

from Bach's Partita No. 2 in C minor on this DVD I was reminded of what Argerich and the late Glenn Gould have in common; a love of speed and crisp articulation. The difference is that Argerich has always loved to play in public, if only on her own terms. She appears occasionally with selected orchestras and conductors but rarely gives a recital. She prefers to play chamber music with her friends. Fortunately, her friends are among the musical elite and the results are frequently memorable.



On this DVD recorded at concerts given at the Verbier Festival in Switzerland in 2007 and 2008 the highlights for me were an intense performance of the Grieg Cello Sonata by Argerich and Mischa Maisky, and an exciting and probing Shostakovich Quintet with Argerich, Maisky, Joshua Bell, Henning Kraggerud and Yuri Bashmet. At one point Maisky brought his bow down with such passion I thought he was going to saw his cello in half! Argerich smudged a few notes here and there but played with such power and exhilaration it didn't matter in the slightest.

Elsewhere there is a wonderful performance of Lutoslawski's Variations on a Theme of Paganini with Argerich and Gabriel Montero, a young protégé well-known in Montreal. A recent visitor to Montreal and the Knowlton Festival, Stephen Kovacevich, plays some four-hand Mozart with Argerich. The young French violinist Renaud Capuçon is not quite a match in Bartók's Sonata No. 1 for Gidon Kremer, Argerich's frequent partner in such repertoire, but he is very good. All in all, this is about as good as it gets for those who love inspired music making at the highest level. **PER**

Fred Jonny Berg: Flute Mystery

Emily Beynon, flute; Philharmonia Orchestra/Vladimir Ashkenazy
 2L 58SABD Blu-ray Disc & Hybrid SACD (59 min each)
 ★★★★★☆ \$\$\$\$



'2L' (or '2L Audiophile Reference Recordings') is an enterprising young label based in Norway which has come up with something completely different. With the aim of presenting the music of an up-and-coming Norwegian composer, Fred Jonny Berg (b. 1973) to a worldwide audience and in the most advanced audio formats, 2L presents a double-disc package: Blu-ray audio and a separate Hybrid (playable on any CD deck) SACD. This is intended to capitalize on the high definition audio capability of Blu-ray, with SACD as a high-tech alternative and good old CD for the technically moribund. It is sensational in all formats. If your television happens to

be illuminated when the Blu-ray disc is loaded up, you will get an image of the track listing and an animated background but no distracting performance footage.

Fred Jonny Berg is a major musical discovery. It would be necessary to rewind to the 1940s and Malcolm Arnold to find an emerging composer of such exceeding promise. His compositions are confidently tonal, fluently melodious and possessed of virtually supernatural penetrative power. The flute works receive achingly beautiful, indeed enchanting, performances from Emily Beynon and the Philharmonia under Vladimir Ashkenazy (Berg conducts the other pieces). This set is recommended for any collector seeking the refined side of contemporary music.

2L has also produced an album entitled *The Nordic Sound* in the same format with 19 track selections from their catalogue. The violin and double bass concertos of Ståle Kleiberg (b. 1958) are the subject of a 2L audio release (2L59SACD). Kleiberg's music reflects the same exalted quality as that of Fred Jonny Berg. **WSH**

Gay: The Beggar's Opera

Roger Daltrey, Stratford Johns, Patricia Routledge, Bob Hoskins, Carol Hall; The English Baroque Soloists/Sir John Eliot Gardiner
 Directed by Jonathan Miller
 Arthaus Musik DVD 102 001 (135 min)
 ★★★★★☆ \$\$\$\$

This is a sort of anti-opera created by John Gay and the composer Johann Pepusch in 1728. Instead of rich folks and mythological figures, as in popular operas by Handel and others, poor people and criminals are the leading characters here. In the twentieth century Bertold Brecht and Kurt Weill modernized the same basic story in the *Threepenny Opera*.



Jonathan Miller directed this production for the BBC in 1983. It is brilliantly done with Roger Daltrey, the lead singer of the rock band The Who, surprisingly sympathetic as the disreputable Macheath. The music amounts to little more than a series of folk ballads but Miller cleverly mixes them into the dramatic flow. With Gardiner and Jeremy Barlow responsible for the musical side, there is a feeling of authenticity.

Miller is notorious for turning familiar operas inside out, but here he is careful about making his characters and his camera work interesting. **PER**

Le Nozze di Figaro

Ingvar Wixell (Il Conte di Almaviva), Claire Watson (La Contessa di Almaviva), Reri Grist (Susanna), Walter Berry (Figaro), Edith Mathis (Cherubino); Choir of the Vienna State Opera; Wiener Philharmoniker/Karl Böhm; Stage Director: Günther Rennert
 Arthaus Musik 100 449 (180 min)
 ★★★★★☆ \$\$\$\$

From the rich archives of Arthaus Musik comes

this 1966 Salzburg *Nozze*, with a stellar cast and the fabulous Vienna Philharmonic under the legendary conductor Karl Böhm. Filmed in black and white, the picture has been carefully restored – yes, it remains grainy but quite watchable. The *mise-en-scène* by Günther Rennert is completely traditional, to be expected given this performance is 43 years old and happened long before the advent of *Regietheater*. The singers – from the leads down to the comprimarios – are all excellent. American soprano Reri Grist is an engaging, soubrette-sounding Susanna. Fellow American Claire Watson is an aristocratic, silvery-voiced Countess, perhaps a little too mannered, in the *Schwarzkopf* mode. Swiss soprano Edith Mathis is a fine Cherubino, if you don't miss the mezzo timbre one expects in this role. Walter Berry is firm of voice, a bit mature as Figaro opposite such a youthful Susanna. Ingvar Wixell is a vocally stentorian, dramatically vivid Count. The camera work is good for its time, without the many close-ups we have come to expect in opera videos today. It is a little disconcerting to see singers taking bows after an aria, a practice that has mercifully disappeared today. This performance is certainly up to festival standards and can easily match the best we encounter today. Highly recommended. **JKS**



Puccini: Edgar

José Cura (Edgar); Amarilli Nizza (Fidelía); Julia Gertseva (Tigrana); Marco Vratogna (Frank); Carlo Cigni (Gualtiero); Orchestra and Chorus of the Teatro Regio Torino/Yoram David
 Stage Director: Lorenzo Mariani
 Arthaus Musik 101 377 (157 min)
 ★★★★★☆ \$\$\$\$

Edgar, Puccini's second opera, was a failure at its La Scala premiere in 1889, lasting all of three performances. The composer reworked the score, cutting the last act. The revised three-act version had its premiere in 1905, but the opera's fortunes did not improve, as *Edgar* remains, with *Le Villi*, two of the least performed of Puccini operas. This Teatro Regio Torino production, taped in 2008, has the distinction of being "complete", made possible by Puccini's granddaughter who came forward with the missing Act Four, previously thought to be lost. To be sure this is Puccini before his full maturity, yet one can see glimpses of his later glory. If the extended duet in the restored last act sounds familiar, it is because Puccini recycled it later for *Tosca*! The libretto, with its strange twists and turns, isn't going to win any prizes for believability. The protagonist, Edgar, is torn between his love for the chaste Fidelía and his

