense that she had to leave the hall” (Zachary Woolf, New York Times, September 28, 2014). Because Karajan was so closely identified with the Berlin Philharmonic and had such influence on its development, we invite you to read Zachary Woolf’s entire article on the orchestra, “[More Change for a Traditional Force: The Berlin Philharmonic Comes to New York](#).”

This month the Blake Collection features the great **Maria Callas** performing works of Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi and Puccini.



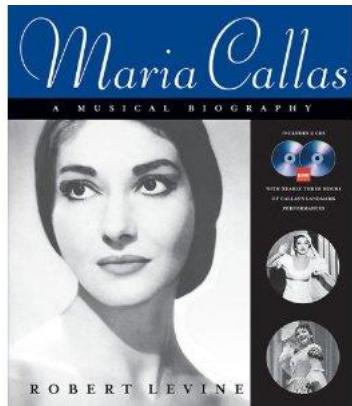
My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—
It gives a lovely light!

— “First Fig” by Edna St. Vincent Millay

“At the time of [Callas’s] death, Tito Gobbi, one of the few singers in a class with Callas, observed, ‘We must not forget that her beginning was hard and difficult, and only with tremendous will and supreme dedication did she become the legend. She was unique. She was different. She was a like a vivid flame attracting the attention of the whole world. I always thought she was immortal, and she is!’” (John Ardoin, *The Callas Legacy*).

“No one before her had ‘heard’ Lucia the way she did. Nor had they been able to articulate Donizetti’s music with such deep and specific feeling. Lucia became a recognizable human being. . . . After Callas, Lucia, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and the entire bel canto repertory would never be the same. We are still dealing with and reeling from her revolution” (Terrence McNally, playwright).

Maria Callas: A Musical Biography



“Maria Callas was almost as famous for her personal life—her jet-setting, her staggering weight loss, her tigress-like temperament—as she was for her singing. Of Greek parentage, the New York-born, internationally famous Callas was the most influential soprano of the 20th century, reviving a school of singing—bel canto—that had been forgotten for 75 years. Unlike most of her generation of sopranos, she was a superb actress both vocally and physically: her voice encompassed many colours and she embodied each character she portrayed. After seeing or hearing her in a role, it was said, it was difficult to imagine another singer attempting it, so fierce was her individual stamp. Her status went beyond cult; her triumphs and failures appeared on the front page of newspapers all over the world. This profusely illustrated musical biography covers Callas’s life and career. A final third of the book analyzes the tracks on the two CDs [which accompany the book], describing what made Callas unique, what made Callas Callas. Listen for yourselves to La Divina (‘the divine one’), as the Italians dubbed her, and be amazed. Robert Levine is an internationally known music writer whose work has appeared in dozens of publications. He is senior editor of ClassicsToday.com, one of the most widely read classical music websites in the world” (Jacket copy).

I Puritani

“Callas is stupendous from beginning to end. Her top notes in *Son virgin vezzosa* are crystal clear and *Qui la voce* is the definitive highspot—certainly among the very best Callas ever did. . . . the emotions and the colouring of the voice in Callas’s reading are unsurpassable. This scene is something to be savoured over and over again. And her singing in the last act is fabulous too” ([Goran Forsling, MusicWeb International](#)). “The arrival of Callas upon the scene came at a time when the general thirst for a revival of great singing had become almost desperate. . . . The demand had regularly been countered by the answer that there were no longer singers for such roles . . . Yet here, in Callas . . . was a singer who pre-eminently could undertake them. Moreover, she invested them with a depth of feeling” (John Steane, liner notes).



Lucia di Lammermoor



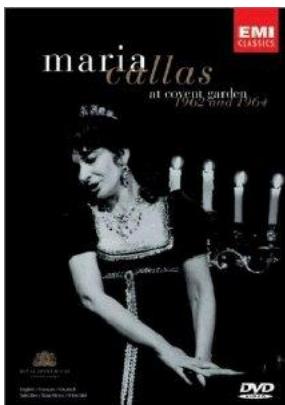
In this early recording, Callas’s “singing is touched by genius, but it is a genius which has freer access through the relatively firm and indeed often beautiful instrument that her voice could be at the time of this, the first of her great series of EMI opera recordings” ([Gramophone, October 1989](#)). This is a definitive recording of the opera and a definitive performance by Callas. The recording “is the performance that put *Lucia di Lammermoor* back on the operative map. . . . [and Callas provides] an object lesson in how to build a character out of notes and syllables” (Richard Osborne, liner notes). This recording is included in EMI Great Recordings of the Century.

Tosca

“It’s the Callas *Tosca* . . . reissued in EMI’s Great Recordings of the Century series . . . It has the incomparable Callas, fiery yet also touching and vulnerable where necessary, the lusty-lunged Giuseppe di Stefano shouting up a storm, and the best of all possible Scarpas in Tito Gobbi. . . . The legendary Victor de Sabata . . . certainly stands with the best conductors of this score” ([David Hurwitz, October 4, 2004, ClassicsToday.com](#)).



Maria Callas at Covent Garden



“Now for the very first time Maria Callas’ legendary live performances from the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, are available on DVD. These two memorable concerts from 1962 and 1964 celebrate her triumphant return to the Covent Garden stage. Repertoire from these performances include Verdi: Tu che le vanita (Don Carlo), Bizet: Habanera & Seguedille (Carmen) and Puccini: Tosca (Act II complete). Her vivid portrayals of the tragic Elisabeth de Valois, the tantalising Carmen, and her vulnerable Tosca (directed by Franco Zeffirelli) captured the hearts of the London audiences. This is Maria Callas as the world remembers her” ([Arkivmusic.com](http://www.arkivmusic.com)).

