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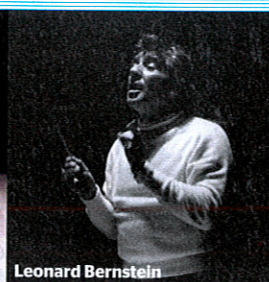
Pierre-Laurent Aimard



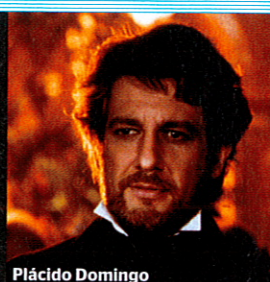
Alfred Brendel



Alicia de Larrocha



Leonard Bernstein



Plácido Domingo

# The Artists' Choice

Revealed, the 250 greatest classical recordings, as selected for Gramophone by more than 30 leading musicians. Below, contributing editor and reviewer **Rob Cowan** muses on why artists and critics might choose differently


**D**o you play yourself? There can't be a music critic in the land who hasn't at one time or another been asked that very question. As if it matters. Do crime novelists need to be criminals, or theatre critics playwrights? I pose the question because so often lay listeners assume that performers and critics hear music in the same way, and very often they don't. Being a musician is not the same as being a performer: there are many competent amateur players who lack even an iota of musicianship, while attentive listeners who aren't endowed with the technique or the coordination necessary to achieve an adequate performance often feel the music more acutely than those who actually play it. OK, this may sound high-handed to a fault, the defensive credo of a musically ungifted scribe, but search the back issues of *Gramophone* and you'll find that virtually all the most perceptive commentary on music has been written by "musicians" who either don't play, or if they do, don't play in public.

Listening itself is an art, and when, as a music journalist or critic, you set out to interview performing musicians about repertoire or about other performers, you will very quickly be shown the door if your own musical intuition is found wanting. And a musician doesn't need to agree with you on specific performers or recordings. The common ground that musical performers and critics share concerns the basic essentials of interpretative genius, not least a discernible musical personality, respect for – rather than slavish adherence to – the score, a musical sense of timing, a feeling for period and appropriate style and, more vital than anything, that indefinable quality that signals a symbiotic rapport between the performer and the composer. That's an area where sensitive critics and musicians nearly always agree: you sense the glow of recognition at the mere idea of (to mention just a few of the miracles chosen by our artists) Schnabel's or Furtwängler's Beethoven, Fischer-Dieskau singing Schubert's *Winterreise* or the Callas/de Sabata *Tosca*.

Some choices are rather telling, or at least they seem so to me. For example, Hilary Hahn opting for Jascha Heifetz's earlier, pre-war recordings of Saint-Saëns and Sarasate showpieces rather than his more pungent, post-war versions. The reason I say that is because to my ears those Thirties

78s more approximate Hahn's own predominantly lyrical style than Heifetz's later recordings where intensity levels are pushed up a rung or two. And what of Jean-Efflam Bavouzet choosing Carlos Kleiber's *Tristan* over, say, Furtwängler's? Could that be something to do with the performance's combination of rarefied atmosphere and textual transparency, edging *Tristan* just a little in the direction of Debussy's *Pelléas*? Yefim Bronfman mentions Beethoven's string quartets with the Budapest Quartet and, yes, there too I imagine parallels: tonal solidity, interpretative directness and an obvious respect for musical form. That's one of the bonuses of talking to artists who are eager to share their responses to great recordings: you suddenly understand so much more about how their minds work, musically speaking, because by imagining those performances in your mind's ear, you're communing on a level beyond the reach of words.

But "musicians as critics" is also at times a rather complex issue. I've sometimes wondered whether when certain musicians review recordings, either privately or in print, they harbour an unconscious agenda, justifying their own technical weaknesses by promoting the idea of musicianship "that matters so much more than technique". Which might explain the occasional oddball recommendation. No accusing fingers, I promise!

Past conversations with artists often have proved revealing: I recall Christopher Hogwood's fascination for the recordings of Willem Mengelberg (Bernard Haitink's was perhaps more to be expected), and Trevor Pinnock's admiration for Beecham. This sensation of meaningful sharing is much the same as when critics talk to like-minded colleagues: the idea is to focus an authentic reaction. But where a performer incorporates those experiences into an interpretation, we have to write about them, though there are plenty of verbally eloquent musicians around – Alfred Brendel, for example. Which brings me to one final point: what artists experience when they read critics on their own performances and whether that in turn colours their attitude to the writings of those same critics on other performers. The old cliché about "it all being a matter of personal taste" still holds, but it's our responsibility to express that "taste" in such a way that you will always know if it doesn't correspond with your own. That's surely the hub of a *Gramophone* review. 



