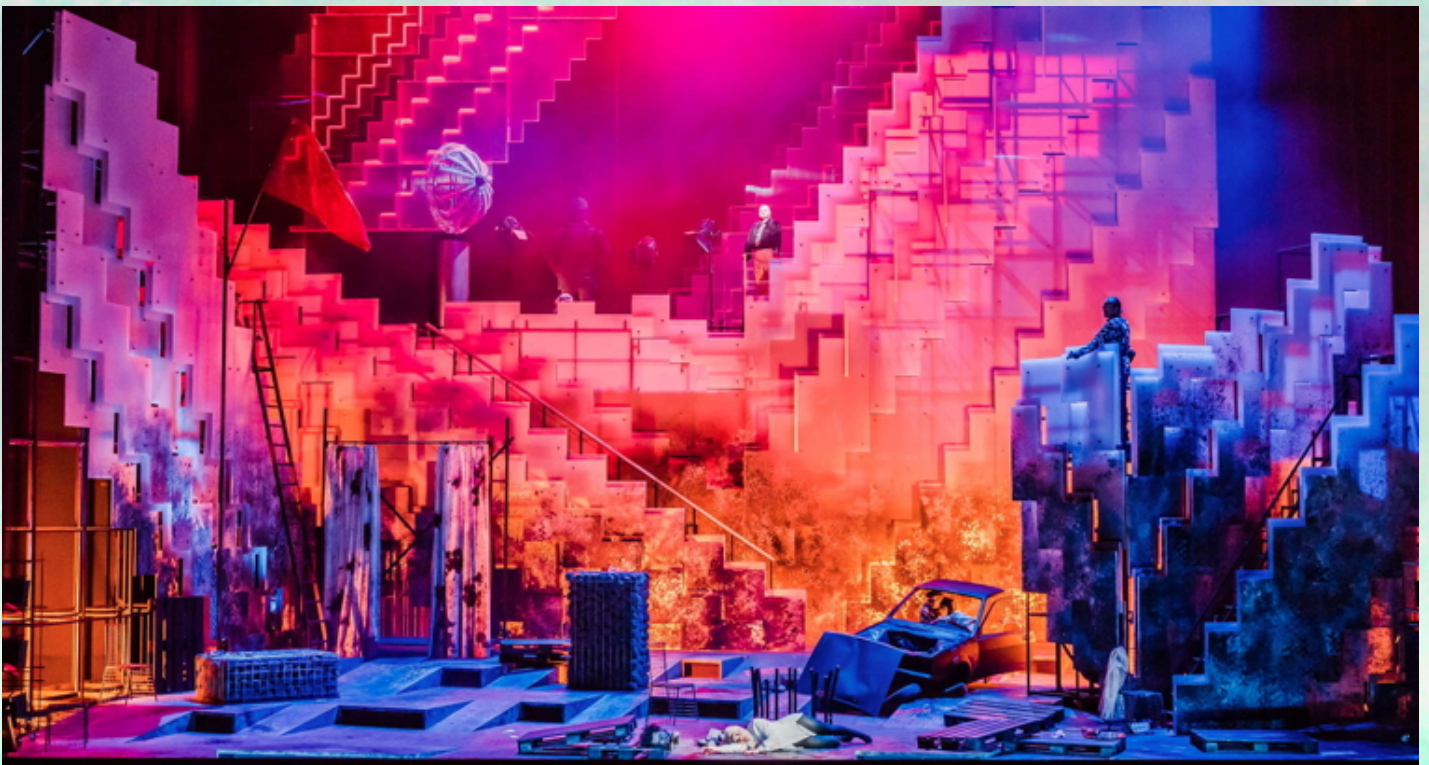




Spotlight on Germany – Issue 111, 1 July 2017

ENSEMBLE – STRAUSS FESTIVAL IN LEIPZIG

Giuseppe Pennisi: 'Stage director Aron Stiehl, "Rosalie" (the art nickname of the creator of the sets and costumes, who died two weeks before the premiere), and lighting designer Michael Röger set the action in present-day Jerusalem. Ulf Schirmer and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra provide all the fire required for a sex and blood tragedy.



