

The Blake Collection

In Memory of Nancy M. Blake



A Desert Island Twenty Selected by Mr. Blake from the Collection's 195 CDs and DVDs

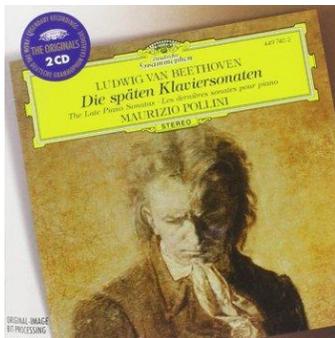
“The ultimate significance of an art work is determined not only by what its creator intended, or by that of which he was conscious when he produced it, but also by the meanings and the values discovered in it by many individuals and generations.”

--Olin Downes (*New York Times* music critic, 1924-1955)



BEETHOVEN

The Late Piano Sonatas

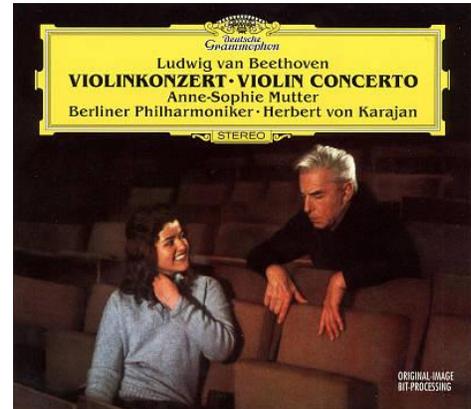


“In the final years of his career, Beethoven wrote five piano sonatas of profound and monumental brilliance, including the famous *Hammerklavier*, which Richard Osborne in the CD liner notes describes as “less the ‘Mount Everest’ of sonatas, more the Mount Etna, the concluding fugue an act of Titanic 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

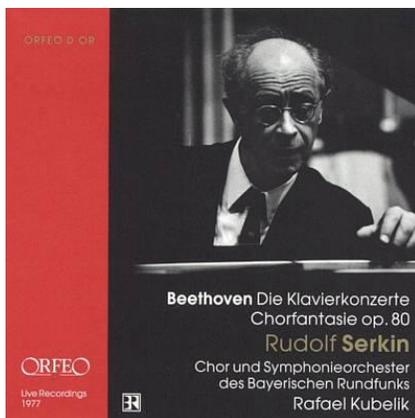
recordings of the late sonatas, which won the 1977 Gramophone critics' award for instrumental music, contain playing of the highest mastery” (Penguin Guide).

Violin Concerto

“By and large, Karajan’s studio recordings with concerto soloists were not among his most important achievements on disc. . . . [T]he first female German violinist of international standing, Anne-Sophie Mutter . . . became [Karajan’s] devoted collaborator, their recordings of major violin concertos being made over 11 years [this was their second]. . . . 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).



Die Klavierkonzerte/Chorfantasie op. 80

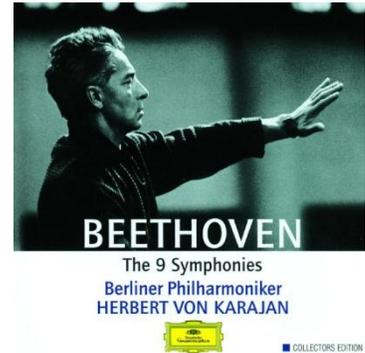


“Munich’s music lovers still talk about these concerts. Although Rudolf Serkin regularly performed in the city following his return to Germany in 1957, concertgoers had never previously had an opportunity to hear the great pianist performing over such an intensive period as they did during the late autumn of 1977. Together with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Rafael Kubelik, he played all five Beethoven piano concertos, together with the rarely heard Choral Fantasy op. 80, at three concerts in the Herkulesaal of the Munich Residenz, an acoustically and

atmospherically ideal space for a meeting of musical minds whose like we shall probably never see again” (Gottfried Kraus, CD liner notes). “For at least a half century Beethoven’s piano concertos played a central role in Rudolf Serkin’s repertoire. . . . Yet out of all the Serkin Beethoven concerto cycles on disc, the present one . . . offers the most consistent artistic and sonic satisfaction” (Jed Distler, “Historical Gems: Beethoven with Serkin and Kubelik,” *Classics Today*, July 25, 2014).

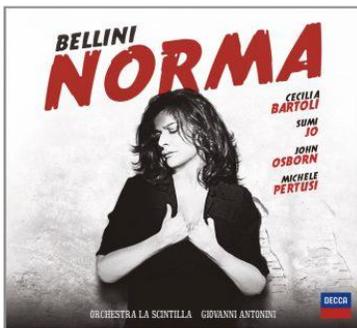
Symphonies

“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 an 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.” ([Arkivmusic](#)).



BELLINI

Norma



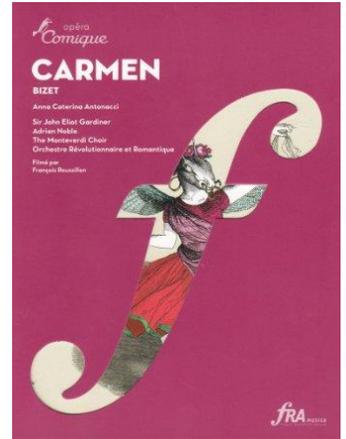
Norma “is a role with emotions ranging from haughty and demanding, to desperately passionate, to vengeful and defiant. And the singer must convey all of this while confronting some of the most vocally challenging music ever composed. And if that weren’t intimidating enough for any singer, *Norma* and 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](#)). If you’re already a fan of this opera, you’ve no doubt heard

a recording spotlighting the great soprano Maria Callas, 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. This is truly a history-making recording.

