

THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

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GRAMOPHONE

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IN THE STUDIO WITH

Harnoncourt & Lang Lang

PLUS

*The versatile Jean-Efflam Bavouzet on
Haydn (and Prokofiev, Bartók, Beethoven...)*



Season preview

Our guide to the best
concerts of 2014/15

Gramophone Classical Music Awards 2014

The shortlist revealed!



The value of a recording is constantly changing

How much is a recording worth to you? What's its value – both artistic and in monetary terms? This is something that's been brought into question quite starkly in recent years. Firstly, the increasing numbers of super-budget back-catalogue reissues – or even new recordings from the likes of Naxos – have caused many a buyer to pause a little longer before shelling out for a full-price disc. More recent still, the rapid developments in online music – first downloads, then streaming – have made most of the history of music available for free or at the very least through an astonishingly good value subscription model.

How things have changed. An industry colleague this week told me of the price to a record collector, back in 1963, of Herbert von Karajan's first Beethoven symphony cycle with the Berlin Philharmonic, issued by Deutsche Grammophon (the Ninth Symphony is the subject of this month's Classics Reconsidered – see page 108). The eight-LP set, when purchase tax was added on, cost £14 and 8 shillings (£14.40). At the time, the average British weekly wage was about £15. In the US it cost \$47.98 – about 40 per cent of the average weekly American wage at the time, but even so, still a very significant investment. (As indeed was DG's in making the recording – the label spent 1.5m Deutschmarks and had to sell at least 100,000 to break even. They need not have worried as, one decade on, it had sold 1 million copies.)

The set's just been remastered and handsomely packaged. You can now pick it up for about £45, less than a tenth of today's average weekly wage.



Martin

The situation today, however, is perhaps more nuanced than it first appears. It is, of course, an amazing advance for mankind that the great musical art of the world is now so affordably available to all. But at the same time, as so much has become free, there's been an increasing interest in recordings that *do* carry a premium price. The riposte to those cheaply packaged reissues are beautiful box-sets which enshrine a musician's output and present it as a cultural item of (literally) weight. As for new releases, the beautifully produced presentation of Cecilia Bartoli's annual 'concept album' – photos and essays adding context and understanding – increases the item's desirability, and sells in vast quantities (reaching well beyond the traditional 'classical enthusiast'). More recently, even vinyl has made a small but successful comeback, despite – or even because of – its greater cost.

It's not just physical items either: on the online front, higher-resolution and studio-master downloads are persuading many digital collectors that spending more is worth doing. And while music can essentially be streamed for free, committed listeners are beginning to see the benefit of paying for better quality, and uninterrupted, listening. At Qobuz, a streaming company we've formed a partnership with, nothing is free, but subscribers are offered lossless sound and access to an extensive catalogue that offers majors as well as many indies. It's encouraging that even in this potentially free-for-all music world, people who value recordings are still prepared to pay for them. Even if not quite in the same way as in 1963.

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



Paganini's First Violin Concerto, the subject of this month's Collection, made a deep impression on

JEREMY NICHOLAS when he first heard it in his teens. 'Its gorgeous operatic themes and exuberant solo part remain irresistible, a seminal work and much recorded,' he says. 'Yet it rarely features in today's concert programmes.'



For **LINDSAY KEMP**, author of this issue's cover story, attending a recording session 'is not always the romantic

experience you thought it would be.' Luckily, this time around he felt 'a tingle of old-time excitement' watching Lang Lang record Mozart with Harnoncourt and the Vienna Philharmonic earlier this year in the Golden Hall of the Musikverein.



HARRIET SMITH first fell for Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's music-making when she encountered his ravishing solo

Ravel recordings a decade ago. Since then, she says, he has become 'a veritable one-man CD factory, yet the riches keep coming. Add to that an inquiring mind and an impish sense of humour and who could resist the chance to interview him?'

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