

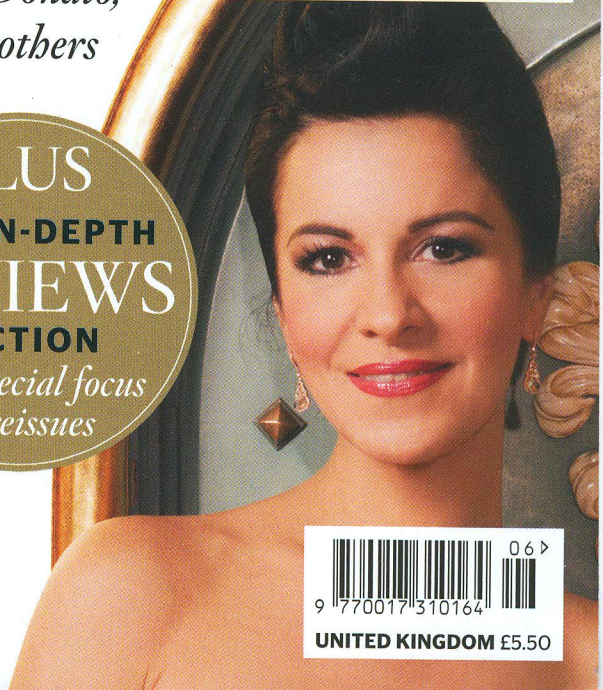
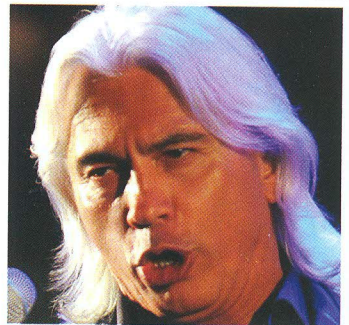
GRAMOPHONE

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HALL OF FAME 2014

25 PEOPLE WHO SHAPED CLASSICAL MUSIC RECORDING

Artists include *Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Stephen Hough, Tito Gobbi and Angela Gheorghiu*
 Championed by *Steuart Bedford, Renée Fleming, Gerald Finley, Frederica von Stade, Joyce DiDonato, and others*



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New Berlin Phil label is a defining moment

The Berlin Philharmonic has launched an in-house label: it is, I think, something of a defining moment in the evolution of the classical music recording industry. It isn't the first orchestra to do so – in fact you could argue it's slightly behind the trend here, following on from others such as the London Symphony, San Francisco Symphony and Bavarian Radio Symphony orchestras. But for the mighty Berlin Philharmonic to launch a label of its own turns it from a trend to the new norm.

The BPO's relationship with major labels over the past century has represented the gold standard of recording during the industry's oft-cited glory years. Partly this was through conductor/label relationships – that between Herbert von Karajan and Deutsche Grammophon most notably, though more recently Sir Simon Rattle's tenure led to a fruitful era of releases on EMI Classics. But, as I discussed in this space a few months ago, the link between maestros and labels has changed, with almost no conductor now enjoying the long-term contract with a major label that was once commonplace.

Well, Rattle's contract with EMI (now part of Warner Classics) has come to an end, and the BPO has decided to go it alone. This doesn't mean it will no longer record for other labels, but when it does, such a project will be driven by a star soloist (which occasionally could also include a star conductor), rather than the orchestra and repertoire. When it comes to symphonic literature, it will now appear on the orchestra's own label – beginning with a set of Schumann symphonies. If the BPO's Digital Concert



Martin Cullingford

Hall is anything to go by, the label should be a stylish and high-end affair (it may be late to launch a label but the BPO has pioneered offering concerts to audiences far and wide through its impressive online home).

But if orchestra own-labels are increasingly the norm, how might this change things for collectors? For a start it might free orchestras from the restraints imposed by commercial considerations. Rattle implied as much when he said: 'The Schumann symphonies have never been considered one of the sure-fire big sellers of all music, but for us in the Berliner Philharmoniker, this music is closer to our hearts than almost any other... So we said, let's share our interpretations with others.' Reading between the lines, this might not have sold enough copies to justify a major label issuing it. But when taken as part of an organisation's wider work, it can become viable.

So perhaps we'll see increasing numbers of orchestral releases which really capture an ensemble's musical soul, enshrining the partnership between players and maestro in repertoire really key to them. Just as we did, en masse, in the early CD era of the '80s of course: and there lies a slight note of caution. The industry's release schedule is only manageable up to a certain size, and part of the cause of that earlier unsustainable bubble is that multiple labels all issued identical repertoire at the same time as each other (sometimes even on the same label). The result: over-supply, and the collectors couldn't keep up. So just because a label can do something, doesn't mean it always should.

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



RICHARD LAWRENCE, who has written the Specialist's Guide to one-act operas, says, 'It was only when sitting

down to prepare this article that I realised how many powerful one-act operas there are. The medium should appeal to anyone who frets at the loss of dramatic tension inevitable when a full-length piece is punctuated by intermissions.'



'For me, Lassus's *Lagrime di San Pietro* is one of the high points of all Renaissance music, to put it

no more strongly,' says **FABRICE FITCH**, who has surveyed the available recordings for this month's *Gramophone* Collection on the work, 'so which recording I'd take to a desert island is a question worth pondering.'



'Graham Fitkin's music ticks all the right boxes for me. It's vibrant, dynamic, powerful and – above all else –

true to itself. Those landmark compositions from the 1990s still sound as fresh and exciting as they did over 20 years ago,' says **PWYLL APSIÔN**, who has profiled Fitkin for our Contemporary Composers series.

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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