

MUSIC & VISION

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Jaap van Zweden — Issue 95, 1 February 2016

The New York Philharmonic Orchestra announced on 27 January 2016 that conductor Jaap van Zweden will become the next Music Director of the orchestra, beginning in 2018-19, the orchestra's one-hundred-and-seventy-seventh season. He will serve as Music Director Designate in the 2017-18 season.

As the New York Philharmonic's twenty-sixth Music Director, Mr van Zweden, currently Music Director of both the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, will succeed Alan Gilbert, whose tenure began in 2009 and culminates in the 2016-17 season.

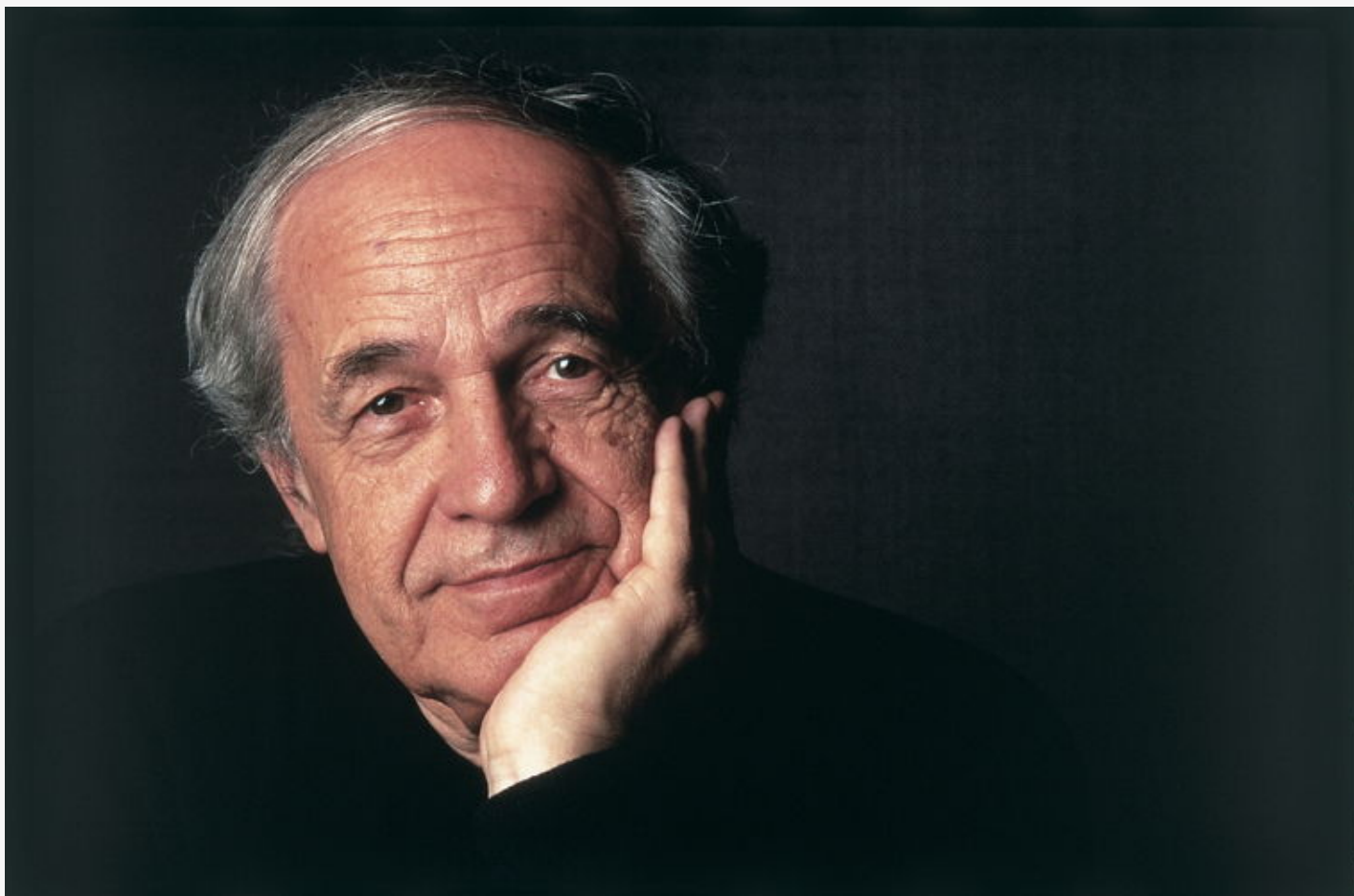
'This is one of the happiest and most fulfilling days of my life', said Jaap van Zweden. 'To be asked by the great musicians of the New York Philharmonic and by the Board of this iconic institution to be its Music Director is truly an honor. As musicians, we strive to achieve the best for our audiences in sharing the music of so many gifted composers of the past and present as we look to the future. My heart is full, and my family and I look forward to being true New Yorkers, as I was during my Juilliard days.'