This month the Blake Collection features **Franco Corelli**.

“He was the greatest dramatic tenor that ever lived.”—Luciano Pavarotti

“He was the most impressive tenor I have heard live. There was this unbelievable amount of easiness . . . this sort of animal instinct which filled the theater and really got to you, this heroic sound. It was sensational.”—Placido Domingo

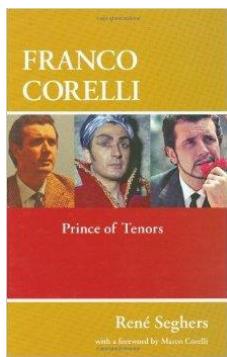
“A voice of heroic power, yet with great beauty of tone; darkly sensuous, mysteriously melancholic . . . but above all, a voice of thunder and lightning, fire and blood.”—Herbert von Karajan (referring to the Salzburg *Il Trovatore*).

“In the opera world, certain singers define their eras, particularly tenors . . . the 1960s belonged to the magnificent Franco Corelli.” Corelli “had a voice of truly sensual beauty, its ardent warmth like that of the Mediterranean sun. He looked as good as he sounded—his muscular physique and chiseled features made him the perfect romantic hero. [He] sang with a rapid, fine-grained vibrato, the natural pulsation like that of a violin or cello, typical of earlier 20th-century singers like Caruso. And it lent a flamelike urgency to his singing. . . . Mr. Corelli knew how to impart additional pathos to a phrase with a weep in the voice. But he was never a lachrymose singer. . . . Because he was essentially self-taught, Mr. Corelli was widely regarded as an instinctive singer. In fact he was an extremely deliberate technician [with] rock-solid technique [who] spent his life perfecting his instrument” ([Barrymore Laurence Scherer, “Franco Corelli, the Accidental Opera Star,” Wall Street Journal, November 4, 2003](#)).

Franco Corelli was an “the Italian tenor whose powerhouse voice, charismatic presence and movie-star good looks earned him the adoration of opera fans from the 1950’s until his retirement in 1976 He earned great respect from the fearsomely demanding [Maria] Callas, who in Mr. Corelli finally had someone with whom she could act. To the soprano Birgit Nilsson, he was about the only tenor who could match her power in Puccini’s *Turandot*. . . . Mr. Corelli became indispensable to the Met, singing 19 roles in 15 seasons for a total of 365 performances” ([“Franco Corelli, Italian Tenor of Power and Charisma, and Pillar of the Met, Dies at 82,” Anthony Tommasini, New York Times, October 30, 2003](#)).



Franco Corelli: Prince of Tenors



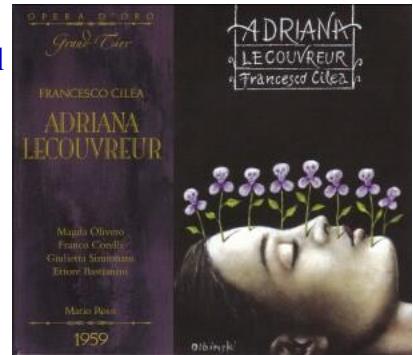
“There were, to be sure, other great tenors at the Met during his reign, but there was only one Prince—Franco Corelli, ‘Mr. Sold Out,’ possessed of matinee-idol good looks, an athlete’s physique and an unequaled heroic tenor voice as bright and as big as the sun, which was at the same time a breathtaking, lyrical instrument capable of a legendary high B-flat diminuendo, as Verdi demands but few deliver in ‘Celeste Aida.’ The double debut of Corelli and Leontyne Price at the Met in January 1961 in *Trovatore* led some critics to praise his stage presence and vocal power while questioning his musical finesse. His triumphant *Turandot* with Birgit Nilsson and Anna Moffo one month later silenced the critics for good and led to a total of 369 Met performances of nineteen different roles between 1961 and 1975” ([Todd B. Solis, OperaNews.com](#)). This is “a scrupulously researched, chronological

account of Corelli's life, which . . . sets exemplary standards of objectivity and comprehensiveness . . . [It] deserves a wide and appreciative audience" ([Richard Nicholson, ClassicalSource.com](#)).

The Blake Collection now has four recordings of live performances featuring Franco Corelli at the pinnacle of his career. They are, in chronological order of the performances:

Cilea: Adriana LeCouvreur

"This [1959] recording has . . . [the] white-hot excitement [of opera as it had never been experienced]. [Magda] Olivero's Adriana is a lesson in diction, vocal shading, nuance and full throttle emotional commitment, all at once. Her delivery of the famous arias is spectacular, touching, poignant as one would expect. . . . Supporting her is a cast that could not be bettered. Corelli, here at his youthful peak, is peerless for the spin, the dynamic shading and the prodigious upper range of his voice. He is fearlessly expressive" (Ira Siff, CD Liner Notes). This is "perhaps the most acclaimed performance of Cilea's opera ever given" ([Lynn Rene Bayley, Fanfare](#)).



