

A golden age

With such an illustrious trio of anniversary patron saints – Giuseppe Verdi, Richard Wagner and Benjamin Britten (200, 200 and 100 respectively) – 2013 could hardly have failed to be a musically rich year. And so it certainly proved, with a mix of releases that saw rarities from the Baroque, in performances of real class, rub shoulders with music from right at the core of the repertoire in readings that re-energised a piece of music created 100, 200 or 300 years ago.

We've gathered together in this digital magazine the best of the best – 13 issues worth of *Gramophone* Choices, supplemented by the recordings that won *Gramophone* Classical Music Awards this year. Add them all together and they make a pretty heady mix that reveals that we're probably living through a musical golden age – never before has so much music, from such a variety of genres, periods and origins, been available quite so freely. However you consume your music – whether at home from a high-end hi-fi with no distractions, or listening on a pair of headphones as you travel to work – there's almost certainly something here for you.

This year's Recording of the Year (see page 38), is a disc that brings together three Hungarian violin concertos that – by taking the violin concerto as a starting point – show how much music can evolve, change and absorb in a little less than 100 years. From Bartók to Eötvös via Ligeti is an intoxicating journey and violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja and composer-conductor Peter Eötvös prove inspiring companions. Rarely has a disc been awarded the top prize with unanimity of critical certainty as this was.

Looking through the monthly choices, it's good to see Linn Records, whose parent company celebrates its 40th birthday this year, showing that a philosophy built on first-class sound quality by no means excludes first-class performances and the discs of Bach's *St John Passion* (March) and Robin Ticciati's Berlioz (June) offer colossal musical rewards.

It's perhaps not surprising that with those three musical patron saints looking down (and perhaps, in one case, looking up) on all the musical goings on, that the human voice should feature quite so prominently – but then there's nothing quite so distinctive as the colour and timbre as the sung voice, and I'm sure Verdi, Wagner and Britten would have nodded appreciatively at some of our choices. And then there are the Great Masterpieces of Classical Music crowned perhaps by the Beethoven and Brahms symphonies and supported by the Beethoven string quartets. However many times you hear them, they still have something new to say, some new message to deliver.

So, with Christmas bearing down on us with ever increasing speed, why not let us guide you to a present or two from the music-making of the past 12 months. And who cares if that present makes it no further than your own CD player, computer, smartphone or iPad.

James Jolly, December 2013

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GRAMOPHONE is published by Mark Allen Group, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London, SE24 0PB, United Kingdom



Patricia Kopatchinskaja:
winner of the Gramophone
Recording of the Year Award