A scene from *Salome* by Richard Strauss at Leipzig Opera. Photo © 2017 Kirsten Nijhof

'Oscar Wilde's tragedy and Richard Strauss' one-act opera, on a libretto by Hedwig Lachmann, were conceived at the time when Sigmund Freud was starting to develop psychoanalysis in Vienna. This molds the production more than decadent atmosphere or old peplum movies. The protagonist is Elisabet Strid, a dramatic Swedish singer who began her international career in 2010. She is a Wagnerian soprano who has already performed at the Bayreuth Festival and at several major opera houses in Europe and America. She has a powerful voice and handles Strauss' dissonances very well. She is sexy (almost a requirement for the role) and acts quite well.

'After the curtain fell, there were ten minutes of standing ovations for both the production and the entire company.' [Read more ...](#)

Whilst in Leipzig, in addition to this new production of *Salome*, Giuseppe also saw two other Strauss operas — *Arabella* and *Die Frau ohne Schatten*: 'In Leipzig, the stage direction (Balász Kovalik), the sets by Heike Scheele and the costumes by Sebastian Ellrich follow quite closely the rather extravagant libretto: a mixture of Oriental fairy tales with a clear message to procreate children.



A scene from *Die Frau ohne Schatten* at Leipzig Opera. Photo © 2014 Kirsten Nijhof

'The opera was conceived after the "useless carnage", as Pope Benedict XVI called World War I, in a letter to all governments involved in the conflict. The message is also valid now, especially in Europe where births are declining. The time of the action, however, is not set in a mythical Oriental world but in Germany at an undefined period: the Imperial Palace and dining room recall Bismarck's times, whereas the low cost housing seems to belong to the nineteen fifties. This blend fits the score quite well — a huge expressionistic picture with a few set pieces.

'The protagonists are two women in search for child bearing happiness: one an ethereal spirit (The Empress) and the other an all too real woman (the Dyer's Wife, ie "Die Frau"). Apart from their baffled husbands and the ambiguous nurse, the other characters provide only colors and celestial commentaries. In his old age, Richard Strauss, who considered *Die Frau* as his best and most beloved opera, attempted to compose a "chamber music" version with a smaller orchestra, fewer characters but the same philosophical message. Nothing of this attempt survives.' [Read more ...](#)

Back in Italy, Giuseppe was in Sardinia for Verdi's *Rigoletto* on the beach, and he also comments on the heavy stage direction and sets in Rossini's *Il viaggio a Reims*, and a trendy concert series, both in Rome.

Mike Wheeler: 'Schubert's last piano sonata, in B flat, D 960, embraces so much of his emotional world's ambivalence. Beate Toyka's performance, as part of Derby Cathedral's lunchtime concert series (Derby, UK, 16 June 2017), reflected the ambivalence without making unduly heavy weather of the darker moments.

'The first movement emerged quietly purposeful, but also uneasy, with the rumbling bass trills allowed to bring just enough of an edgy, unsettled feel. There was a sure hand, too on the unfolding structure, with each characteristically Schubertian tonal shift a new turn in the spiral.



Pianist Beate Toyka was born in Germany into a musical and international family, and studied at Cologne Conservatoire and then at the Royal Academy of Music in London with Hamish Milne. Following a period living and working in Botswana, she settled in Derbyshire, where she formed the Derby Piano Quartet (four pianists at two pianos) and performs with the Attenborough Piano Quartet and the Mercian Piano Trio. She has performed J S Bach's *48 Preludes and Fugues* several times, and has played Chopin's four *Ballades* and his complete cycle of *Études*. She has also played concertos by Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms.