Puccini: Tosca



This performance, with Leontyne Price in the title role and Corelli as her lover, Cavaradossi, was "recorded at the Metropolitan Opera during the matinee of April 2, 1962, [and] features the most impressive singing of any *Tosca* on disc. Both Leontyne Price and Franco Corelli had made their sensational Met debuts the previous season, and what we hear is big, exciting voices—the kind, I'm sorry to say, we really don't have any more—in their prime. Price lightens her tone when needed and unleashes waves of gorgeous, expressive sound, and Corelli was . . . a fearless tenor, with dark, baritonal low and middle tones and high notes of tempered steel (which he was not ashamed to hold on to). . . . This is a thrilling ride" ([Robert Levine, ClassicToday.com](#)). (For a sample of this performance, see Corelli sing the aria "E Lucevan le stelle" from *Tosca* at [YouTube](#).)

Mascagni: Cavalleria Rusticana

"This live performance from December 7, 1963, [opening night at La Scala] is one of those legendary recordings that has been making the circuit of opera lovers for decades, usually accompanied by such statements as, 'They don't sing them like that anymore,' and 'They were gods, back then, gods, I tell you!' None of this is true, but what is undeniable fact is the visceral power of communication on display in this *Cav*, a matter of theatrical expressivity employed by three of the best Italian opera singers of the day at the top of their careers. . . . In operas he knew and understood, [Corelli] was not just a tenor but a living presence, and one capable of finesse. The serenade here is about as ardent and splendorous as they get, just as it should be, but Corelli's attention



to phrasing . . . begins to show just how much he went beyond the stereotype. Then there's the perfect lightness of tone to the start of "Mamma! Mamma, quel vino e generoso," and even more so with a marvelous floating tone on "E poi, mamma, sentite," and the diminuendo on "s' io non tornassi." When volume is required, Corelli has it, along with a golden sound that never feels pushed; but what really makes this and many of his other finest performances work is that he creates credible human beings out of music. . . . So does Giulietta Simionato. She had been on the stage for more than three decades by the time of this performance, and her once bright mezzo had darkened and grown richer with the years. There's a regular beat to the voice in the chest, but she's frankly incandescent . . . this and much more point to a major interpretative artist giving the performance of a lifetime—and none of this, mind you, at the sacrifice of the written note" ([Barry Brenesal, *Fanfare*](#)).

Puccini: Turandot



This performance of *Turandot* given on opening night of 1964-65 season at La Scala was "one of those special evenings when all the stars in heaven and onstage align to create a performance of transcendent beauty and heart-stopping excitement. Fortunately, this *Turandot* was one magic night that was recorded. It has entered the annals of great historic performances, and no collection should be without it. Maestro Gianandrea Gavazzeni brings his innate theatricality to Puccini's score, painting wonderful broad strokes while highlighting minute orchestral details, encouraging spontaneity and expression but keeping the performance moving. A great deal of the overall success of the performance is owed to him. But for a *Turandot* to be a triumph, much

depends upon the singing; the casting here could hardly have been bettered at the time—or at any time. . . . Birgit Nilsson and Franco Corelli . . . are both having a particularly great night here. Nilsson sails through the role's considerable vocal demands with alarming ease, producing a series of high Bs and Cs that leave the listener staring in disbelief at the speakers. What's more, she offers Turandot's fire and ice—fierce pride, anger rooted in fear, vulnerability, sensuality and a desire for release from her emotional bondage—in just the right measure. . . . Corelli sings magnificently, and cleanly . . . Breath-defying diminuendos and spectacular high notes are abundant. One forgets how, before 'Nessun dorma' became a tired pop anthem, it was simply owned by this gentleman, who not only glorified himself with it but exalted Puccini as well" (Ira Siff, *Opera News*, September 2012, Vol. 77, Issue 3, p. 76-77). (Watch a video of Corelli's "Nessun dorma" on [YouTube](#).)



We would be remiss not to remind you about two other Franco Corelli recordings already part of the Blake Collection:

Giordano's Andrea Chenier in a live 1960 recording with Renata Tebaldi, Ettore Bastianini, and the Vienna State Opera Orchestra and Chorus under the baton of Lovro von Matacic.

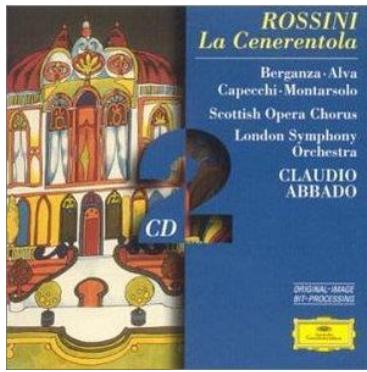
The 1962 Salzburg Festival performance of Verdi's **Il Trovatore**, with Leontyne Price, Giulietta Simionato, and Ettore Bastianini, Herbert von Karajan conducting.

For February, the Blake Collection features Bel Canto Opera.

"In its narrowest sense bel canto opera refers to the early decades of 19th-century Italian opera, when Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti dominated the field. But the overall concept of bel canto started much earlier, with a consensus among opera enthusiasts that there was nothing more ravishing than a beautiful voice singing a beautiful melodic line beautifully, especially a melodic line driven by a sensitive musical setting of a poetic and singable text. The technique of singing that produced the desired results valued smooth production, or legato, throughout the entire vocal range. Ideally, you did not want to hear singers shifting gears as their voices moved from low to middle to high registers. Also prized was the ability to execute effortlessly all manner of embellishments—rapid-fire runs, trills and such—the better to decorate vocal lines. So the use of a lighter yet penetrating sound in the upper register was crucial to the style. . . . The melodic line is everything in . . . bel canto" (Anthony Tommasini, "[Bel Canto: Audiences Love It, but What Is It?](#)" *New York Times*, November 28, 2008).



