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editors'  
top  
picks:  
from  
Bartók to  
Beck,  
essential  
music  
we can't  
live  
without

# records to die for

**t**he value of music as a commodity, and as one of mankind's wonders, has never been in such flux. Retail record shops are dying, the former major labels are focused on making records for kids (the same kids they're suing), and the business overall remains wedded to an incredibly short view (get a hit or get out), but the music itself continues to trickle through to those who want it—and, yes, on some level would die without it.

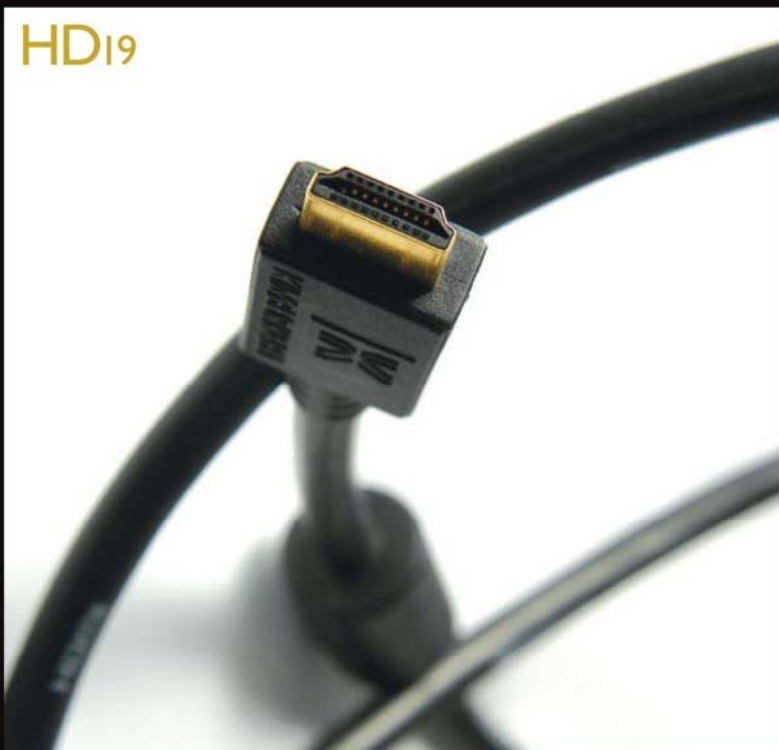
If change exhilarates rather than terrifies you, the collapse of the traditional music-business model has made for a very exciting time. Like wine grapes made tenacious by rocky soil, adversity has added new fuel to musical fires. Musicians, liberated from the clutches of record labels, are intoxicated by new freedoms. Fewer rules and fewer expenses mean that imaginations have the freedom to experiment and hopefully grow a career. When artists work for themselves instead of companies that also make perfume, electronics, or whiskey, they're a tad more motivated to embrace possibility. Independent labels, seeing the weakness of the old major-label goliaths, have leapt into the breach, and many of them are now healthier than ever. Consumers who are willing to surf the Web, keep their ears open, and type their credit-card numbers into online stores, can now obtain more music than they can probably ever listen to. And if you're a music collector, this is a golden age: many musicians have begun to build their audiences by releasing limited-edition EPs, live sets, and website-only recordings—in other words, things the major labels should have been doing for decades.

Just a few years ago, the changes that are now occurring would have been dismissed as pure fantasy. The Eagles selling a new two-disc set exclusively at Wal-Mart, in ecologically sound packaging, for \$11.99? A portable digital device as *the* way people store and consume music? It's a new world, and where it will all lead no one knows—yet. But fear not: though the ways we receive, amass, and listen to music will never be the same, the music itself shows no signs of going away.

Against this very molten backdrop, we present our annual compilation of essential listening experiences, guilty pleasures, and really scary (or hilarious) glimpses into what makes *Stereophile's* writing crew tick. Enjoy, keep the faith, and by all means *listen!*—**Robert Baird**

**Note:** If a recording listed here has previously been reviewed in *Stereophile*, whether in "Record Reviews" or in past editions of "Records To Die For," the volume and number of the pertinent issue appear in parentheses at the end of the review. For example, a listing of "(XXX-9)" means that a review of the recording appeared in Vol.30 No.9 (September 2007).

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**ANAT COHEN: Poetica**

Anat Cohen, clarinet; Jason Lindner, piano; Omer Avital, bass; Daniel Freedman, drums, percussion; Gilad, percussion. With: Antoine Silvermann, Belinda Whitney, violin; David Creswell, viola; Danny Miller, cello.  
Anzic 1301 (CD). 2007. Anat Cohen, Omer Avital, prods.; Leon Dorsey, eng. DDD? TT: 65:13

This recording is jazz saxophonist Anat Cohen's first outing on her original instrument, the clarinet. And, oh, what an original voice that is! I have never heard a clarinetist whose articulation, phrasing, and use of dynamics and portamento more closely resemble those of the human voice. Cohen's sense of melodic shaping flows like a narrative, hence the album's title. Her chamber ensemble, augmented by a string quartet, covers a wide range of Cohen originals, Brazilian and Israeli folk songs, and even a Coltrane tune.