As Music Director Designate in the 2017-18 season, Jaap van Zweden will conduct several weeks of concerts. As Music Director beginning in 2018-19, he will conduct the Orchestra for twelve weeks each year. Acclaimed for superb performances and orchestra-building in Dallas and around the world, Amsterdam-born van Zweden was appointed at age nineteen as the youngest-ever concertmaster of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and began his conducting career twenty years later in 1995. It was following the encouragement of Philharmonic Laureate Conductor Leonard Bernstein, during a rehearsal of Mahler's First Symphony there, that he first took up the baton. His appointment as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic will be a homecoming for van Zweden, who studied violin at Juilliard. **Read more ...**

In other news, French violinist Renaud Capuçon renews his exclusive contract with Erato; Robert Schumann's complete songs will be the focus of the fifteenth Oxford Lieder Festival in October 2016; The American Classical Orchestra presents Haydn's *L'Isola Disabitata* at Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center, New York; Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra Music Director Louis Langrée receives Chevalier dans l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur; Ealing Music and Film Valentine Festival in West London, UK, returns 10-14 February 2016; Red Priest Records presents a new disc exploring seventeenth century music for recorder and harpsichord (**read our review**).



Alain Lanceron, President of Warner Classics and Erato (left) with Renaud Capuçon, renewing his contract with Erato



Pierre Boulez (1925-2016)

Music is a labyrinth, with no beginning and no end, full of new paths to discover, where mystery remains eternal. — Pierre Boulez

French composer, conductor, pianist and writer Pierre Boulez was born on 26 March 1925 at Montbrison in the Loire, and showed early aptitude for both music and mathematics. He studied in Lyon and at the Paris Conservatoire with Messiaen, who introduced him to dodecaphony. Boulez went on to study twelve tone composition privately with René Leibowitz, but was mostly influenced by Messiaen and that composer's research on integral serialism, becoming an emblematic figurehead and philosophical leader of the post-war trend towards abstraction and experimentation.

As a conductor with great respect for composers' notated intentions, Boulez became known for his interpretations of twentieth century classics, and also for having an ear able to pick out mistakes within very complex musical structures, but he wasn't popular as musical director of the New York Philharmonic because of his (arguably) excessive programming of modern repertoire.

He wrote widely on musical technique and aesthetics, and, early on, worked as a pianist and player of other keyboard instruments.

He founded and directed the French music research institute, IRCAM, at the request of the French president, Georges Pompidou.

He was a powerful, controversial figure, who said what he thought, dismissing the music of Brahms, Mozart, Shostakovich, Sibelius, Tchaikovsky and Verdi :

Shostakovich plays with clichés most of the time, I find. It's like olive oil, when you have a second and even third pressing, and I think of Shostakovich as the second, or even third, pressing of Mahler.

Boulez was criticised by many:

Though the Germans had lost the war, their musical imprint was secured through the hands of a young Frenchman ready to leap at the outrageous to secure his own fortune. — **Jeff Talman on Boulez in M&V**

Early in his career, Boulez said that the opera houses should be blown up, and that all the art of the past should be destroyed :

They decry the Taliban for destroying everything, but civilisations are destroyed to be able to move on.