Rossini: *La Cenerentola*



La Cenerentola is "a semi-comic homily on the value of true love and the speciousness of rank, inspired by Charles Perrault's *Cinderella*. Perhaps the chief reason for its comparative lack of popularity is the florid writing for the title role, a part that demands the combination of a contralto's range with a coloratura's agility. . . [It is] one of the finest female roles in Italian opera" (*Rough Guide to Classical Music*, London: Rough Guides, 2001, p. 416). This Deutsche Grammophon reissue is from 1971 and features mezzo soprano Teresa Berganza in the title role and Claudio Abbado conducting the London Symphony Orchestra and the Scottish Opera Chorus. This recording "boasts the incandescent singing of Teresa Berganza, who [gives] her character an astonishing vivacity and pathos" (*Rough Guide*, p. 416).

Bellini: *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*

Felice Romani's libretto for Bellini's retelling of Romeo and Juliet is based on a version of the story by Luigi Scevola, not Shakespeare's. This is one of the last operas written with a major "trouser role"—a male lead to be sung by a woman. The role of Romeo "provided prima donnas of the 1830s with a flamboyant and heroic role unmatched by any other Romantic Italian opera" (Simon Maguire, CD liner notes). This live 2008 recording featuring the Vienna Symphony and Vienna Singakademie "boasts three of the most admired singers of the moment, all of them in fine form. The performance is dominated by Elina Garanca's Romeo; she easily suggests both the swaggering duellist and the lovelorn youth. There are times when her rich, velvety tones sound almost like a soprano, and in the duets with Anna Netrebko's Juliet, the two voices seem naturally to complement each other. *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* was one of the last important operas to employ a mezzo as the masculine lead. The tenor who sings Tebaldo



needs to be of equal strength to balance the drama, and Joseph Calleja rises to the challenge. . . . Robert Gleadow makes a strong impression as Friar Laurence, and Tiziano Bracci is impressive as Capellio. Fabio Luisi leads the Vienna forces in a performance which, though obviously sympathetic to the voices, manages to accentuate the drama. It's certainly a star vehicle but also a satisfying account of Bellini's near-masterpiece" (Patrick O'Connor, "Star Singers and Star-Crossed Lovers—A Recipe for Benchmark Bel Canto Brilliance," *Gramophone*, March 2009).

Donizetti: *Lucrezia Borgia*



On April 20, 1965, Marilyn Horne was scheduled to sing the title role in Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* at Carnegie Hall, but the singer was unable to go on. Those in charge of the production were scrambling for a replacement, when someone "suggested a Spanish soprano who he had recently heard in *Figaro* at Lausanne. Her name was Montserrat Caballe. . . . It was a once in a lifetime opportunity and [her performance was a] raging success. . . . Suffice to say Caballe went from an unknown to the front page, as well as the arts pages, of the next day's New York papers. . . . To virtually the entire audience the opera was unknown, and so was the majestic-looking, 33-year-old Spanish soprano singing the title role. But after her intoxicatingly beautiful singing of the opening aria, it was clear that a true, full-fledged prima donna had arrived. . . . RCA came along

with a contract to record *Lucrezia Borgia* the following year during their annual recording sessions in Rome. The conductor was to be Jonel Perlea the same as at the New York concert performance. Alongside Caballe they cast the Canarian tenor Alfredo Krauss, a *tenore di grazia* of recognised vocal elegance, particularly in the bel canto repertoire. The cast also comprised the young American mezzo Shirley Verrett and regulars from the Met and Rome opera houses. The recording features as one of esteemed *Opera Magazine*'s Thirty all-time great recordings" (Robert J Farr, MusicWeb International).

Donizetti: *Maria Stuarda*

This "musically splendid and intensely dramatic performance of *Maria Stuarda*. . . . stars the great American mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato in the title role. . . . Ms. DiDonato's performance will be pointed to as a model of singing in which all components of the art form—technique, sound, color, nuance, diction—come together in service to expression and eloquence. . . . This production has the right conductor in the pit: Maurizio Benini, who has long brought a sure hand and insight to bel canto works. He draws a supple and glowing performance from the orchestra and the chorus. . . . The cast is excellent. In a notable Met debut, Elza van den Heever, a 33-year-old South African soprano whose career is rising internationally, is a vocally burnished and emotionally tempestuous Elizabeth (Elisabetta). Her sound, with its earthy tinge and quick vibrato, is not conventionally beautiful. But her voice has penetrating depth and character. She turns flights of coloratura passagework into bursts of jealousy and defiance as Elizabeth contends with the threat that Mary, a blood relative, poses to her reign in England. . . . Matthew Polenzani, who is becoming the Met's go-to tenor in bel canto repertory. . . . brings melting sound and appealing vulnerability to



the role of the hapless Robert Dudley (Roberto), the Earl of Leicester. . . . Ms. DiDonato is simply magnificent, singing with plush richness and aching beauty. At a few moments, from the collective sounds of the subdued chorus and orchestra, a pianissimo high note, almost inaudible, emerged from Ms. DiDonato's voice, slowly blooming in sound and throbbing richness" ([Anthony Tommasini, "2 Queens, 3 Lovers and One Death Warrant," New York Times, January 1, 2013](#)). *Gramophone* gave this live Metropolitan Opera DVD recording its 2014 Editor's Choice Award. (*Maria Stuarda* is based on a play by Schiller. If you want to go deeper into the background of the opera, have a look at [Ben Brantley's New York Times review of the play](#) with performances by the wonderful Janet McTeer and Harriet Walter as Mary and Elizabeth, respectively.)



