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CLASSICAL NOTES BEST OF 2007

Simone Dinnerstein, Bach: The Goldberg Variations (Telarc)—Postwar listeners wanted their Bach in a powerful and concentrated style with plenty of intellectual fire, and chose Glenn Gould. But a younger audience prefers a lean, knowing, and unpretentious elegance; Simone Dinnerstein, in the runaway hit of the year, provides exactly that.

Russian National Orchestra, Beethoven: The Nine Symphonies (DG)—The Russian style is basically a combination of brute power and high sentiment. These performances by the Russian National Orchestra—filtered through the radically Romantic sensibility of its conductor, Mikhail Pletnev—will not please everyone, but their audacious originality is indisputable.

Corigliano: Music for String Quartet (Naxos)—Half magus, half magpie, this quintessential New York composer assembles works of piercing tenderness from the shards of twentieth-century music. The Corigliano Quartet plays its signature piece with persuasive devotion; a startlingly mature quartet by Corigliano's student Jefferson Friedman rounds out the album.

Lisa Batiashvili, Sibelius and Lindberg Violin Concertos (Sony Classical)—The young Georgian violinist's Sibelius is an interpretation of rare eloquence, a balance between the thrust of an Oistrakh and the lightness of a Grumiaux. Accompanied by Sakari Oramo and the Finnish Radio Symphony, she also proves a convincing protagonist in the world-première recording of Magnus Lindberg's noble new work.

Marc-André Hamelin, Haydn: Piano Sonatas (Hyperion)—The Canadian wonder Hamelin, moving out of new-or-obscure repertory and into the classical heritage, offers crisp and spirited interpretations in which dazzling surfaces are underpinned by real musical insight.

Henry Brant/Charles Ives: "A Concord Symphony" (Innova)—The Minnesota-based label, an offshoot of the American Composers Forum, hits the big time with this heroic work, Brant's orchestration of Ives's "Concord" Piano Sonata. No less than Dennis Russell Davies and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra do the honors.

Mozart: "Mitridate, Re di Ponto" (Decca)—In a DVD from the 2006 Salzburg Festival, the director Günter Krämer takes a supposedly minor Mozart opera and turns it into a dramatic feast that features stellar performances by Richard Croft, Miah Persson, and Bejun Mehta and vigorous accompaniment by Marc Minkowski and Les Musiciens du Louvre-Grenoble.

Oswaldo Golijov: "Oceana" (DG)—"Oceana," a cantata based on sensuous texts by Pablo Neruda, is a work of true seriousness and equipoise from a sometimes showy composer; his inspired advocates in this and other pieces include the bossanova princess Luciana Souza, the soprano Dawn Upshaw, and the conductor Robert Spano.

Budapest Festival Orchestra, Richard Strauss: "Josephs Legende" (Channel Classics)—This 1914 ballet, composed for Nijinsky but never danced by him, is the ultimate Strauss sleeper, a sumptuous mix of "Rosenkavalier" innocence, "Salome" decadence, and "Alpine Symphony" bombast. Iván Fischer and a full-sized Budapest Festival Orchestra deliver an electrifying performance.

Stockhausen: "Stimmung" (Harmonia Mundi)—A genius of modern music has passed on, and attention is due. Listen to this recording, by the angel-toned Theatre of Voices, of the composer's seventy-eight-minute meditation from 1968, in which six singers find an empire of variety within the ceaseless repetitions of a single chord.

—Russell Platt