Pierre Boulez died on 5 January 2016, aged ninety, at his home in Baden-Baden, Germany.



Leif Solberg in Lillehammer on his one-hundredth birthday in 2014. Photo: Toccata Classics

We also mark the passing of Aurèle Nicolet, Denise Duval, Leif Solberg, Anti Marguste, Gilberto Mendes, Gilbert Kaplan and Rodney Milnes.

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SURREALIST POP — LIVE PERFORMANCE REVIEWS



The entire cast of Rossini's *La Cenerentola* at Teatro dell'Opera di Roma. Photo © 2016 Yasuko Kageyama

Giuseppe Pennisi: 'After fifteen years of absence, Teatro dell'Opera di Roma presented a new production of Rossini's *dramma giocoso La Cenerentola*. It is part of a broader project to celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of the Rossini operas especially commissioned by Roman theatres — ie *La Cenerentola* by the Teatro Valle and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* by the Teatro Argentina. The project includes as many as three different productions of *Il Barbiere* — the first in the main house starting 11 February 2016, the second, in the Spring, in a travelling van in squares of both the city center and the suburbs, and the third in July and August at the Baths of Caracalla in the open air. In a co-production arrangement, the opera van will also reach squares in Palermo.

'On 22 January 2016, the opening night of *La Cenerentola* was shown live in HD in sixty-four Italian movie theatres and then in a dozen other countries, including Australia and the USA. This is an indication of both the priority given to the production by the Teatro dell'Opera and renewed interest by Italian and foreign audiences in the main Roman lyric institution.

'An added attraction was that the stage direction was entrusted to Emma Dante (and her team of costume and stage set designers as well as mimes). Emma Dante is a well known, although controversial, stage and movie director, with opera experience in Italy and France.'

Giuseppe Pennisi also reports on some special concerts in Rome, and on *Disney Fantasia* on the big screen, with live orchestra.

Maria Nockin: 'On Saturday 16 January 2016, the Metropolitan Opera presented Georges Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles* live in high definition at movie theaters in seventy countries around the world. I saw it at the Deer Valley AMC Cinema in Phoenix, Arizona. Met Hostess Patricia Racette introduced the first act and explained the workings of the pearl diving scene. Director Penny Woolcock's production made use of all the technical wonders that a major opera house like the Met could supply. The prelude accompanied "divers" who were actually live aerialists on a huge new apparatus. They plunged down five stories accompanied by bubbles, projections and Jen Schriever's lighting and they seemed to be in clear but immensely deep water.

'Matthew Diamond's direction gave the cinema audience mostly closeups, and a few shots that revealed the full scenic picture would have been welcome. Dick Bird's set consisted mainly of boards and steps that resembled docks with small rustic homes perched on steep cliffs in the background. Kevin Pollard's costumes updated the period to modern times, but many cast members still wore traditional sarees and dhotis.



The chorus in Act III of Bizet's *The Pearlfishers* at New York Metropolitan Opera. Photo © 2015 Ken Howard

'Diana Damrau was a perfect Leila who sang all the high notes and trills with ease. This was the best performance I have ever heard her give. Her voice had color all the way up and down the staff and her strong characterization made me believe this rather loosely constructed plot.

'It was interesting to compare Matthew Polenzani's singing live in 2016 with the repeat transmission of his Tamino in the 2006 HD

Magic Flute in December. He has gained in security, confidence and stamina while losing nothing in sweetness of tone.'

Mike Wheeler: 'Sinfonia Viva continued to cement its relationship with Derby Cathedral in the first of two concerts (Derby Cathedral, Derby, UK, 22 January 2016; the second will follow in March), echoing the pair given at the same time last year.

'On that occasion we were welcoming Duncan Ward to his new job as the orchestra's Principal Conductor. As before, so now, his infectious drive and enthusiasm brought a ready response from Viva's players, beginning with a crisp, alert performance of Haydn's Symphony No 59, known as the 'Fire' from its probable use as incidental music for a play of that name. The second movement's minor-key sections had just enough gravitas to balance the laid-back, but not over-indulgent, handling of the rest. The minuet was nicely springy, and the exuberant horn/oboe dialogue kick-started a racy account of the finale.

