

Recordings of the Year 2018 - Our Top 10

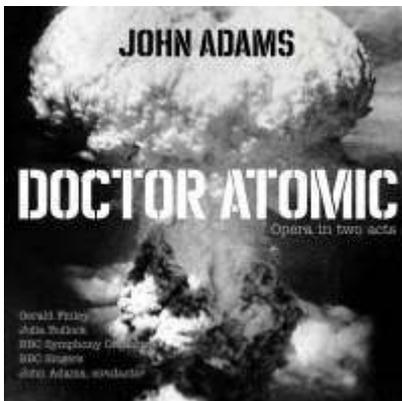


by Chris O'Reilly



After some spirited debate and many hours of listening, the Presto editorial team have finally decided on our Top 10 Recordings of 2018 - the albums which really made us listen afresh to core repertoire, or made compelling cases for music which was new to us!

We'll be despatching physical awards to all our winners over the next week, so do look out for a photo-gallery in the not-too-distant future, and you can [explore all one hundred finalists here](#).



[John Adams: Doctor Atomic](#)

Gerald Finley (Robert Oppenheimer), Julia Bullock (Kitty Oppenheimer), Brindley Sherratt (Edward Teller); BBC Singers, BBC Symphony Orchestra, John Adams

'The score is littered with moments of unexpected beauty...Finley is highly affecting, portraying magnificently Oppenheimer's sense of turmoil and moral conflict...for me the most exquisite music is sung by Julia Bullock as Oppenheimer's wife, Kitty...Overall, though, this is Finley's opera, and his impressive achievement makes this a highly compelling first recording for this thought-provoking work.' (James Longstaffe)

Available Formats: 2 CDs, MP3, CD Quality FLAC, Hi-Res FLAC

- [View full details](#)
- [Listen to samples](#)



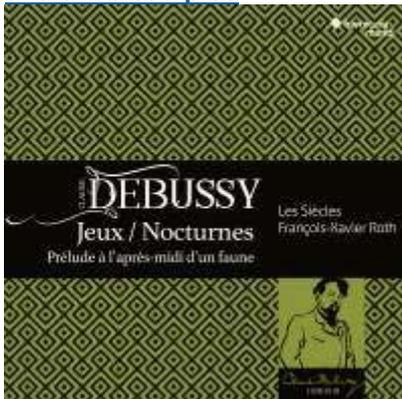
[Bruckner: Symphony No. 7](#)

Gewandhausorchester, Andris Nelsons

'While there's no denying the might of the Leipzig brass, what elevates these performances for me is the fact that Nelsons takes equal care over the string parts...Having said that, the brass certainly don't disappoint either: the outbursts of the slow movement of the Seventh are handled extremely well, with a beautifully-paced series of cadences that culminates in an ecstatic climax.' (James Longstaffe)

Available Formats: CD, MP3, CD Quality FLAC, Hi-Res FLAC, Hi-Res+ FLAC

- [View full details](#)
- [Listen to samples](#)



[Debussy: Jeux/Nocturnes](#)

Les Siècles, François-Xavier Roth

'The change in sonority that these period instruments allow is immediately apparent...but I don't wish to give the impression that it is entirely the instruments themselves that are responsible for such an absorbing performance: the musicians respond fabulously to the nuances of Debussy's score, and Roth navigates the rubato and changing pulse with an authority and a flexibility that never feels contrived...This disc is without doubt a confluence of triumphs.' (James Longstaffe)

Available Formats: CD + DVD Video, MP3, CD Quality FLAC, Hi-Res FLAC

- [View full details](#)
- [Listen to samples](#)



[Deux: Bartók, Poulenc & Ravel](#)

Patricia Kopatchinskaja (violin), Polina Leschenko (piano)

'There's an overwhelming feeling of partnership and joy at the shared act of music-making between the two of them that makes listening to them a sheer pleasure.....If there's one thing you can say about all of Kopatchinskaja's recordings to date, it's that she finds intriguing ways to put her own stamp on things, and nowhere is this more evident than the opening of *Tzigane*.' (James Longstaffe)

Available Formats: CD, MP3, CD Quality FLAC, Hi-Res FLAC

- [View full details](#)
- [Listen to samples](#)
- [Watch videos](#)



[Four Pieces - Four Pianos](#)

Alexander Melnikov (pianos)