'Those shifts were reflected in the major-minor switches in the second movement, unhurried but with a firm current still perceptible, while the dominant impression of the third movement was of a kind of clouded playfulness. The lute-like, or guitar-like flourishes — Schubert played the guitar, though he wrote nothing major for it — had their own kind of contained friskiness.

'The finale set off as a kind of almost-polka — so much of Schubert's output consists of sociable dance music of one kind or another — so that the later two big flare-ups of emotional intensity were properly startling though, again, without overbalancing the structure as a whole. The fast coda suggested a determination, not so much to push them aside, as to take them and integrate them into the complete picture.'

[Read more ...](#)

Mike also listens to Elgar, Grieg and Walton from soloists, the Nottingham Harmonic Choir, Rory Macdonald and the Hallé Orchestra.

[Read our latest concert reviews](#) [Listings of forthcoming concerts and festivals](#)

CLASSICAL MUSIC NEWS — ISADORA WERKSTATT; LUDGER RÉMY (1949-2017)

Isadora Werkstatt Berlin 2017 is the international gathering of those who create and design using Isadora, a proprietary graphic programming environment for Mac OS X And Microsoft Windows designed by Mark Coniglio and first released in 2002. Although emphasis is on real-time manipulation of digital video, the software is also used by musicians and sound artists.

The gathering consists of five days of intensive workshops, lectures, artist talks and performances for users of Isadora, and it takes place at Uferstudios, Berlin, Germany, from 9-13 August 2017.



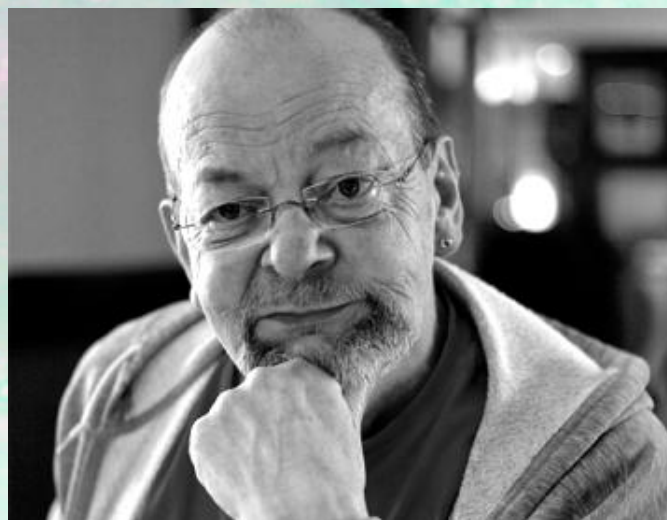
A screenshot from Doug Borntreger's video *Send Doug to Isadora Werkstatt Berlin 2016*

Of particular interest on the musical/audio/performance side will be 'Sound Analysis for Generative Visuals' and 'Extending your Body Beyond the Stage: Isadora for Dancers and Performers'. There are also intensive introductory courses for new users, and a workshop on new features. Swiss composer and sound artist Daniel Schorno will be presenting two mini lectures on 'Instrumentalising Physical Computing'.

Xenia Leydel, producer of Isador Werkstatt 2017, writes: 'We are thrilled to invite you to the second Isadora Werkstatt! We've expanded and shaped this year's schedule in response to your feedback. We think you'll see that this year's edition presents even more opportunities for learning and exchange. New items on the menu include an intensive tour of Isadora's brand-spanking-new features by her creator Mark Coniglio; courses on creating 3D particle systems; interfacing to third-party software, hardware, and Arduino; and how to get data from the Kinect v2 into Isadora.' [Read more ...](#)

German harpsichordist, conductor and musicologist Ludger Rémy was born in Kalkar on 4 February 1949. He studied harpsichord in Freiburg and then with Kenneth Gilbert in Paris.