'Viva principal Adam Mackenzie then stepped forward as the soloist in Mozart's Bassoon Concerto, negotiating with considerable agility the twists and turns Mozart scatters in his path, and bringing touching, unaffected lyricism to the aria-like second movement. The stateliness of the minuet-style finale was thrown nicely into relief by an undercurrent of agitation in the minor-key episode.

'After the interval it was principal oboist Emily Pailthorpe's turn, in the Phoenix Concerto written for her in 2009 by Paul Patterson. Oboists really should be falling over each other to take this thoroughly attractive work into their repertoires. While resisting the temptation to overdose on clichéd orientalism, Patterson gives the solo part plenty of sinuous melodic appeal, backed up by harmonically tangy string writing full of dancing



Adam Mackenzie

energy. A solo cadenza leads into the meditative second movement, with its magically hushed ending, from which a strings/solo dialogue rouses the music for a boisterous finale, played here with knife-edge rhythmic precision.' (Sinfonia Viva in Derby Cathedral, UK, 22 January 2016)

Wheeler also listens to off-the-beaten-track chamber music from Katherine Jenkinson, Julian Bliss and Alison Farr, and to Dvorák, Beethoven, Schumann and Brahms from Steven Isserlis, Joshua Bell and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields.

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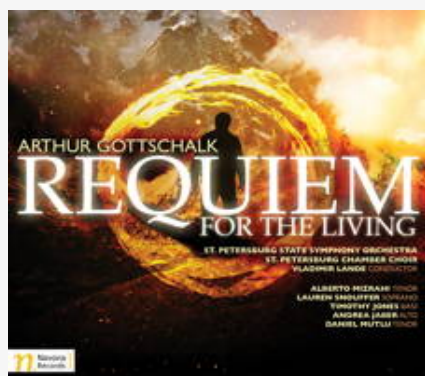
FAMILIAR AND OTHERWORLDLY — CD REVIEWS

Andrew Schartmann: 'In the disc's finale, Nat Evans' *Music for Breathing*, lightheartedness gives way to a meditative state. The composition itself is beyond stunning — a mixture of emulation and music proper — and questions the boundary between instrumental tones and the sounds of nature. In the hands of The City of Tomorrow, that boundary fades from existence, leaving us with a soundscape that is at once familiar and otherworldly. The effect is so unique, in fact, that I am at a loss for words to describe my experience. And so I turn to the composer :



'... funny, playful,
and full of light.'

"After spending much time outside, the occidental concept that 'nature' is nothing but 'beautiful' or 'peaceful' has faded away. Every moment there are animals giving birth or being eaten, a new tree growing out of a stump, a group of trees conspiring over ten years to choke out a competitor ... All this activity is in perfect balance — sighing and breathing back at us endlessly." (The City of Tomorrow — *Nature*. Ravello Records, RR7904)



'... a solid performance of both orchestra and choir.'

Ron Bierman: 'The interpolations are based on a broad range of moral thought, from Buddha and Muhammed to Duke Ellington and George Eliot. The first line of the first movement, for example, begins in Latin with the traditional "Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord". But Gottschalk soon inserts a Hebrew memorial prayer in English, which is sung here by Cantor Alberto Mizrahi. The tenor is rightly famed for his interpretation of Jewish music, having sung for presidents and on numerous recordings. But his voice is strained as he enters on a high note.' (Arthur Gottschalk: *Requiem for the Living*. Navona Records, NV6009)

Paul Sarcich: 'Fauré songs for bass? Well why not, given that composers generally underserve the low voices in favour of the high, and why should the bassi and contralti be deprived of some fine repertoire just because it didn't happen to be written in their key? As Roy Howat explains in his scholarly notes, Fauré himself was a pragmatic transposer of his own songs for various singers he worked with.'

'Howat also goes into the rationale behind the groupings of songs on this album, the relationships Fauré had with many of the poets, and gives a full guide to the background and characteristics of the poems; all of which is predicated on that fact that the new Peters critical edition of Fauré's songs is being used here, edited by Howat and his wife Emily Kilpatrick. This purports to clean up masses of errors in previous editions and bring some sense to the groupings of the songs.'

