



Best (and Worst) Opera and Classical Music

Steve Smith and Olivia Giovetti

Steve Smith, Music editor

1. **Mark Padmore and Paul Lewis** *Winterreise* (Harmonia Mundi)

No record was more controversial for its sheer beauty, nor more powerful for its psychological rigor, than this gripping Schubert account.

2. **David Lang** *The Little Match Girl Passion* (Harmonia Mundi)

The cool, eloquent shimmer of David Lang's Pulitzer Prize-winning choral parable came through in a gorgeous, atmospheric recording.

3. **Stile Antico** *Song of Songs* (Harmonia Mundi)

A vibrantly performed collection of 16th-century vocal works based on the Song of Solomon completed a hat trick for the invaluable Harmonia Mundi label.

4. **Joyce DiDonato** *Colbran, the Muse* (Virgin Classics)

Vivacious mezzo Joyce DiDonato brought technical dazzle and generous spirit to an utterly captivating recital of Rossini arias. [Colbran, the Muse review](#)

5. **JACK Quartet** *Xenakis String Quartets* (Mode)

A mix of audacity and assurance turned this confident young ensemble's survey of thorny Xenakis compositions into a genuine event.

6. **Alina Ibragimova** *Bach Sonatas and Partitas* (Hyperion)

A young Russian violinist, not widely known in the U.S., offered a deeply personal take on these canonical works that ranks among the very best.

7. **Nadia Sirota** *first things first* (New Amsterdam)

Violist Nadia Sirota cut straight to the heart in appealing pieces by a trio of fast-rising composers, for whom she served as both muse and champion.

8. **Mario Diaz de León** *Enter Houses Of* (Tzadik)

A startling new compositional voice exploded out of this disc, with wistful melodies haunting an abrasive mix of modernist integrity and anarchic noise.

9. **Christopher Tignor** *Core Memory Unwound* (Western Vinyl)

The Slow Six violinist and composer went intimate with this evanescent collection of dreamy electroacoustic reveries and remixes.

10. **Christopher Rouse** *Orchestral Music II* (BIS)

Conducting the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Alan Gilbert sequenced three emotionally potent works into a gripping journey through darkness to light.

Olivia Giovetti, contributing editor

1. Sonia Wieder-Atherton *Chants d'Est* (Naïve)

Songs of the displaced Mitteleuropeans found a new home on this fierce French cellist's debut solo CD. [Read more](#)

2. Gidon Kremer *Mozart: The Complete Violin Concertos* (Nonesuch)

The radicalism of the late 18th century was captured in Gidon Kremer's performance with the virtuosic Kremerata Baltica.

3. Joyce DiDonato *Colbran, the Muse* (Virgin Classics)

While no basis for comparison exists, it's easy to believe that the sumptuous Joyce DiDonato is the reincarnation of 19th-century diva (and Rossini's wife) Isabella Colbran.

[Colbran, the Muse review](#)

4. The Sixteen *Coronation Anthems* (Coro)

Harry Christophers & Co. gave new life to Handelian works in time for the 250th anniversary of the composer's death.

5. Victoire *A Door Into the Dark* (eMusic)

This may well have been the year of new-music darling Missy Mazzoli, and her all-star, all-female quintet's debut EP left us wanting more. [Read more](#)

6. Mark Padmore and Paul Lewis *Winterreise* (Harmonia Mundi)

Mark Padmore's rich tenor and Paul Lewis's luscious playing warmed up the chill of Schubert's song cycle.

7. Grant Llewellyn *American Spectrum* (BIS)

Were Christopher Rouse's multifaceted, effusive *Friandises* the only thing here, it would still make the list.

8. Monteverdi *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (Decca DVD)

Illuminated by conductor Emmanuelle Haïm, Monteverdi was in good hands with Danielle de Niese and Alice Coote.

9. Nadia Sirota *first things first* (New Amsterdam)

Quicksilver violist Nadia Sirota made new works by Nico Muhly, Judd Greenstein and Marcos Balter sing.

10. Dmitri Hvorostovsky *Tchaikovsky: Romances* (Delos)

Siberian tiger Dmitri Hvorostovsky returned to a set of Tchaikovsky songs he sang two decades ago—and he's never sounded sexier.