'Liszt's *Réminiscences de Don Juan* receives a jaw-dropping performance from Melnikov. For me this is definitely the highlight of the disc...The idea of juxtaposing different pianos is a fascinating concept, but luckily it is more than just a gimmick. After the initial surprise of the varying timbres of each instrument, you soon forget about such technical considerations and become drawn in to the actual interpretations, all four of which are dazzling and highly recommended.' (James Longstaffe)

Available Formats: CD, MP3, CD Quality FLAC, Hi-Res FLAC

- [View full details](#)
- [Listen to samples](#)



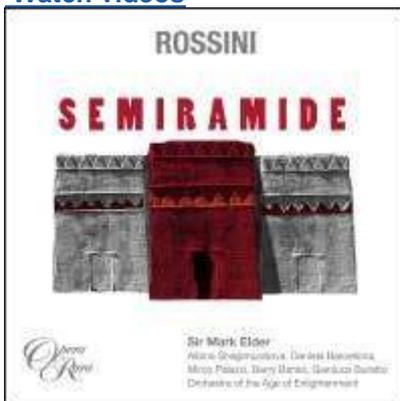
[Handel Arias](#)

Franco Fagioli (countertenor), Il Pomo d'Oro, Zefira Valova

'My expectations always run extremely high with this artist, but he excels himself here with singing that simply exudes joy and revels in the capabilities of his remarkable instrument: the vocal virtuosity on display in 'Crude furie', 'Dopo notte' and 'Venti, turbini' (the latter capped with a ringing top D!) will take your breath away. I'm addicted.' (Katherine Cooper)

Available Formats: CD, MP3, CD Quality FLAC, Hi-Res FLAC

- [View full details](#)
- [Listen to samples](#)
- [Watch videos](#)



[Rossini: Semiramide](#)

Albina Shagimuratova (Semiramide), Daniela Barcellona (Arsace), Mirco Palazzi (Assur), Barry Banks (Idreno); Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment & Opera Rara Chorus, Sir Mark Elder

'The period instruments of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (particularly the brass) fizz and glow, and four hours zip along in the blink of an eye thanks to Elder's lightly-sprung tempi and unflagging rhythmic momentum....[Shagimuratova] possesses the same crystalline quality that made Sutherland such a marvel and yields nothing in terms of agility and facility in the upper reaches.' (Katherine Cooper)

Available Formats: 4 CDs, MP3, CD Quality FLAC, Hi-Res FLAC

- [View full details](#)
- [Listen to samples](#)
- [Watch videos](#)



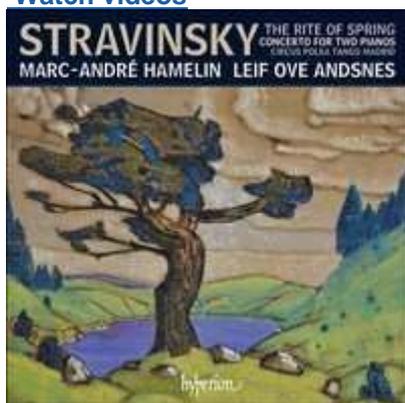
[Domenico Scarlatti: Sonatas Vol. 1](#)

Federico Colli (piano)

'His infectious enthusiasm for this music and empathy with its creator are writ large in every phrase: Colli sees the composer as a deeply conflicted, almost Romantic figure whose music is shot through with a melancholy which emanates from various sources...he's keen to point up the radical qualities of a composer who not only blurred the boundaries between the Baroque and Classical styles but frequently pushed beyond both'. (Katherine Cooper)

Available Formats: CD, MP3, CD Quality FLAC, Hi-Res FLAC

- [View full details](#)
- [Listen to samples](#)
- [Watch videos](#)



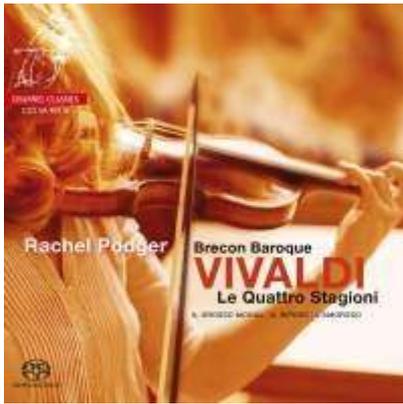
[Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring](#)