'There are twenty-five songs presented here, grouped by poet (Baudelaire, Gautier, Verlaine) or poetic intentions (adding Hugo, de Lisle, Mendès, Silvestre, Closset, de l'Isle-Adam, Prudhomme, Monnier, and Bussine's adaptations from Tommaseo's collection of Tuscan songs). Certainly a very wide spread of Fauré's corpus of art songs, allowing some sort of overview of his work and development as a song composer.' (Gabriel Fauré: Songs for Bass Voice and Piano. Toccata Classics TOCC 0268)



'Roy Howat's accompaniments are crystal-clear always ...'



'... marvelous technique and improvisational skills.'

Gerald Fenech: 'Born in 1968, Niklas Sivelöv is one of the leading pianists not only in his native Sweden, but in the Nordic countries as well. With a number of international awards and accolades to his name, he is continually commissioned not only to perform but also to compose, and his discography already numbers some twenty-five CDs. Sivelöv can be regarded as a boy prodigy, playing the organ when he was six, and winning prizes across the whole of Scandinavia while attracting attention for his dexterity both as an improviser and composer. When he was fourteen he switched to his beloved instrument, the piano, and three years later he started his serious studies at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm.'

'Sivelöv made his debut in 1991 with Bartók's second Piano Concerto, a monster of a work, and since then he has worked with several eminent conductors such as Paavo Berglund, Thomas Dausgaard and Esa-Pekka Salonen. He has also performed with many great orchestras such as the Bucharest Philharmonic, the MDR in Leipzig and L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, not to mention all the major Scandinavian orchestras. As a pianist his repertoire is immense, encompassing around fifty concertos extending from Bach to contemporary music, and he has been the catalyst of many world premieres.' (Niklas Sivelöv Piano Music. Toccata Classics TOCC 0271)

Fenech also listens to Jewish cabaret music from the New Budapest Orpheum Society on Cedille (*As Dreams Fall Apart*, CDR 90000 151), to the choral music of Ferenc Farkas (Toccata Classics TOCC 0296), to Turina's chamber music for strings and piano (Cedille CDR 90000 150), to Vivaldi's complete viola d'amore concertos (Cedille CDR 90000 159), to Schubert Lieder from Ailish Tynan and Iain Burnside (Delphian DCD34165), to the piano music of Edward Loder (Toccata Classics TOCC 0322) and to Milan Dvořák's complete jazz piano etudes (Toccata Classics TOCC 0319).



'... those who decide to take the plunge will be rewarded with riches aplenty.'



'... the string sound of the Moravian Philharmonic is warm and sumptuous.'

Geoff Pearce: 'Here we have a first rate orchestra, a conductor who certainly shows leadership and direction, and, in Louis Babin, a composer who I think will become a lot better known, judging by the standard of the works produced here. Petr Vronský is chief conductor of the Moravian Philharmonic, playing here, and was previously with the Brno Philharmonic.'

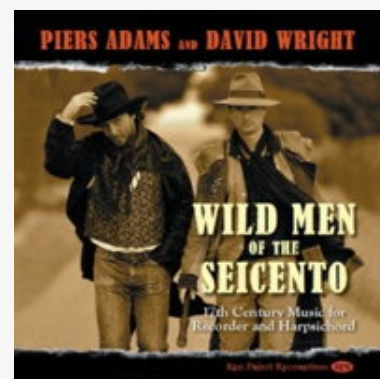
'*Saint-Exupéry, de cœur, de sable et d'étoiles*, in three short movements, inspired by the life and work of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, author of *Le Petit Prince* and also a pilot, is music to be listened to and enjoyed.' (Les productions Louis

Babin ODL-LB-002)

Pearce is also impressed with Mozart and Brahms Clarinet Quintets played by Anthony McGill and the Pacifica Quartet (Cedille CDR 90000 147).

The late Howard Smith welcomed Quartetto Gelato's *Musica Latina* (Linus Entertainment 2 70104) and was impressed with David Kechley's *Colliding Objects* on the innova label (*innova 829*).