He felt an obligation to meet the challenge set by German music theorist Johann Mattheson to combine theory and practice in music. Rémy's main research subject was seventeenth and eighteenth century German music, reviving discovered works by performing and recording them. This included the revival of Domenico Sarro's opera *Didone abbandonata* in a shortened concert version, in 2005.



Ludger Rémy (1949-2017)

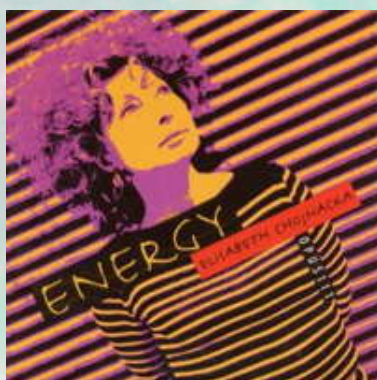
He founded Les Amis de Philippe (an orchestra named after Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach) in 1994, and recorded C P E Bach's concertos with them in 1995, directing from the harpsichord.

From 1995 until 1999 he directed the Telemann-Kammerorchester Michaelstein, recording Telemann's oratorio *Der Tod Jesu* with this group (plus soloists and the Magdeburger Kammerchor) in 1999. He made about seventy CD recordings, as both instrumentalist and conductor, and several of them have been awarded important prizes.

He taught at several German academies, and became Professor of Early Music at the Hochschule für Musik Carl Maria von Weber Dresden in 1998.

From 1995 until 2007 he was on the jury of the International Competition for Harpsichord and Fortepiano at the Flanders Festival in Bruges.

Ludger Rémy, one of the leading musicians active in the rediscovery and revival of early German music, died on 21 June 2017, aged sixty-eight. [Read more ...](#)



Elisabeth Chojnacka (1939-2017)

We also mark the passing of Jacques Charpentier, Philip Gossett, Paul Zukofsky, Malcolm Lipkin, Jeffrey Tate, David Lewiston and Elisabeth Chojnacka.

In other news, the programme for Trondheim Chamber Music Festival 2017 has been announced, Italian composer Clara Iannotta is to be published by Edition Peters, two works by John McCabe have been reissued as part of a boxed set of the complete recordings of Louis Frémaux, Warner

Music Group establishes a new Arts Music Division, and SOMM Recordings releases *Kathleen Ferrier Remembered* — previously unpublished recordings from two different sources.

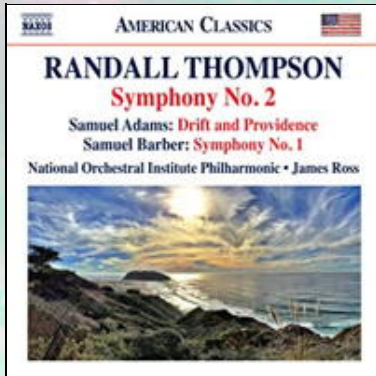
[Read our latest news](#)



John McCabe in the 1980s.
Photo © Reg Wilson

CD SPOTLIGHT – JOYOUS OCCASIONS

As we come to the end of the German-themed section of this newsletter, we spotlight some recent recordings from Naxos, the label founded from Hong Kong by German entrepreneur Klaus Heymann, and one from Capriccio, which began in Germany but is now run from Austria.



'... impassioned and committed performances.'

Geoff Pearce: 'Samuel Barber's Symphony No 1 of 1936 received mixed reception when it was first performed in Rome in the same year. The work is in one movement, broken into four sections. The first section contains some of that impassioned disquieting sweep sometimes found in Barber's music, but it abounds with youthful energy and dramatic gestures, and he certainly shows us that he is capable of writing a good tune.'

'The second section develops into a triumphant rather Sibelius-like fanfare from a rather lively pulsating *scherzo* in strings and then wind. This energetic music is very enjoyable and is a great achievement for a twenty-six-year-old, even though an elderly

Italian princess remarked during the first performance of this work: "That young man should have been strangled at birth".

