

John Harbison: The Rewaking
Lydian String Quartet with Dominique Labelle
Musica Omnia mo0110 (2 discs)

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ANTHONY TOMMASINI'S PICKS

The Year in Classical Music

1. VERDI: `FALSTAFF' Bryn Terfel, Thomas Hampson; Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Claudio Abbado (Deutsche Grammophon; two CD's). Though there are several classic recordings of Verdi's miraculous final opera, this new one takes its place among the best. Mr. Abbado elicits a bustling and transparent performance, and Mr. Terfel owns the title role. The entire cast is superb, especially Dorothea Roschmann as Nanetta and Mr. Hampson as Ford.
2. EARL KIM: VOCAL WORKS Benita Valente and Karol Bennett, sopranos; Metamorphosen Chamber Ensemble, directed by Scott Yoo (New World). Here is an entrancing program of works for voice, narrator and chamber ensemble by Kim, the California-born composer of Korean heritage, who died in 1998. He was a gentle genius whose aesthetic valued precision, lucidity and the beauty of a single sound. Ms. Valente and Ms. Bennett are superb.
3. GLUCK: ITALIAN ARIAS Cecilia Bartoli, mezzo-soprano; Akademie f~ur Alte Musik Berlin, directed by Bernhard Forck (Decca). Working with the excellent Berlin Academy for Old Music, Ms. Bartoli offers a revelatory program of little-known arias from Gluck's early period (titled ``Dreams and Fables"), all to librettos of Metastasio. Ms. Bartoli is in top form.
4. JUDITH WEIR: `A NIGHT AT THE CHINESE OPERA' Various singers; Scottish Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Andrew Parrott (NMC; two CD's). Released in Europe in 2000, this recording of the English composer Judith Weir's scintillating 1987 opera within an opera did not arrive in the United States until this year. The story, to a libretto by Ms. Weir, tells of a troupe of actors drafted into building defenses against floods in 13th-century China. They enact a play, ``The Chou Family Orphan," that discombobulates the military governor. Mr. Parrot conducts a fine cast.
5. STRAVINSKY: `THE RITE OF SPRING'; SCRIBIN: `POEM OF ECSTASY' Kirov Orchestra, conducted by Valery Gergiev (Philips). Mr. Gergiev's organic, fervent and seductive performance makes ``The Rite of Spring" sound again like the shocking ballet score it was when new rather than the comfortably brilliant concert work it has become.
6. JOHN HARBISON: `THE REWAKING' Dominique Labelle, soprano; Lydian String Quartet (Musica Omnia; two CD's). This impressive program, named for one of its four pieces, offers chamber and vocal works by John Harbison. The album, from the new Musica Omnia label,

includes a fascinating extra disc with Mr. Harbison discussing the music and providing illustrations on piano and recorded excerpts.

7. LISZT: PIANO WORKS Leif Ove Andsnes, pianist (EMI Classics). The Norwegian pianist brings his superb technique and probing musicianship to a fascinating program of familiar and unfamiliar Liszt works.

8. STEVEN MACKEY: 'TUCK AND ROLL,' 'LOST AND FOUND,' 'EATING GREENS' Mr. Mackey, guitarist; New World Symphony, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas (RCA Victor Red Seal). Though currently a professor at Princeton, Mr. Mackey was a rock guitarist in his youth. This album offers his recent concerto for electric guitar and orchestra, "Tuck and Roll," and two other works, thoroughly rigorous compositions infused with the brash vitality of rock. Mr. Thomas conducts the New World Symphony, a training ensemble of young musicians who take to this music readily.

9. RICHARD STRAUSS: 'ARIADNE AUF NAXOS' Deborah Voigt, Ben Heppner; Staatskapelle Dresden, conducted by Sinopoli (Deutsche Grammophon; two CD's). Giuseppe Sinopoli, in the last recording of his life, leads an impassioned and colorful if at times fussy account of this great opera. The cast is fabulous, with Ms. Voigt as Ariadne, Natalie Dessay as Zerbinetta, Anne Sofie von Otter as the Composer and Mr. Heppner as Bacchus.

10. DAWN UPSHAW: 'ANGELS HIDE THEIR FACES' (Nonesuch). The soprano Dawn Upshaw, working with an excellent roster of chamber musicians, offers vocally exquisite performances of Bach and Purcell. If you are looking for comfort after the events of Sept. 11, I recommend Ms. Upshaw's sublime account of Purcell's "Music for a While."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/23/arts/music/23TOMM.html>

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