BIZET

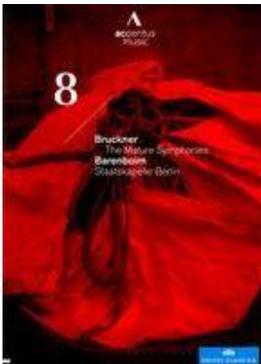
Carmen

Faust was displaced as the most beloved French opera by Georges Bizet's *Carmen*. This DVD set is a 2010 recording of live performances by soprano Anna Caterina Antonacci with the Orchestre Revolutionnaire 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).



BRUCKNER

The Mature Symphonies: Symphony No. 8



"To reveal the rests as vibrant silences, rather than interruptions or gaps—this was the artistry that Barenboim and the Staatskapelle so skillfully demonstrated. In this way, everything about Bruckner became understandable, yet still so captivated the listeners that some of them—especially in the unequalled Eighth Symphony—were moved to tears" (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*). "The work, the conductor and the orchestra are all shown in the best light. It is this kind of experience that has you sitting afterwards, for a long time, wondering at the greatness of what you have just heard" (Michael Tanner, *BBC Music Magazine*, April 2015).

DONIZETTI

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.



MAHLER

Das Lied von der Erde

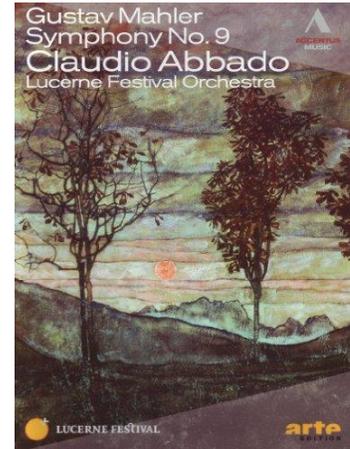


This "valedictory song cycle . . . is one of Mahler's most personal works and is perhaps his most beautiful, combining symphonic scale and structure with the narrative clarity of a song cycle. The six songs are settings of translated Chinese poems conveying the relationships between death and nature, 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).

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" (Norman Lebrecht in *Why Mahler?*, NY: Anchor Books, 2011, p. 168). This phenomenal DVD is a 2010 recording of the Lucerne Festival Orchestra under the baton of the legendary Claudio Abbado. (In 2003, Abbado founded the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, and the ensemble has recorded eight of Mahler's symphonies.)



MOZART

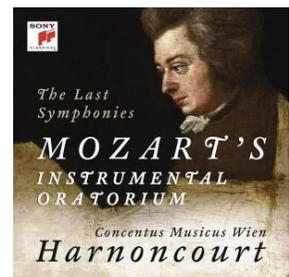
Piano Concertos no. 25 and 20



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 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]" (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. . . . [Harnoncourt'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](#)).

Le nozze di Figaro (The Marriage of 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](#)). "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](#)).

Don Giovanni

Yannick Nezet-Seguin 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](#)). 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.



PUCCINI

Tosca

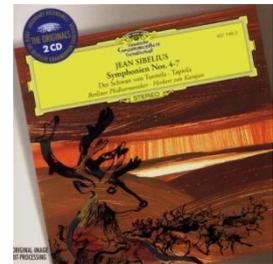


“It’s the Callas Tosca . . . reissued in EMI’s Great Recordings of the Century series It has the incomparable Callas, fiery yet also touching and vulnerable where necessary, the lusty-lunged Giuseppe di Stefano shouting up a storm, and the best of all possible Scarpias in Tito Gobbi. . . . The legendary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

SIBELIUS

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*.



STRAUSS

Der Rosenkavalier



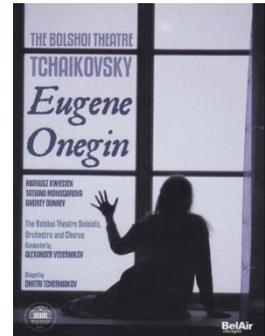
“As to the performance, I have said many times that this would be my first choice as a ‘desert island’ opera set, and I feel that more than ever with all the principals at their very finest—Schwarzkopf and Ludwig a supreme partnership. . . . this intensely beautiful, polished yet passionate performance still brings more truth than any rival, one of the supreme achievements of both Karajan and Legge” (Edward Greenfield (reviewing original CD upon release, *Gramophone*, March 1985). *BBC Music Magazine* described this as, “a recording of Strauss’s operatic masterpiece that, today, remains unbettered.” ([January 2012](#)). Another of EMI’s Great Recordings of the Century.

TCHAIKOVSKY

Eugene Onegin

“This is a unique and compelling rendering of Tchaikovsky’s operatic masterpiece. It features a relatively new production (from 2006) in which the Bolshoi replaced its historic version which ran for 60 years! Imagine the courage it took for director Dmitri Tcherniakov to completely rethink the grandeur and majesty of the famous old production and go in an utterly different direction. That it succeeds in gripping the viewer is quite a tribute. . . .

Tcherniakov has turned *Onegin* into an intimate and completely human drama, eliminating the spectacle element and concentrating on the relationships of the characters. . . . These characters interact with each other as well as do actors in a great stage play; this is operatic acting at its highest level. . . . This *Eugene Onegin* is unlike any other you are likely to see—stripped of excess, splash, and ‘Russian’ atmosphere, it is an intimate and deeply moving human story. . . . You will not put it out of your memory” ([Henry Fogel, Fanfare](#)).



VERDI

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. . . . The stand-out star among the soloists . . . 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. . . . 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.”

Messa da Requiem

This 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, Elina Garanca and Rene Pape – stamp their authority on this terrific performance” ([MDT](#)).

