

THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

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# CECILIA BARTOLI

*The star mezzo's  
fabulous Russian  
adventure*

**Sir Andrzej Panufnik**

*Reigniting an  
appreciation of the  
composer's work*

**Christopher Hogwood**

*Remembering  
an inspirational  
musician*

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**REVIEW**  
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## Partnerships are what make orchestras great

What makes a great orchestra? It's six years since we asked a number of leading critics from around the world to help us rank ensembles and to answer this question. While musicianship and technical virtuosity are givens, I'd say that much else is down to partnerships. Partnerships between conductors and players, but also between the players themselves (not least in the venerable Vienna Philharmonic, of which more later, for whom no specific music director is appointed). To a lesser but still very important extent, partnerships between musicians and administration – for the former to know they have the support of the latter in the journey they wish to take is crucial (as becomes so evident when it falls apart). And then there is that between musicians and audience. Hearing quite how many people turned up simply to hear the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra announce its new season, let alone to hear the less popular of Shostakovich's symphonies, is evidence of how just one such partnership – that between Vasily Petrenko and the people of Liverpool – has proved such a success.

Success ebbs and flows as musical partnerships change, blossom or decay – a slow process, and I feel it's too soon to meaningfully ask the question again that we did back in 2008 and expect our answer to be based on particularly different evidence.

But I ponder all this now partly because the orchestra we praised above all others then, the Royal Concertgebouw, has just announced its new Chief Conductor, Daniele Gatti. Few orchestras embody that notion of partnership quite as well as the Royal



Concertgebouw: though it was founded in 1888, Gatti will be only its seventh musical boss. Some people talk of a continuity of sound, a tradition, being passed through generations there – as they do of another of today's mighty ensembles, the Leipzig Gewandhaus, heirs to the eras of Mendelssohn and Brahms, and currently excelling under Riccardo Chailly. Gatti's inheritance at the Royal Concertgebouw is a rich one: we wish him and his players well as they embark on a new era, and in particularly difficult times.

Earlier this month the Birgit Nilsson Prize was formally awarded to the Vienna Philharmonic, which will spend the money on opening up its archive as widely as possible (now there's a decision which speaks of an awareness of history). The prize was established by the singer to honour a musician (or ensemble) who represents the absolute epitome of excellence. The \$1m prize pot has attracted some comment – but that's no bad thing. We live in times when it's increasingly hard for classical music to get itself discussed in the wider media. If the Birgit Nilsson Prize can earn its winners the same popular prominence as the Nobel Prize does for recipients in the fields of literature or science, then this would be good news.

And is the Vienna Philharmonic still a great orchestra? Everyone has their own way of judging that; but hearing the controlled strength and beauty of sound in *pianissimo* passages at the prize-winner's gala concert, I would say so. Either that, or the transformative effects of being handed a very large cheque really should be bottled.

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### THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Was I rehearsing Maurizio Pollini's *Hammerklavier* or rather hearing it for the first time in certain respects?'

says **JED DISTLER**. 'Time creates perspective. As for Harriet Smith, who brought me to *Gramophone* in 1997, it was invigorating and great fun to talk "piano shop" with her again in this month's "Classics Revisited".'



'Ever since my early years, when the impact of those stunning Antal Dorati Mercury Living Presence LPs

epitomised how recorded sound could deliver, I've been a fan of this conductor,' says **ROB COWAN** of the subject of his 'Icons' essay. 'The drama, incisiveness and sheer brilliance of Dorati's performances remain etched in my memory.'



'Having spent much of last year focusing on the Lutoslawski centenary, I was eager to move on in 2014 to mark

the centenary of his friend and collaborator, Sir Andrzej Panufnik,' says **MICHAEL McMANUS**. 'It was a privilege to contrast the lives of these contemporaries who rejected the extremes of their time and forged their own individual paths.'

**THE REVIEWERS** Andrew Achenbach • Nalen Anthoni • Mike Ashman • Philip Clark • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Duncan Druce • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Iain Fenlon • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Caroline Gill • Edward Greenfield • David Gutman • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Tess Knighton • Richard Lawrence • Ivan March • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Julie Anne Sadie • Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • Ken Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

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