

Classical

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Mozart: *Così fan tutte*. Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Nézet-Séguin. (96/24) HDtracks.com

When Yannick Nézet-Séguin, 38-year-old music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, takes the stage with a bunch of opera singers, the visual effect is pretty amusing. Opera singers are large people and Nézet-Séguin is a compactly muscular 5'5". Mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato dubbed him "Mighty Mouse," but the label fits as much for the conductor's energizing performances as for his size. *Così fan tutte's* irresistible good spirits—a never-gets-old slant on the Battle of the Sexes—takes off the moment Nézet-Séguin hits the Overture's Allegro and never looks back. The conductor effectively contrasts the feminine and the masculine strains inherent in Mozart's music: just listen to the musical change of gears from Scene 1 to Scene 2 in the first act. YNS has a terrific cast to work with—Miah Persson, Angela Brower, Mojca Erdmann, Rolando Villazón, Adam Plachetka, and Alessandro Corbelli—but it's their collaboration in the many ensemble numbers that makes this *Così* treasurable. The brilliant, buoyant, nuanced sound matches the performance perfectly.

Wagner: *Good Friday Music*. Parsifal Synthesis. Houston Symphony, Stokowski. (192/24) HDtracks.com

Leopold Stokowski may ultimately be remembered as much for his orchestral transcriptions as for his flamboyant podium demeanor or for shaking hands with Mickey at the beginning of *Fantasia*. Stokowski's treatments of other composers' music was intended not so much to "improve" it as to amplify its emotional power. His "symphonic synthesis" of Act III of Wagner's *Parsifal* distills the essence of that massive work without trivializing it. (Stokowski also performs *Parsifal's Good Friday Music*

pretty much as Wagner wrote it, with the vocal parts simply omitted.) The Houston Symphony wasn't The Fabulous Philadelphians but it was completely under the spell of its charismatic leader and makes some beautiful sounds. The 1959 Everest recording, supervised by Bert Whyte, is full and richly textured. Though charging \$25 for a 28-minute program borders on larceny.

Zia. Del Sol Quartet. (96/24) HDtracks.com

The Del Sol String Quartet is yet another young chamber group with technique to burn who's decided to leave the Beethoven and Brahms to others and devote itself to modern music and to repertoire that looks beyond a "Western" orientation. Gabriela Lena Frank's *Leyendas: An Andean Walkabout* comprises six short movements inspired by Chilean native culture. The open fifths of Andean pipes are occasionally apparent but, mostly, an exotic aura is created by inventive scoring—harmonics, pizzicatos, and *sul ponticello* effects can sometimes be heard simultaneously. Lou Harrison's *String Quartet Set* harkens back to a medieval European esthetic, with excursions to Turkey. José Evangelista's *Spanish Garland* incorporates Iberian folk music; Iranian composer Reza Vali's *Calligraphy No. 6* is crabbed and concentrated; and *Fast Blue Village 2* by the Uzbekistan-born Elena Kats-Chernin is exhilarating Schubert-meets-minimalism-meets-bluegrass. The sound is vivid and dynamic.

Guardian Angel. Rachel Podger. (DSD multichannel) ChannelClassics.com

You're thinking: "Do I *really* want to spend \$34 on a DSD multichannel recording of a solo violin playing baroque music?" You bet you do. If approaching reality is one of your goals as an audiophile—it shouldn't be your only goal, of course—this will be one of your closest approaches

yet. Jared Sacks recorded Rachel Podger in a Haarlem church, the artist 20 feet from an array of five microphones, two pointed away from the player to provide the surround channels for the 5.0 mix. Podger's Genoese instrument illuminates the space, her sound emanating from a fairly diffuse area in front of the listening position. The soloist's audible breathing is much more specifically localized than the musical sound—an utterly believable aural phenomenon. The program is sublime and surprisingly varied. A Bach flute sonata is fluently relaxed while two minor-key sonatas by Tartini are more melancholic. Three rhapsodic pieces by Nicola Matheis, a sonata by Johann Georg Pisendel, the last of Biber's "Mystery Sonatas," and an upbeat gigue by Antonio Montanari complete the 80-plus-minute recital.

Beppe: *Remote Galaxy*. Philharmonia Orchestra, Ashkenazy. (DSD multichannel) 2L.no

In less politically correct times, Flint Juventino Beppe would've been labeled an "idiot savant." Beppe, diagnosed with Asperger's and Tourette's syndromes, has had no formal musical training, yet here's a recording of several symphonic works—not his first, by a long shot—with a major orchestra led by a world-famous conductor. The music is tonal and melodic, but derivative of absolutely no one; it's spectacular without seeming gaudy or even cinematic (although I could imagine sections from several of these pieces accompanying a yet-unborn Tim Burton film). 2L's multichannel sound is hard to characterize as well. A large orchestra is traditionally deployed with breathtaking width and depth and then, suddenly, an instrument will loom up—a harp, snare drum, bells—and hover in the air. One thing's for sure: the intoxicating soundfield 2L creates will fill every square inch of your room. **tas**