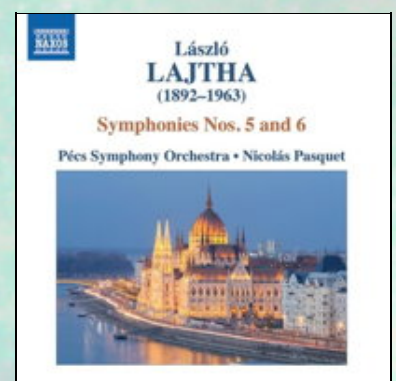
'The tender and beguiling third section starts off with an oboe solo over a carpet of muted strings and harp. Barber is a composer who can show great beauty, and this section is an example.

'The final section is a passacaglia placed in the lower strings, and in which all the orchestra eventually join in, and the work comes to a triumphant close.

'I regard this symphony as a masterwork and hope that the listener also finds it so.'
(*Randall Thompson: Symphony No 2; Samuel Adams: Drift and Providence; Samuel Barber: Symphony No 1*, Naxos 8.559822)

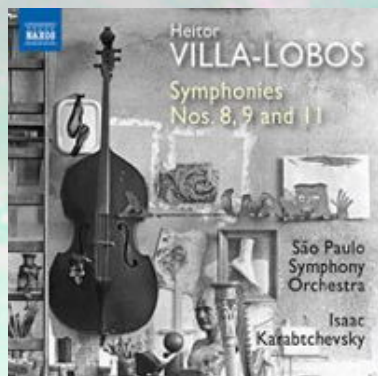
Geoff also listens to symphonies by George Antheil (*George Antheil: Over the Plains; Symphony No 4, '1942'; Symphony No 5, 'Joyous'*, Chandos CHAN 10941) and to symphonies by László Lajtha: 'Lajtha wrote nine symphonies, and evidently the odd numbered works are tragic, whilst the even ones are cheerful. Hence the Fifth Symphony, in two movements, and completed in 1952, is altogether different from No 6.

'There is a sense of dread and general unsettledness about the first movement, *Très modéré*, which starts with a rather grim folk-like melody, with brass and percussion interjections. This is not happy music, and even the quieter sections are wistful and devoid of much warmth. Brief chorale-like passages for winds and brass provide moments of relief, and some lyrical string passages bring calmer moods, in contrast to the uneasiness surrounding them.



'The fine Pécs Symphony Orchestra responds well to the direction of Nicolás Pasquet.'

'There is, however, nothing here that would put off most listeners. If you are a Bartók and Kodály fan, you should like this symphony, even though it is by no means derivative. There is some fascinating music here, much of it owing to the composer's deft orchestration, use of varying textures and a strong melodic sense.' (*László Lajtha: Symphonies Nos 5 and 6*, Naxos 8.573646)



'The São Paulo players respond with joyous enthusiasm to the rhythmic vitality and ingenious orchestration of these scores ...'

Gerald Fenech: 'Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959) is undoubtedly not only Brazil's greatest composer of the twentieth century, but also one of the world's leading composers of the same century. By 1940 he was already a shining light of South American music, and his career was strengthening at a faster rate than one could imagine. In the 1920s the composer was for the most part resident in Paris, where he had formulated a far-reaching vision of Brazil in his music. In 1944 he visited the USA for the first time, and the following year he conducted the Boston Symphony Orchestra. These events had a tremendous impact on Villa-Lobos, and the works performed in New York, Boston and Washington DC benefited from the symbolic capitals of these orchestras and became part of the composer's canon. Indeed, right up to the end of his life, Villa-Lobos alternated annual visits to Paris and America to conduct his own compositions, and the latter's recognition of his talents inspired the composer to create several new works following a stream of commissions.'

'The three symphonies on this recording were all written for American audiences and the trio were all premiered there. These are works unlike those Villa-Lobos composed in the 1920s and 30s where he was still under the influence of folk idioms and exotic effects so reminiscent of his country. This was a period where the composer was moving towards a more concise, sometimes neo-classical model.'