Finally, the Blake collection would like to pay tribute to one of the world's great bel canto artists, **Mariella Devia**. She rarely performs outside Europe and her few recordings are not readily available. But in June 2014, she performed at Carnegie Hall: "Nearly fifteen years after her last appearance at Carnegie Hall—also with the Opera Orchestra of New York . . . Mariella Devia made a thrilling, triumphant return in [Donizetti's] richly dramatic *Roberto Devereux* . . . it was one of those rare nights in the theater that will be remembered fondly for a lifetime" ([David Laviska, MusicalCriticism.com](#)). And if you want to sample her talent, we recommend these YouTube videos: "[Come Bello](#)" from *Lucrezia Borgia* and "[Casta Diva](#)" from Bellini's *Norma*.



And perhaps now is a good time for you to revisit the other bel canto operas already in the Blake Collection:

Bellini:

[I Puritani](#) and [Norma](#) (featuring Maria Callas)
[La Sonnambula](#) and [Norma](#) (featuring Cecilia Bartoli)

Donizetti:

[Anna Bolena](#) and [Lucia di Lammermoor](#) (featuring Maria Callas)
[Lucia di Lammermoor](#) (with Joan Sutherland and Luciano Pavarotti)
[L'elisir d'Amore](#) (with Rolando Villazon and Ann Natrebko)

Rossini:

[Il Barbiere di Siviglia](#) (with Leo Nucci and Cecilia Bartoli)
[Il viaggio a Reims](#) (Claudio Abbado conducting)
[William Tell](#) (Antonio Pappano conducting)

For March the Blake Collection spotlights two great musicians, **Martha Argerich** and **Leonard Bernstein**.

MARTHA ARGERICH

“Argerich, a sixty-year-old native of Argentina, reigns supreme over the feudalistic world of virtuoso pianists. Rivals become mere fans around her, lingering at the door of her dressing room and then skulking away. Her concerts conjure up scenes from another place and time: grown men running down the aisles clutching bouquets, world-renowned musicians pummelling the railings of the upper boxes, jaded critics breaking into foolish smiles. Argerich brings to bear qualities that are seldom contained in one person: she is a pianist of brainteasing technical agility; she is a charismatic woman with an enigmatic reputation; she is an unaffected interpreter whose native language is music. This last may be the quality that sets her apart. A lot of pianists play huge double octaves; a lot of pianists photograph well. But few have the unerring naturalness of phrasing that allows them to embody the music rather than interpret it” (Madame X: Dinner with the Dark Lady of the Piano, New Yorker, by Alex Ross, November 12, 2001).

Martha Argerich was just 24 when she won the 7th International Chopin Piano Competition, and years later she served on the board of judges. (The board comprises renowned musicians from around the globe such as Nadia Boulanger, the legendary teacher of Aaron Copland and many others.) Winners of the competition have included Maurizio Pollini and Krystian Zimerman.

Evening Talks



“Martha Argerich has long been hailed as one of the greatest and most uniquely imaginative pianists. She is most admired for the pure joy of her music-making and her individual approach to each work, each situation and each audience. A wild child and a rebel at heart, this legendary Argentinean musician has often been surrounded by an aura of mystery during her long career. The ‘evening talks,’ a film by Georges Gachot, a French film maker specialised in classical music documentaries, lifts a corner of the veil: Martha Argerich shares with us her memories, confides in us her doubts, and transmits to us her incredible appetite for music-making. Martha Argerich has before admitted to feeling ‘lonely’ on stage during solo performances and now focuses on concertos and duo work. The film also shows her performing with some of her closest musical friends such as pianists Nelson Freire and Friedrich Gulda and in various chamber music settings. Images of Argentina, where she was

born in 1941, footage of rehearsals in the concert hall or at home, excerpts of recent concerts and archival material complete this unique film portrait of one of the most consummate artists of our time. This outstanding documentation received several awards in Europe and the US and this DVD features a highly informative booklet including international press articles in original languages and more than half an hour of the original footage for the film in an extras package. An intimate glimpse into the life of a wonderful woman and musician!” (Arkivmusic).