**KALMAN RUBINSON**

**GOLIJOV: Oceana,<sup>1</sup> Tenebrae,<sup>2</sup>**

**Three Songs<sup>3</sup>**

Dawn Upshaw,<sup>3</sup> soprano; Luciana Souza,<sup>1</sup> vocals; Soloists,<sup>1</sup> Gwinnet Young Singers;<sup>1</sup> Kronos Quartet & guests;<sup>2</sup> Robert Spano,<sup>1, 3</sup> Atlanta Symphony<sup>1, 3</sup> & Chorus<sup>1</sup>

Deutsche Grammophon B0009069-02 (CD). 2007. Sid McLauchlan,<sup>1, 3</sup> Judith Sherman,<sup>2</sup> prods.; Stephan Flock,<sup>1, 3</sup> Judith Sherman,<sup>2</sup> engs. DDD. TT: 60:42

**GOLIJOV: Ainadamar**

Dawn Upshaw, soprano; Kelley O'Connor, mezzo-soprano; Jessica Rivera, soprano; Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony, Women of the Atlanta Symphony Chorus  
Deutsche Grammophon B0006429 (CD). 2006. Valerie Gross, Sid McLauchlan, prods.; Stephan Flock, Wolf-Dieter Karwatky, engs. DDD. TT: 80:15

The music of Osvaldo Golijov is a great discovery for me. The recent origins of these works, all but one composed in the last decade, should not be off-putting—Golijov is a thoroughly romantic and mostly tonal composer. His tremendous lyrical talent is clearly voiced in his works for the female voice, and expressed in styles ranging from the tango to the Yiddish lament (*Three Songs*). Add to that his talent at integrating emotionally communicative sound effects into the music, as most strikingly demonstrated by the use of a rifle barrage as rhythmic underpinning for the execution scene in *Ainadamar*. Even in his strictly instrumental music, such as the *Tenebrae* for strings, Golijov's melodies have a vocal quality. Beyond all such analysis, Golijov tells stories with a wide array of voices and instruments, and with the syn-copation of the tango and the Latin flavor of the guitar, whether explicit or implied. This is marvelous stuff.

The sound is good but not outstanding—not in the class of what Telarc gets from the Atlanta Symphony on their SACDs. Nonetheless, the all-important voices are beautifully rendered, and there's sufficient impact from the varied percussion instruments to support the drama.

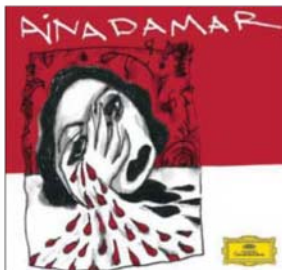
**MOZART: Symphonies 19, 20, 21, 26**

Adám Fischer, Danish Radio Sinfonietta  
DaCapo 6.220541 (SACD/CD). 2007. John Frandsen, Karl Bjerre Skibsted, prods.; Lars C. Bruun, eng. DDD. TT: 67:55

**MOZART: Violin Concertos 3, 4, 5**

Marianne Thorsen, violin; Oyvind Grimse, Trondheim Solistene  
2L 2L38SACD (SACD/CD twin pack). 2006. Morten Lindberg, prod., eng.; Hans Peter L'Orange, eng. DDD. TT: 79:40

In these phenomenally lovely and original performances of some of Mozart's middle-period symphonies and violin concertos, conductor Adám Fischer and the Danish Radio Sinfonietta emphasize the works' classical structures, while



**"Golijov uses a rifle barrage as rhythmic underpinning for the execution scene in *Ainadamar*."**

**—KALMAN RUBINSON**

Oyvind Grimse and the Trondheim Solistene play with remarkable flexibility. Each reveals a truly Mozartean flare; playing them back to back, one feels that their individual personalities serve the music with fidelity. Fischer gives each symphony its due without, like Harnoncourt's more generic presentations, overdramatizing them. Violinist Marianne Thorsen, going up against Julia Fischer's ongoing Pentatone series of the Mozart concertos (and directly in No.5), finds many subtle and delightful ways to make these familiar works voyages of discovery.

The sound is excellent in both sets, but subtly different. The symphonies sound as if recorded in a small concert hall with a warm but open acoustic, which allows the balance of the strings and brass to be simultaneously contrasted and consistent. Indeed, despite the small forces and classical scoring, the perceived dynamic range is great. The concertos, on the other hand, were recorded in a small church with a more close-up sound; the venue provides its warmth more in the ambience than in the direct instrumental sound. I'm addicted to both sets.

**LELAND RUCKER**

**DAN ZANES: Cool Down Time**

Private Music 0100582133-2 (CD). 1995. Tchad Blake, prod., eng. AAD. TT: 40:11

Zanes headed the nervous, shaky Del Fuegos back in the days before *alternative* was a marketing term, but you'd never know it from this disarming, low-key affair, which loosely documents his alcoholic crash landing, recovery, transition back to the real world, and, finally, a second career as a children's entertainer. The sound of this stripped-down trio of Zanes, Mitchell Froom, and Jerry Marotta evokes glimmers of everyone from Booker T and the MG's to the Band. The soulful, bluesy grooves are solid, and Zanes handles admittedly difficult subject matter with humor ("Tested," "Rough Spot") and poignancy ("If You Live," "No Sky," "Carefully").

**THE ROLLING STONES:**

**Out of Our Heads**

ABCKO 882 290-2 (SACD/CD). 1965/2002. Andrew Loog Oldham, prod.; David Hassinger, eng. AAD. TT: 28:09

It is a thing of magic to hear the moment when five individual musicians become a band: when the spark ignites, when the whip comes down. That's how *Out of Our Heads* feels. Not to say that the Rolling Stones hadn't shown plenty of promise on earlier singles and albums, but then they were mostly mimicking their heroes, for whom they were, out of their heads. But something happens here: It's the moment of inspiration, the point at which they take control of any song

they cover, and at which Mick Jagger and Keith Richards' songwriting begins to come together. Richards said recently that the Stones didn't really nail "Satisfaction," that it took Otis Redding to finally get it right. I guess I can forgive them for the clumsiness of the hit single that changed their careers.



**"It's a thing of magic to hear the moment when five individual musicians become a band: when the spark ignites, when the whip comes down."**

**—LELAND RUCKER**