'The Eighth (1950) and Ninth (1952) share a transparent lightness of touch, while the Eleventh (1955) can be described as a work of undiluted charm and is the perfect introduction to the composer's later works.' (*Heitor Villa-Lobos: Symphonies Nos 8, 9 and 11*, Naxos, 8.573777)

'Born in 1841 in former Bohemia, Antonín Dvořák had to face many adversities before making his real breakthrough in the mid 1870s. From thereon until his death in 1904, his fame and popularity were deeply rooted on both sides of the Atlantic. Following the second performance of his *Stabat Mater* in England in 1884, the English were simply bowled over by the composer's music, and Dvořák, on his part, lauded the conditions accorded. In a very short time, calls for new choral works started pouring in, and the composer found himself working almost overtime to appease the public's demands. Indeed, the composer soon obliged with the cantata *The Spectre's Bride*.

'Written between May and November 1884 to a libretto based on a ballad by compatriot Karel Jaromír Erben, the work was premiered in its original form on 27 August 1885 in



'Meister and his Vienna forces capture the eerie atmosphere of the story with chilling effect, and his consistent attention to detail allows the soloists free reign to bring out all the expressiveness of the characters.'

Birmingham. Tradition has it that Dvořák himself conducted the piece with about a four-hundred-strong choir and an orchestra composed of 150 players. The cantata was widely acclaimed, and the many performances that followed both in Britain and the USA contributed much towards cementing Dvořák's fame in the English-speaking world.

'As with all of Erben's ballads, the story has a spooky thread throughout. A young woman is praying to the Virgin Mary for her lover to return, yet at the same time she wants to die. A male apparition claiming to be the desired lover leads the girl on a ghostly journey during the night during which she is made to drop the objects that protect her: a crucifix, a rosary and a prayer book. Arriving at a cemetery the woman suddenly realizes that she has just been following a vision. Contrite, she prays for forgiveness which is duly bestowed just as the rays of the sun break through the darkness proclaiming a new beginning.' (*Antonín Dvořák: The Spectre's Bride, Capriccio C5315*)



'Edward Gardner gives revelatory accounts of both works, always keeping in check the emotional element, but when the occasion warrants, he lets the music sweep us off our feet.'

Gerald also listens to music by Carbonelli (*Giovanni Stefano Carbonelli: Sonate da Camera Nos 1-6, Delphian DCD34194*), to new music for choir and very old instruments (*Set Upon the Rood — New Music for Choir and Ancient Instruments, Delphian DCD34154*), to piano music by Nikolai Peyko (*Nikolai Peyko: Complete Piano Music, Volume Two, Toccata TOCC 0105*), to French music for brass and piano (*Belle Nuit — sonate et rhapsodie — romance et mélodie, Navona NV5983*) and to orchestral music by Elgar: 'When Edward Elgar decided he was ready to embark on his first symphony in 1904, the British Empire was at the threshold of a new century. Indeed, many Englishmen surmised that the Empire was at the zenith of its glory, but things were starting to change, and Elgar saw it coming. His first attempt at the genre is undoubtedly a study in change and conflict, evolution and

transformation, social and musical. One might even interpret the work as a proclamation and premonition wrapped in one statement.

'The opening, with its *nobilmente* theme, transports the listener into a world of serene grandeur, but this is soon dispelled with the turbulence that follows. The music is buffeted back and forth and everything is about to be swept along on the winds of change with barely a moment to take stock of what might be gone forever. Elgar is sensing this decadence of an Empire, but he still sort of wants to remain basking in the military glory of his land, so along comes the "Scherzo", a seven-minute movement full of convulsive moments that are heavy and brash.

'But this soon melts away, and the transition into the slow movement, where the loftiest aspirations are celebrated, coaxes us into a world of heartfelt serenity that contrasts perfectly with what has gone before.