Martha Argerich: The Legendary 1965 Recording

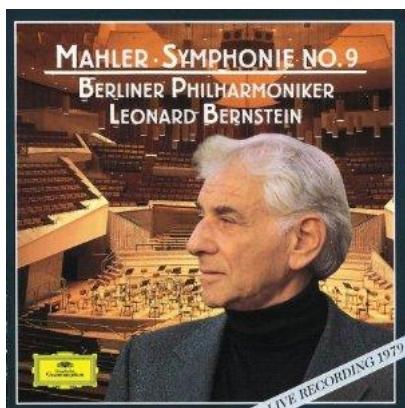
“When Martha Argerich walked into the studio it was her dark, smouldering looks which first struck me. . . . At first, her hands moved casually over the keyboard as she tested the piano. Then she launched into Chopin’s Polonaise Op. 53. I sat up in my chair . . . the balance engineer said “Wow!” If this was a sample of her playing, Argerich was quite the most formidable player we had ever come across. The big chords sounded huge, the runs between them clean; in the trio, a great showpiece, the difficult left-hand octave runs were even and the crescendo controlled. I peeped into the studio to make sure that this wash of sound was really originating from the slip of a girl seated at the piano. It was quite unbelievable. . . . Nothing would have been beyond this woman” (Suvi Raj Grubb, liner notes to CD). “This CD truly deserves its legendary status. It was recorded way back in 1965 at the start of what has turned out to be one of the most exciting and frustrating careers in history; exciting because Argerich is arguably the greatest pianist alive, and frustrating because she refuses to give solo recitals, preferring the support of friends and colleagues in chamber or orchestral concerts. That makes her rare solo outings all the more precious. This disc exactly duplicates her debut recital for DG, which release and subsequent exclusive contract forestalled EMI until now. Rumor had it that the EMI was better, and on the whole it is, though both are pretty exceptional by any standards. The differences are relatively minor, but include an even more brilliant response to the Polonaise in A flat, tighter rhythm in the Scherzo No. 3, and a few incidental touches in the Sonata No. 3 and elsewhere. Chopin lovers and fans of this artist certainly need no further recommendation” ([David Hurwitz, ClassicsToday](#)).



LEONARD BERNSTEIN

Many American television viewers in the ‘60s were introduced to classical music by Leonard Bernstein through his “Young People’s Concerts,” where he conducted the New York Philharmonic. The two Bernstein recordings we offer this month are of Bernstein with other orchestras.

Mahler: Symphonie No. 9



“The most amazing Bernstein Mahler performance, to my ears, is his live recording of the Ninth with the Berlin Philharmonic” ([Alex Ross in response to “Questions for Alex Ross,” New Yorker, December 4, 2008](#)). Leonard Bernstein “almost single-handedly resurrected the symphonies of Mahler. Why? One reason was a visionary desire to restore a neglected repertory. The other reason is equally clear. This was music written by a conductor for conductors, and its mammoth complications were soluble only by a charismatic leader operating at center stage” ([Bernard Holland, “A Department Store of Music” \(a review of Humphrey Burton's biography of Bernstein\), New York Times, May 22, 1994](#)). Bernstein “had never been invited to conduct the Berlin Philharmonic before that now historic concert of 4 October 1979, which was fortunately preserved” in this recording. And it turned out to be the only time Bernstein was to conduct the Berlin

Philharmonic. “The program consisted of Mahler’s Ninth, a symphony that was especially close to Bernstein’s heart. He regarded the work as the composer’s vision of ‘his own imminent death’ as well as a kind of farewell

to the era of tonal music.” The orchestra and conductor were at first wary of each other, but this tentativeness “soon gave way to a profound mutual understanding, and the performance, as documented here, became a testimony to the orchestra’s playing under a conductor whose art it was to experience only once and never again. The musicians and audience alike were spellbound, and Leonard Bernstein remarked: ‘the orchestra was wonderful . . . never have I heard such exquisite soft playing, and this in one of my favorite symphonies’” (from Peter Gradenwitz’s liner notes for the CD).

Shostakovich: Symphony No. 7 “Leningrad”

“No musical work embodied the siege of Leningrad—indeed, no piece of music embodies any war—like Dmitri Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony. Its Leningrad premiere, on Aug. 9, 1942, was performed by starving musicians and broadcast over loudspeakers at the front to defy the Nazis and hearten Russian troops. Abroad, it provided ‘a moral redemption for Stalin and the Soviet regime,’ . . . especially for the Western allies, who ‘wanted badly to believe in the Russians, in their survival, and in their decency.’ Shostakovich’s private irony was that his music was not merely a cry against the Nazis but also against Stalinism. [It was] a ‘requiem for a noble city beset by the twin monsters of the century’” (Michael O’Donnell, “The Strains of War,” (a review of Brian Moynahan’s *Leningrad: Siege and Symphony*), *Wall Street Journal*, November 7, 2014).



As with his one-off conducting of the Berlin in the Mahler 9, this performance Shostakovich’s “Leningrad” Symphony with Bernstein at the helm of the Chicago Symphony is the only time the conductor and orchestra worked together. This live recording “is magnificent. Everything goes right from start to finish. Bernstein holds the first movement together magnificently. The opening paragraph, with two wonderful tunes . . . is very well handled. . . . Then comes the middle section. Here, Bernstein slowly screws up the tension, keeping a rock-steady tempo. By the time we reach the climax all hell is about to break loose and take over. But the ‘recapitulation’ bursts in and the music calms down. Beautifully done here, the gradations of volume are very well handled. The final page, with its ghostly . . . reminiscence of the middle section is quite hair-raising in its simplicity. The delicate, dance-like, second movement is light and airy, feeling like ballet music at times. The unruly elements are kept in check and this is as fine an exposition of this movement as one could hope for. The slow movement seems more beautiful and less stressful than I’ve ever heard it before. Towards the end, Bernstein injects the music with a large dose of tragedy and the movement ends in desperation, which is how the quiet opening of the finale begins. Before long, however, Bernstein has pulled out all the stops and we’re plunged back into the fighting, tension and strain of the first movement. The volume grows, the orchestration fills out and the coda, which so often can sound bombastic, is built, not as a victory, but certainly not as a tragedy, rather as real defiance in the face of adversity—whether it be Stalin’s subjugation of the Russian people or the Nazi war-machine. This is a very great performance in every way: the playing, the direction and the intelligence which Bernstein brings to his interpretation. This issue won a Grammy in 1991 and I am not surprised. The engineers have excelled in creating a wide dynamic range which encompasses the very quietest of whispers and the largest orchestral sound thrown at them—and there are some very big sounds from the full orchestra. . . . It’s doubtful you’ll ever hear them played with such passion and searing, white hot, insight and intensity ever again. Not so much a must-have as a can’t-live-without” ([Bob Briggs, MusicWeb International](#)).



