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Philadelphians' classical richness, depth captured on discs



Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducts Tchaikovsky with the Rotterdam Philharmonic.



GALLERY: Philadelphians' classical richness, depth captured on discs

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The Inquirer For years at a time, classical Philadelphians go missing from the recording industry - and then they return amid a critical mass that couldn't have been predicted.

Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia will eventually have 100 or so concerts available for download and streaming. Though the Philadelphia Orchestra's recorded debut with music director Yannick Nézet-Séguin won't be out until fall, he has major discs with his other two orchestras (Montreal Metropolitan and Rotterdam Philharmonic). The late Wolfgang Sawallisch is now the subject of an eight-disc box set of live recordings. Composers Michael Hersch and Jennifer Higdon are in evidence, and sound archivist Ward Marston keeps finding more dead singers we need to hear.

Most artistically important of all these is *I want to live* (Innova) by the female version of the Crossing choir, full of new works by David Lang, William Brooks, and Paul Fowler. Just about every imaginable approach to sung text is on display here, as voices tumble and sail over one another with counterpoint and syncopation few other vocal groups

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Opera Philadelphia's music director, Corrado Rovaris, is the catalyst in *La Salustia* (Arthaus), a DVD of this rarely heard first opera by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi. At first, *La Salustia* dutifully meets the baroque-opera status quo. But whenever the complex plot reveals a character's inner state, the composer's distinctive voice emerges unmistakably with lyricism that borders on sublime.

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With the Accademia Barocca orchestra, Rovaris paces the piece so well you're happy to go where it takes you. Everything about the Juliette Deschamps production (at Teatro Pergolesi in Jesi, Italy) is handsome: The arched sets, singing, costumes, and even performers. It's not for everybody but fine for what it is.

On other conductors: Nézet-Séguin's Montreal outing with the Bruckner *Symphony No. 6* (ATMA) isn't his greatest recording of this composer, but the symphony itself is a bit of a runt. Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6* with the Rotterdam Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon) shows Nézet-Séguin truly revitalizing this oft-heard work through the coloristically saturated lens of Ravel, though with rhythmic acuity that more readily shows the subversiveness of the second movement's waltz. Though it will not be officially released here until 2014, this disc can be found as a Japanese import on Amazon.com.

Sawallisch has been curiously absent from the historic-recording market, but a new eight-disc set on the Profil label (out last month) shows the late Philadelphia Orchestra music director in top form with fine soloists, excellent radio sound, and core repertoire: Mozart symphonies, Haydn's *The Seasons*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, and Orff's *Antigonae*. Essential Sawallisch.

The Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia downloads are too numerous to list, but a sample reveals excellent sound and smart performances. Particularly fascinating is how conductor laureate Ignat Solzhenitsyn and current music director Dirk Brossé access historically informed performance influences in vastly different ways. In Beethoven, Brossé has buoyance, Solzhenitsyn has noble severity - and extremes not often heard in typical studio-made recordings. Then there are the new works: Steven Mackey's neo-Sibelian *Tonic* just might be great.

The composers: Higdon's evolution is hugely apparent on two chamber music discs. Her faster, more hectic early works on *The Music of Jennifer Higdon* (Albany) feel like



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Hindemith, with the composer writing for overlooked instruments all well, though a bit dutifully.

An Exaltation of Larks (Bridge) has more recent, harmonically luxurious discs played by the Lark Quartet and friends, with *Scenes from a Poet's Dreams* and *Light Refracted* showing how beautifully Higdon writes for piano. Particularly in *Poet's Dreams*, veteran Gary Graffman reminds you what a fine pianist he is.

Hersch has a CD/DVD combination set titled *The Sudden Pianist* (Innova) with the composer playing a suite from his fearless two-hour piano work *The Vanishing Pavilions* - always well worth hearing. The 30-minute documentary *A Sudden Pianist* by Richard Anderson captures the composer/pianist's brainy charisma, but only a sliver of his personality.

The singers: Ward Marston's five-disc box set *The Complete Arthur Endreze*, on his own Marston label, initially seems awfully quixotic: Though the Chicago-born Endreze was the baritone of choice in pre-World War II Paris, is he worth five discs? Yes. His slim, elegant sound is a revelatory change from beefier Verdians and woolier Wagnerites.

Of all these discs, the purest enjoyment comes from soprano Ailyn Perez's *Poeme d'un jour* (Arthaus). If you love this Academy of Vocal Arts graduate for her emotional generosity more than her fancy coloratura technique, you'll hear it in these songs by Hahn, Faure, and de Falla.

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