'In the *Finale*, Elgar sweeps us along in a torrent of optimistic if not strictly triumphant statements that culminate in the opening theme of the symphony, only now it is bedecked with a golden aura of extraordinary beauty.' (*Elgar: Symphony No 1; Introduction and Allegro, Chandos CHSA 5181*)

The late **Howard Smith** listened to Venezuelan piano music (*Clara Rodriguez — Music of Moisés Moleiro*, Nimbus NI 6104), to Telemann (*Telemann in the French Style — The Hanoverian Ensemble*, MSR Classics MS 1309), to British music for flute and piano (*By the River in Spring*, divine art dda25069) and to a catholic selection of music for brass quintet (*Mainstreet Brass — By Request — A Collection of Our Favorites*, MSR Classics MS 1290).

[Browse our latest CD reviews ...](#)

All our CD reviews are illustrated with sound samples, usually chosen by the author of each review. If you enjoy listening to these sound samples, you can often hear an extra sample on the 'CD information page' linked from the bottom of each review. An alternative way to reach these CD information pages is via our **New Releases** section, where you can also see information about recent CDs which haven't yet been reviewed, and follow the review cycle process for any particular CD.

DVD SPOTLIGHT — EXHILARATING MOZART



Gerald Fenech: 'Composed in 1775 to a libretto by Giuseppe Petroselli, *La Finta Giardiniera* is one of Mozart's best early creations, but being a comedy it has been overshadowed by such dramatic pieces as *Idomeneo* and *Lucio Silla*. The story is rather complicated with one romantic escapade overlapping another, but with a happily resolving finale and some truly glorious music lasting nearly three hours, this opera is certainly deserving of more frequent performances. Indeed, during these last three years it has enjoyed a mini revival, and the recording under review is one such occasion. Recorded in March 2014 at the Opera de Lille, this version has its pros and cons.

'Costumes and staging are indeed quite uninspiring, the latter only picking up slightly in Act III, and the story evolves in almost constant semi-darkness, a feature with nearly all modern French opera productions. Still what matters most is the interpretation, and I say it without hesitation; this is a humdinger of a version, passionately sung and acted and superbly conducted by Emmanuelle Haim. All the performers are unknown names but

each one gives his/her all, and their involvement in Mozart's sublime score is one of unreserved commitment and unbridled emotional enjoyment.' (*Mozart: La Finta Giardiniera*, Parlophone Records 08256 461664 5 9, 2 CDs)