Keith Bramich: 'As well as being very entertaining, Piers Adams' liner notes for this CD convincingly and knowledgeably portray the lunacy of seventeenth century music, arguing that it is very difficult for the modern ear to handle works exhibiting both humour and spirituality. On first hearing, one could easily assume that this CD contains 'straight' music 'messed about with' by Adams. The truth is more subtle, however, and Piers Adams and David Wright's superb performances exhibit a strangely infectious authenticity. The humour at the end of the Violin Sonata No 3 in F by Heinrich Biber (1644-1704), for example, described by Adams as "pure Monty Python", comes largely from Biber's writing (plus a "brought up to date" harpsichord part) — Adams on recorder is (mostly) true here to Biber's original.



'... Piers Adams and David Wright's superb performances exhibit a strangely infectious authenticity.'

'You might expect the whole disc to be played for laughs, but it's not. Compare this performance at modern pitch with any more conventional rendition, and (as well as discovering that Adams and Wright shave at least two minutes off the duration), you can hear Adams' "extended recorder technique" as simply re-imagining the violin writing for his own instrument.' (Piers Adams and David Wright - *Wild Men of the Seicento*. Red Priest Recordings *RP013*) **Browse our latest CD reviews ...**

ASK ALICE — ON SIBELIUS GROWING LIKE A FUNGUS

Alice McVeigh: "'As harsh as fate", Sibelius wrote of his fourth symphony, in the 1940s, some decades after the premiere: "Even today I cannot find a single note in it that I would change, nor can I find anything to add. The fourth symphony represents a very important part of me."

'Harold Truscott has suggested that the fourth is "full of a foreboding which is probably the unconscious result of ... an atmosphere which was to explode in 1914 into a world war." However, and very much more personally, Sibelius — who had long struggled with alcoholism — had only just survived several (hugely risky) operations for throat cancer and certainly appeared to be severely depressed. To Strindberg — referring to the third movement — he wrote that, "being human is misery", requesting that the same movement be played at his funeral. (He also quoted Strindberg when asked about the symphony as a whole, saying: "One feels pity for human beings.")



Jean Sibelius in 1913

'Musically, the work is spare, arresting and intense. In a letter to his biographer, Sibelius wrote: "It has nothing, absolutely nothing, of the circus about it ... It is a protest against the music of today." Certainly its stripped-down, sinewy muscularity has nothing in common with the lush late romanticism so prevalent in the early 1900s. In Finland it was even nicknamed *Barkbröd* ("Bark-bread"), a reference to that country's nineteenth-century famines, when the poor ate tree bark in order to survive. Yet it remains uncompromisingly real, honest and immensely rewarding: in fact, many consider it Sibelius' masterpiece.

'The ambiguous tritone dominates from the very outset, when out of Finland's frozen wastes and aching horizons emerges a single, mournful cello. Then storm clouds rise, the brass and timpani are summoned. A more liquid, consolatory theme eventually surfaces in the strings, after which solo winds confer above string pulsation. The solo cello, and then violins, aspire upwards, resolutely off the beat. A bitty, nervy section intervenes, featuring string tremolo and skittish woodwind. A sense of utter disintegration — even despair — prevails, even when the clouds break: the brass chorale, the upper strings recalling the second theme. Amid uncertainty of texture and dissolving harmonies, the violins are left, completely stranded.

'In the second movement a sprightly solo oboe ignites what feels like a normal scherzo — for a while. Spiccato spreads like a virus through the strings, undercut by grumbling brass. A lopsided, rather jerky theme gives way to the oboe frivolity again, gossiping pairs of flutes stroll past. Eventually the violins assume priority with trill-infested menace, rising to cries of warning, along with objections from the brass, and nerves from the strings. Amid a general sense of agitation, the music fragments and falters, evaporating uneasily into Finnish mists, all sense of scherzo — or indeed of anything — lost.'

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This newsletter, edited by Keith Bramich, is a monthly taster for Basil Ramsey's high quality and colourful online classical music magazine, published every day since January 1999.

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