Keep in mind these recordings already in the Blake Collection as well:

Martha Argerich:

[Prokofiev & Ravel: Piano Concertos](#) (Claudio Abbado conducting the Berlin Philharmonic)

[Mozart: Piano Concertos no. 25 and 20](#) (Claudio Abbado again, this time with the Lucerne Festival Orchestra)

Leonard Bernstein:

[Beethoven: Fidelio](#) (Conducting the Vienna Philharmonic and Vienna State Opera Chorus)

[Shostakovich: Symphony No. 5](#) (Conducting the New York Philharmonic)

[Sibelius: Symphonies 1, 2, 5 & 7](#) on DVD (Conducting the Vienna Philharmonic)

Other Winners of the International Chopin Competition:

Maurizio Pollini:

[Beethoven: The Late Piano Sonatas](#)

[Schubert: The Late Piano Sonatas](#)

[Chopin: Piano Sonatas Nos. 2 & 3](#)

Kristian Zimerman:

[Chopin: Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 2](#)

[Krystian Zimerman—The Liszt Recordings](#)

[Krystian Zimerman Plays Chopin & Schubert](#) on DVD

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Bellini	Opera	<i>La Sonnambula</i>	Bartoli, Florez, D'archangelo; De Marchi; Orch. La Scintilla	CDs	23
Bellini	Opera	<i>Norma</i>	Bartoli, Jo, Osborn, Pertusi; Antonini; Orch. La Scintilla	CDs	1
Bellini	Opera	<i>Norma</i>	Callas, del Monaco, Signani, Modesti; Serafin; Italian Radio Orch & Chorus	CDs	53
Berlioz	Symphony	<i>Symphonie fantastique</i> , etc.	Munch; Boston Symphony	CD	37
Berlioz	Symphony	<i>Symphonie Fantastique & Harold en Italie</i>	Eschenbach; Orch. de Paris	DVD	37
Bizet	Opera	<i>Carmen</i>	Antonacci, Richards, Cavallier, Gillet; Gardiner; Orch. Rev. & Monteverdi	DVD	38
Bizet	Opera	<i>Carmen</i>	Gheorghiu, Alagna, Hampson, Mula; Plasson; Toulouse	CDs	54
Brahms	Concerto	Piano Concertos & Fantasies	Gilels; Berlin Phil	CD	12
Brahms	Concerto	Violin Concerto and Double Concerto	Fischer, Muller-Schott; Netherlands Phil.	CD	51
Brahms & Tchaikovsky	Concerto	Violin Concertos	Heifetz; Reiner; Chicago Symphony	CD	18
Brahms	Symphony	Complete Symphonies	Karajan; Berlin Phil	CDs	12
Brahms	Symphony	Symphony No. 4	Kleiber; Vienna Phil	CD	12-13
Brahms	Symphony	Complete Symphonies	Thielemann; Staatskapelle Dresden	DVD	29
Brahms	Informational	<i>Discovering Brahms</i>	Thielemann	DVD	29
Britten	Choral	<i>War Requiem</i>	Vishnevskaya, Pears, Fischer-Dieskau; Britten; London Symphony	CD	7
Bruckner	Symphony	Symphonies 4 & 7	Thielemann; Munich Phil	DVD	13
Bruckner	Symphony	Symphony No. 5	Welser-Most; Cleveland Orchestra	DVD	13
Bruckner	Symphony	Symphony No. 6	Barenboim; Berlin Staatskapelle	DVD	29
Bruckner	Symphony	Symphony No. 8	Thielemann; Staatskapell Dresden	CDs	30
Bruckner	Symphony	Symphonie No. 8	Karajan; Vienna Phil	CDs	51
Bruckner	Symphony	Symphony No. 9	Welser-Most; Cleveland Orchestra	DVD	13
Bruckner	Symphony	Symphony 9	Skrowaczewski; Minnesota Orch.	CD	52
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Chopin	Concerto	Piano Concertos 1 & 2	Zimerman; Polish Festival Orch.	CD	19
Chopin	Piano	Piano Sonatas 2 & 3	Pollini	CD	19
Chopin, Liszt, etc.	Piano	Sonatas & Etudes	Wang	CD	52
Chopin, Schubert	Piano	<i>Kristian Zimerman Plays Chopin & Schubert</i> Zimerman		DVD	52
Chopin	Piano	<i>Martha Argerich: The Legendary 1965 Recital</i> Argerich		CD	73
Cilea	Opera	<i>Adriana Lecouvreur</i>	Olivero, Corelli, Simionato; Rossi; San Carlo (Naples)	CDs	67
Donizetti	Opera	<i>Anna Bolena</i>	Callas, Simionato, Raimondi, Rossi Lemeni; Gavazzeni; La Scala	CDs	54
Donizetti	Opera	<i>L'Elisir d'Amore</i>	Villazon, Netrebko, Nucci, D'Arcangelo; Eschwe; Vienna State Opera	DVD	23
Donizetti	Opera	<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>	Sutherland, Pavarotti, Milnes, Ghiaurov; Bonynge; Royal Opera	CDs	23
Donizetti	Opera	<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>	Callas, di Stefano, Gobbi, Natali; Serafin; Maggio Musicale Fiorentino	CDs	64