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A SELECTION OF ANNIVERSARIES FOR THE SECOND HALF OF 2017

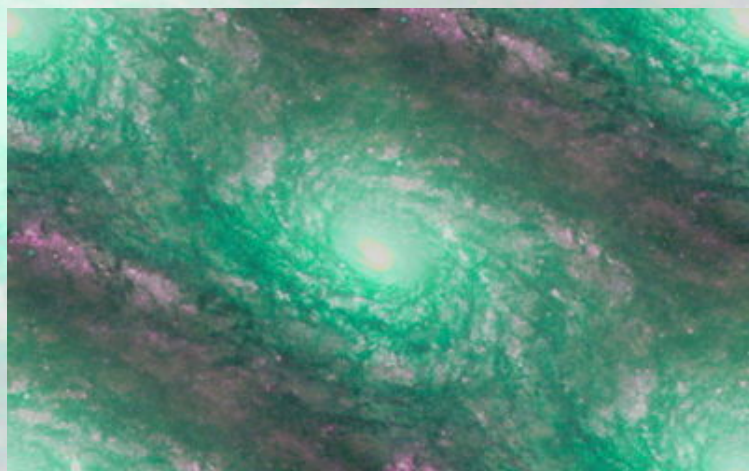
- 11 Jul 1937: George Gershwin died 80 years ago
- 11 Jul 1997: Carl Dolmetsch died 20 years ago
- 12 Jul 1937: Guy Woolfenden was born 80 years ago
- 15 Jul 1857: Carl Czerny died 160 years ago
- 17 Jul 1937: Gabriel Pierné died 80 years ago
- 20 Jul 1957: Gernot Wolfgang was born 60 years ago
- 23 Jul 1757: Domenico Scarlatti died 260 years ago
- 24 Jul 1917: Robert Farnon was born 100 years ago
- 27 Jul 1877: Erno Dohnányi was born 140 years ago
- 27 Jul 1867: Enrique Granados was born 150 years ago
- 04 Aug 1937: David Bedford was born 80 years ago
- 06 Aug 1917: Hidayat Inayat Khan was born 100 years ago
- 08 Aug 1942: Vardo Rumessen was born 75 years ago
- 10 Aug 1997: Conlon Nancarrow died 20 years ago
- 11 Aug 1937: Barbara Smith Conrad was born 80 years ago
- 14 Aug 1892: Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji was born 125 years ago
- 17 Aug 1917: Zhou Xiaoyan was born 100 years ago
- 28 Aug 1867: Umberto Giordano was born 150 years ago
- 01 Sep 1957: Dennis Brain died 60 years ago
- 05 Sep 1997: Georg Solti died 20 years ago
- 14 Sep 1737: Michael Haydn was born 280 years ago
- 16 Sep 1977: Maria Callas died 40 years ago
- 19 Sep 1992: Geraint Evans died 25 years ago
- 20 Sep 1957: Jean Sibelius died 60 years ago
- 22 Sep 1937: Jalal Zolfonun was born 80 years ago
- 23 Sep 1642: Giovanni Maria Bononcini was born 375 years ago
- 30 Sep 1937: Valentin Silvestrov was born 80 years ago
- 09 Oct 1867: Ignacy Feliks Dobrzynski died 150 years ago
- 10 Oct 1997: George Malcolm died 20 years ago
- 11 Oct 1837: Samuel Wesley died 180 years ago
- 17 Oct 1892: Herbert Howells was born 125 years ago
- 17 Oct 1917: Norman Leyden was born 100 years ago
- 01 Nov 1877: Roger Quilter was born 140 years ago
- 10 Nov 1942: Michel Tabachnik was born 75 years ago
- 15 Nov 1942: Daniel Barenboim was born 75 years ago
- 17 Nov 1997: Wilfred Josephs died 20 years ago
- 27 Nov 1867: Charles Koechlin was born 150 years ago
- 29 Nov 1797: Gaetano Donizetti was born 220 years ago
- 30 Nov 1957: Beniamino Gigli died 60 years ago
- 01 Dec 1937: Gordon Crosse was born 80 years ago
- 11 Dec 1967: Victor De Sabata died 50 years ago
- 12 Dec 1937: Philip Ledger was born 80 years ago
- 20 Dec 1942: Aleksey Nasedkin was born 75 years ago
- 23 Dec 1957: Eric Coates died 60 years ago
- 24 Dec 1942: Friedrich Klose died 75 years ago
- 26 Dec 1937: Ivor Gurney died 80 years ago
- 28 Dec 1937: Maurice Ravel died 80 years ago

NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE

We're building an archive of our monthly classical music newsletters. They've been published in this PDF format since September 2013, and you can download and read any of them from [this page](#).

NEWSLETTER OPENING AND BACKGROUND IMAGES

This newsletter's opening image of Augustusplatz, Leipzig, Germany, shows the Gewandhaus, the tall City-Hochhaus building and Leipzig University's Augusteum (© 2013 Jörgens.mi)



We have over 1,000 background images, and feature a different one each day on our website. This newsletter's background image, showing the structure of the universe, derives from an ESA/NASA image, from 2008 or earlier.

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.

The editorial and advertising copy deadlines for our August 2017 newsletter are both Monday 24 July 2017. [Details here](#).

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