Marc-André Hamelin (piano), Leif Ove Andsnes (piano)

'You barely miss the orchestration at all in the first published version of *The Rite* for piano four-hands (as played by Stravinsky and Debussy in the summer of 1912), thanks to the marvellous range of colours conjured from the keyboard by Andsnes and Hamelin, and the clarity which they bring to even the most thickly-textured passages is a revelation. Their reading of the *Circus Polka* 'for a young elephant' has galumphing charm in spades.' (Katherine Cooper)

Available Format: CD

- [View full details](#)
- [Listen to samples](#)



Vivaldi: Le Quattro Stagioni

Rachel Podger (violin), Brecon Baroque

'Podger's approach is considerably more fine-boned than most, which is as much down to the choices about phrasing, tempi and articulation as it is to the forces deployed...This is *The Seasons* as chamber-music rather than virtuoso war-horse, and the synergy between Podger and her tiny band is matchless...But the drama never feels short-changed: the sirocco storm of Summer whips up out of nowhere with scorching savageness.' (Katherine Cooper)

Available Formats: SACD, MP3, CD Quality FLAC, Hi-Res FLAC

- [View full details](#)
- [Listen to samples](#)
- [Watch videos](#)

Special Category Winners

Rising Star - Eric Lu



A student of Jonathan Biss and Đặng Thái Sơn, this 20-year-old Chinese-American pianist won the First Prize and Terence Judd Hallé Orchestra Award at The Leeds International Piano Competition in September after holding the audience and jury spellbound from his very first entry in Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto in the final; the live recording (issued earlier this month on Warner Classics) testifies to musicianship of immense poise and potential. You can read David's [interview with him about his competition success here](#).

Conductor of the Year - François-Xavier Roth



Roth's explorations of French orchestral music with the period instruments of Les Siècles have gone from strength to strength this year, with a *Mother Goose* and *Le Tombeau de Couperin* which Katherine described as a '[revelatory sonic experience](#)' back in April, and a magical reading of Debussy's *Nocturnes* and *Jeux* (reviewed today) as part of Harmonia Mundi's Debussy Centenary Edition.

[Browse the full list of his currently available recordings here.](#)

Best Completed Cycle or Series - Harmonia Mundi Debussy Centenary Edition



This ten-volume series commemorating the centenary of Debussy's death got off to a flying start with the Jerusalem Quartet's '[impressively dynamic](#)' account of the String Quartet in May, with later highlights including Alexander Melnikov's riveting interpretation of the second book of *Préludes* (an August Choice in both *Gramophone* and *BBC Music Magazine*), and *Harmonie du Soir* - a luminous song-recital from Sophie Karthäuser, Stéphane Degout, Eugene Asti and Alain Planès.

Premiere Recording - Stravinsky: Chant funèbre



Composed in 1908 (shortly before *The Firebird*) as a memorial to Stravinsky's teacher Rimsky-Korsakov and performed in January of the following year, the score of *Chant funèbre* was lost for over a century before being discovered in a pile of manuscripts at the St Petersburg Conservatory in 2015; James described Chailly's landmark recording as 'one of the most remarkable discs of Stravinsky's music to have appeared for some time.' [Read his complete review here.](#)

Premiere Recording (new work) - Brett Dean: Hamlet



Setting a libretto by Matthew Jocelyn (which plays dazzlingly fast-and-loose with the various versions of Shakespeare's text) and brought vividly to life by a stellar cast headed by Allan Clayton, the Australian composer's *Hamlet* premiered at Glyndebourne in 2017 to overwhelmingly positive reviews and will transfer to the Metropolitan Opera in 2021/22. The spine-tingling writing for off-stage (or rather, 'under-stage!') chorus and the mad-scene for Barbara Hannigan's Ophelia are just two highlights in a score that looks set to gain a firm foothold in the repertoire. [Read our interview with the composer here.](#)

Best Deluxe Box Set



Totalling over 280 hours of music and featuring 750 performers, this supremely authoritative 222-disc collection includes seven world premiere recordings and ten hours of new recordings as well as benchmark performances from musicians including Masaaki Suzuki, Christopher Hogwood, Alfred Brendel, Marie-Claire Alain, Pablo Casals, Wanda Landowska, Arthur Grumiaux and Zuzana Růžičková. [Watch our unboxing video here.](#)