

Twelve months in music

A year that started with one of today's finest violinists injecting vigorous new life into two of the most recorded concertos, the Sibelius and Tchaikovsky, and ended with an astounding recording of one of the Everests of the operatic repertoire, Berlioz's *Les Troyens* is a good one by any reckoning. Lisa Batiashvili and Daniel Barenboim prove that every generation of classical musicians has something new to say about the great works of the musical literature, just as John Nelson and a hand-picked, and magnificent, cast gave us a recording that it is hard to imagine being bettered.

In between came many terrific recordings – a dozen given the extra accolade of a *Gramophone* Award (and listed at the back on this special digital magazine, now an annual fixture in our publishing year) – and we revisit them in the pages that follow. The spirit of renewal is strong this year, with conductors of a younger generation giving us imaginative new slants on classical music's most popular works – Pablo Heras-Casado and Vasily Petrenko (*Gramophone's* 2017 Artist of the Year) demonstrating that the richness of Tchaikovsky's imagination chimes with every age, while Yannick Nézet-Séguin gave us a set of the Mendelssohn symphonies for DG that will probably occupy a similar place in the Yellow Label's Catalogue that the classic Claudio Abbado set commanded back in the 1980s. But it isn't just conductors in their thirties who are making a splash: Sir John Eliot Gardiner went back to Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and gave us a new recording that, I know, he feels is one of the best things he's ever done – and luckily our reviewer, Lindsay Kemp, had exactly the same thoughts.

It wasn't only the tried-and-trusted classics of the repertoire that caught our attention this year, two recordings of brand-new music made quite an impact too – a shattering new setting of the *Stabat mater* by James McMillan that had Marc Rochester talking about it as '21st-century masterpiece' and Jonathan Dove's extraordinarily powerful, and highly topical, song-cycle *In Damascus*, a work that is as harrowing, upsetting, engaging, touching and heartening as you'd expect from a work of art inspired by the events in Syria.

Whether you're planning your Christmas gift shopping or merely lining up some listening for the coming weeks, there's plenty to choose from in the pages that follow.

James Jolly December 2017

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Vasily Petrenko: Gramophone's
Artist of the Year 2017