Donizetti	Opera	<i>Lucrezia Borgia</i>		CDs	70
Donizetti	Opera	<i>Maria Stuarda</i>		DVD	70-71
Dvorak & Tchaikovsky	Concerto	Cello Concerto/Rococo Variations	Rostropovich; Karajan; Berlin Phil.	CD	19
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Giordano	Opera	<i>Andrea Chenier</i>	Tebaldi, Corelli, Bastianini; Matacic; Vienna State Opera	CDs	26
Gounod	Opera	<i>Faust</i>	Boue, St. Arnaud, Bannermann, Nore, Bourdin, Rico, Frank; Beecham; Royal Phil	CDs	38
Grieg	Concerto	"Ballad for Edvard Grieg": Piano Concerto	Andsnes; Jansons; Berlin Phil.	CD	20
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Janacek	Opera	<i>Kat'a Kabanova</i>	Benackova, Straka, Randova, Peckova; Mackerras; Czech Phil.	CDs	36
Korngold	Opera	<i>Die tote Stadt</i>	Denoke, Kerl, Skovhus; Runnicles; Vienna Phil.	CDs	40
Korngold	Symphony	<i>Symphony & Much Ado</i> Suite	Previn; London Symphony	CD	40
Korngold	Book	<i>Erich Wolfgang Korngold</i>	Duchen	Book	41
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Mahler	Symphony	<i>Das Lied von der Erde</i>	Wunderlich, Ludwig; Klemperer; Philharmonia	CD	31
Mahler	Symphony	Symphony 1 (w/Prokofiev Piano Concerto)	Wang; Abbado; Lucerne Festival Orch.	DVD	16-17
Mahler	Symphony	Symphony 2	Abbado; Lucerne Festival Orch.	DVD	16-17
Mahler	Symphony	Symphony 3	Abbado; Lucerne Festival Orch.	DVD	16-17
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Mahler	Symphony	Symphony 5	Abbado; Lucerne Festival Orch.	DVD	16-17
Mahler	Symphony	Symphony 6	Abbado; Lucerne Festival Orch.	DVD	16-17
Mahler	Symphony	Symphony 7	Abbado; Lucerne Festival Orch.	DVD	16-17
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Mahler	Book	<i>Why Mahler?</i>	Lebrecht	Book	1
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Massenet	Opera	<i>Werther</i>	Villazon, Vernhes, Koch, Nakamura, Iversen, Patterson, Jeffery, Zhou, Devin; Pappano; Royal Opera	CDs	39
Mozart	Concerto	Piano Concertos 14, 20, 25	Buchbinder; Vienna Phil	DVD	5
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Mozart	Opera	<i>Cosi fan tutti</i>	Persson, Villazon, Erdmann, Brower, Corbelli, Plachetka; Nezet-Seguin; Chamber Orch. Euro.	CDs	3
Mozart	Opera	<i>Cosi fan tutte</i>	Shimell, Avemo, Gardina, Wolf, Fritsch, Gatell; Hencke (Director); Cambreling; Teatro Real de Madrid	DVD	11
Mozart	Opera	<i>Die Zauberflöte</i>	Wunderlich, Peters, Lear, Otto, Fischer-Dieskau, Crass, Hotter; Bohm; Berlin Phil.	CDs	28
Mozart	Opera	<i>Don Giovanni</i>	DiDonato, Villazon, D'Arcangelo, Pisaroni, Damrau, Erdmann; Nezet-Seguin; Mahler Chamb Orch.	CDs	3
Mozart	Opera	<i>Don Giovanni</i>	Vargas, DiDonato, Keenlyside, Ketelsen, Halfvarson, Poplavskaya, Persson, Gleadow; Mackerras; Royal Opera	DVD	28
Mozart	Opera	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	Schrott, Persson, Finley, Roschmann, Shaham, Veira, Araya, Langridge; Pappano; Royal Opera	DVDs	5
Mozart	Opera	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	della Casa, Danco, Gueden, Poell, Siepi, Corena; Kleiber; Vienna Phil	CDs	27
Mozart	Symphony	Symphonies 35-41	Bohm; Vienna Phil	CDs	4
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Prokofiev & Rachmaninov	Concerto	Piano concerto 3/Piano concerto 3	Pletnev; Rostropovich; Russian Natl.	CD	35
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Rossini	Opera	<i>Il Barbiere di Siviglia</i>	Nucci, Bartoli, Matteuzzi, Fissore, Burchuladze, Pertussi; Patane; Bologna	CDs	22
Rossini	Opera	<i>Il Viaggio a Reims</i>	Ricciarelli, Cuberli, Gasdia, Terrani, Araiza, Gimenez, Nucci, Raimondi, Ramey, Dara; Abbado; Chamber Orch. Europe	CDs	55
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Verdi	Choral	<i>Requiem</i>	Price, Cossotto, Pavarotti, Ghiaurov; Karajan; La Scala	DVD	62
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