## Dvořák

Piano Trio No 3

**Beaux Arts Trio** Philips 454 259-2PM2

Georgiously lyrical and integrated playing from the Beaux Arts Trio

## Elgar

Symphony No 1. Falstaff

**LSO / Edward Elgar** EMI 567296-2

Restless, probing interpretations in the composer's knowing hands

## Elgar

Violin Concerto. Cello Concerto

**Yehudi Menuhin vn Beatrice Harrison vc**

**LSO; New SO / Edward Elgar** EMI 217575-2

Essential for Elgarians, two inspired performances

## Elgar

Enigma Variations

**LSO / Pierre Monteux** Decca 452 303-2DCS

Monteux's famous *Enigma* with LSO forces still feels fresh and revealing

## Elgar

The Dream of Gerontius

**Sols incl Janet Baker; Hallé Orch /**

**John Barbirolli** EMI 573579-2

Janet Baker is magnificent in this moving *Gerontius*

## Enescu

Oedipe

**Monte Carlo PO / Lawrence Foster**

EMI 754011-2

A starry reclamation for Enescu's epic opera

## Falla

El sombrero de tres picos

**Philh Orch / Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos**

EMI 567587-2

Theatricality abounds in this Spanish journey

## Fauré

Choral Works

**Chorale Gabriel Fauré** Vox Unique ACD8214 (LP)

Fauré's choral works reimagined for boys' choir and organ

## Franck

Violin Sonata

**Jacqueline du Pré vc Daniel Barenboim pf**

EMI 586233-2

Intimate music-making from du Pré and Barenboim

## Goldenthal

Fire Water Paper: A Vietnam Oratorio

**Pacific SO / Carl St Clair** Sony SK68368

A spectacular, heartfelt Vietnam memorial from Copland pupil Elliott Goldenthal

## Grieg. Schumann

Piano Concertos

**Leon Fleisher pf Cleveland Orch / George Szell**

Sony MPK44849

For many, the finest accounts of these works

## Handel

Concerti grossi, Op 6

**AAM / Andrew Manze** Harmonia Mundi HMU90 7228/9

Alert, alive and light-footed, Manze and the players clearly have a ball

## Haydn

'Paris' Symphonies

**Tonkünstler Orchestra / Kristjan Järvi**

Preisler PR90765

Rich-toned recordings from the Musikverein

## P Henry

Apocalypse de Jean

Philips 837 923/5LY (LP)

A fine example of the music of French electronic-school composer Pierre Henry

## Humperdinck

Hänsel und Gretel

**Sols incl Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau; Munich RO /**

**Kurt Eichhorn** RCA 74321 25281-2

Brilliant playing in a set often unfairly overlooked

## Janáček

The Cunning Little Vixen

**Sols incl Lucia Popp; VPO / Charles Mackerras**

Decca 475 8670DOR2

Mackerras is incomparable in this repertoire

## Josquin Desprez

Masses

**A Sei Voci**

Naïve E8507; 8560; 8639; 8809

A Sei Voci explore Josquin for the Naïve label

## Knussen

Horn Concerto. Flourish with Fireworks, etc

**Barry Tuckwell hn London Sinf / Oliver Knussen**

DG 474 322-2GH

Bewitching music from composer Oliver Knussen

## Kodály

Cello Sonatas

**János Starker vc** Delos DE1015

Kodály was a great János Starker admirer and the cellist here shows why

## Korngold

Between Two Worlds

**Berlin RSO / John Mauceri** Decca 444 170-2DH

Korngold's film score turned into a tone-poem and evocatively conducted by John Mauceri

## Lassus

Lamentations of Jeremiah

**Ens Vocal Européen / Philippe Herreweghe**

HMA195 1299

A fine display of intense, mesmeric contemplation

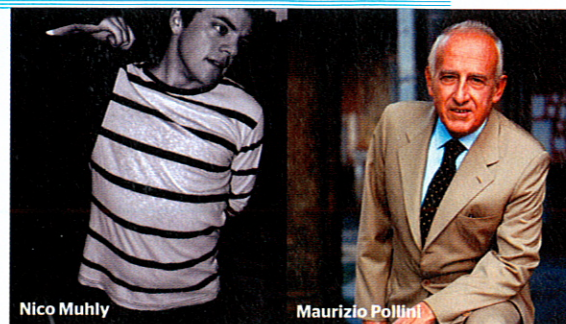
## Liszt

A Faust Symphony

**Hans-Peter Blochwitz ten Budapest Fest Orch /**

**Iván Fischer** Philips 454 460-2PH

Brilliantly alert, with a touch of Satanic wit



Nico Muhly

Maurizio Pollini

## Liszt

A Faust Symphony

**Siegfried Jerusalem ten Chicago SO /**

**Georg Solti** Decca 466 751-2DF2

Beauty, power, excitement and lyrical singing

## Liszt

Totentanz

**Alfred Brendel pf LPO / Bernard Haitink**

475 7188PX2

Brendel brings dignity and tension to Liszt

## Mahler

Symphonies

**Israel PO, NYPO, LSO / Leonard Bernstein**

Sony 88697 45369-2

Bernstein in earth-shaking form with the Israel Phil

## Mahler

Symphonies

**Bavarian RSO / Rafael Kubelík** DG 463 738-2GB10

Kubelík, one of the first and among the finest Mahler advocates

## Mahler

Symphonies Nos 1-4

**NYPO / Leonard Bernstein** DG 477 5174GB6

Bernstein again, this time with the polish of the New York Philharmonic

## Mahler

Symphony No 4

**Judith Raskin sop Cleveland Orch / George Szell**

Sony SBK46535

Deep feeling in one of Szell's finest hours

## Mahler

Symphony No 4

**San Francisco SO / Michael Tilson Thomas**

SFS 821936 0004-2

A Bernstein pupil in dramatic vein and great sound

## Mahler

Symphony No 5

**VPO / Leonard Bernstein** DG 477 6334GGP

Bernstein had to persuade the Austrians to love Mahler, with fabulous results

## Mahler

Symphony No 5

**Bavarian RSO / Rafael Kubelík**

Audite AUDITE95 465

Kubelík in the studio is great, live he's even better