

Finger on the pulse

The first *Gramophone* Awards took place in 1977 and every year since we've given the classical record industry a kind of health check, singling out the finest music-making from a 12-month period and celebrating the musicians who were making waves. This year, 12 months from the Awards' 40th anniversary, is no exception. Sure, things have changed over those four decades – earlier musics – from the Renaissance to the Baroque – have assumed a major role in which the industry chooses to record. After all, much of it – though many centuries old – has the allure of the new. This is music that in many cases is being heard again after a sleep of hundreds of years. And in the Orchestral category, a much broader representation of orchestras and ensembles is on display, though there is still that vital element of the 'health check' that allows us to evaluate the musical chemistry between an orchestra and its music direction (this year we can put a finger on the pulse of the relationship between the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Andris Nelsons, the Seattle Symphony and Ludovic Morlot, the Hallé and Sir Mark Elder, the Staatskapelle Berlin and Daniel Barenboim and, with a little poignancy and regret, between the Orchestra Mozart and Claudio Abbado).

As I wrote last year, we seem to be living in an age of great pianism – with Igor Levit, Bertrand Chamayou, Stephen Hough Jonathan Plowright and Yevgeny Sudbin flying the flag in the Instrumental category supplemented in the Concerto category by Maria João Pires (a winner last year) and the stupendous Daniil Trifonov there's little cause for concern.

In annual medical mode, it's also worth pointing out how many younger artists are represented in the pages that follow – the perspicacity of BBC Radio 3's New Generation Artists scheme has clearly borne fruit with the appearance of many of NGA alumni. Igor Levit, Maxim Rysanov, Quatuor Ebène, Alina Ibragimova, Janine Jansen and Alice Coote all feature.

The process that produced this shortlist of 72 recordings (six in each of 12 categories) drew on all the Editor's Choices (10 from each of 13 issues) supplemented by any recordings which our reviewers wanted to champion individually. This was voted on by specialist juries and this shortlist was created. The September issue of *Gramophone* (which is published on August 15) further narrows these recordings down to three per category, with the 12 category winners revealed online on August 22. The *Gramophone* Classical Music Awards ceremony takes place in London on September 15 and there we will name our special awards including Lifetime Achievement, Artist of the Year, Young Artist of the Year, Label of the Year and Recording of the Year.

Once again we're delighted to be producing this digital magazine in association with our friends at Qobuz and most of the recordings here contain direct links to Qobuz where you can sample the music-making. Listening to this vast array of outstanding recordings has been an enormously pleasurable way of spending the summer, and we hope you too will find much to enjoy too.

James Jolly July 2016



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