

Music of 2017: A retrospective of classical CDs to take a listen to

By Keith Powers / Correspondent

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Here are classical CDs from 2017 that are definitely worth a listen to. All have some connection to the Boston area.

Martin Boykan: Rites of Passage

Bridge Records (www.bridgerecords.com)

Boykan, long-time Brandeis professor, has a lineage that looks back to mentors like Copland, Piston, Hindemith and Steuermann, and looks forward with students like Steven Mackey, Marjorie Merryman, Peter Lieberman and others. Outwardly, he sticks to serial styles, influences of Webern and Stravinsky. Listen to the music — chamber music here, including his third piano trio, “Rites of Passage” — and you find yourself hanging on every next phrase, wondering what will come.

“Rites of Passage” (Yohanan Chendler, violin; Joshua Gordon, cello; Steven Weigt, piano), veering away from one musical idea, is the best case in that point. All of this music brings you deeper and deeper into its sound-world, the more you listen.

Boston Symphony Orchestra: Complete Recordings on Deutsche Grammophon

(www.deutschegrammophon.com)

While the BSO and Deutsche Grammophon cement the current orchestra’s reputation around award-winning recordings of Shostakovich with director Andris Nelsons, the orchestra and the label also revel in the past — at the complete DG recordings, made over five decades. It began with Charles Ives — “Three Pieces in New England” — in January 1970. Half a century later, this 57-CD set documents a changing orchestra, and a changing world.

It would be worth it (well, maybe not: \$199.95) for the photos: Ozawa with Rostropovich in the Shed at Tanglewood, announcing the death of Shostakovich in August 1975; Anne-Sophie Mutter, onstage with Ozawa in 1989; lots of Ozawa for that matter, old and young; the late Claudio Abbado, looking like an Italian matinee idol, in 1970; musicians who were deeply integrated into the BSO's musical life, like Eugen Jochum, Rafael Kubelik, William Steinberg — all gone now.

The music? No we haven't listened to all of it, and probably never will finish. But for BSO regulars, this will feel like flipping through the family scrapbook, and watching your family (and yourself) come of age.

Child Alice: David del Tredici

Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Gil Rose conducting

(www.bmopsound.org)

This setting for voice (soprano Courtenay Budd) and large orchestra has amazingly only had two performances — this one, for live recording, and three decades ago in Carnegie Hall. Here, Gil Rose and his ensemble — this is their 60th recording on BMOP/sound — travel del Tredici's imaginative journey around and through Lewis Carroll's life and creation.

If living composer/long dead librettist can be considered a team, del Tredici and Carroll are certainly that. The composer has dedicated decades to Carroll's works. His insights from the liner notes detail not only his love for Carroll's ideas, but his own inspired creations extending out from those ideas. Add this to your opera collection, even though you have to imagine it onstage. Alice would like that.

Lights, Camera, Music: Six Decades of John Williams

Boston Pops, Keith Lockhart conducting

BSO Classics (www.bso.org)

John Williams's music seems destined to be one of the lasting musical contributions of our time. Its connection to famous movies doesn't hurt, but this music can be enjoyed without Wookies, burning skyscrapers, sharks, dinosaurs, witches, heroes or any extra-terrestrials.

Troika: Matt Haimovitz and Christopher O'Riley

Pentatone/Oxingale Series (www.pentatonemusic.com)

Arrangements of Pussy Riot, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Lennon/McCartney, Viktor Tsoi. The adventurous cellist and the prolific piano host of "From the Top" look into the corners of the repertory for interesting projects. The title comes from Prokofiev's film score to "Lieutenant Kijé" — only three minutes, but it encapsulates what this elegant partnership is all about. Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer" — as amazing a "Dumka" as any by Dvorak. All Russian music — if you count "Back in the U.S.S.R."

Leonard Bernstein: Complete Solo Works for Piano

Andrew Cooperstock, piano

Bridge Records (www.bridgerecords.com)

Was Bernstein larger than life, wrestling with the musical gods, far above us mortals? Or was he just another guy on the corner, whistling a tune and checking out the scene?

Yes. The composer who puzzled thinkers with works like the "Symposium," also melted hoary hearts with "There's a Place for Us." Both Bernsteins existed, and everything in between, seemingly.

His solo piano music is less virtuosic than you'd expect, and less probing. But Cooperstock reads it all precisely, and these two disks make a wonderful, low-key accompaniment to at least one afternoon during the centennial of the great musician's life.

Ted Hearne: Sound from the Bench

The Crossing, Donald Nally, conducting

Cantaloupe Music (www.cantaloupemusic.com)

Evidence that Roomful of Teeth is not the only vocal ensemble tackling the word, the world and inventive sounds that try to fit one into the other. The Crossing is a Philadelphia-based contemporary music choir, two dozen members. Brilliant music and lyrics (or lyric choices) by Hearne — words are his, or from public documents: a Bill Moyer's interview, a Supreme Court decision — or Jena Osman's poetry. Electric guitars and drums accompany. Fascinating and strange.

Brahms: The Symphonies

Boston Symphony Orchestra, Andris Nelsons conducting

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The high-profile recordings on Deutsche Grammophon draw the most attention, but this series of all four symphonies on the BSO's own label, recorded in November 2016, have pristine sound and emotional wallop. Too bad the two piano concertos, performed by Hélène Grimaud during the same run, could not be included.

Everything Brahms wrote was for symphony orchestra. Trios, quartets, quintets, they all have a rich orchestral texture — and here, actually writing for orchestra, the music feels perfectly organic. The BSO — sounding sublime, especially the winds and horns — gets recorded with artistry and accuracy.

George Li: Live at the Mariinsky

Warner Classics (www.warnerclassics.com)

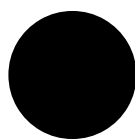
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Augustin Hadelich: Paganini Caprices

(www.warnerclassics.com)

If you end up owning this disk, circle Jan. 25-27 on your calendar, and plan a trip to Symphony Hall. That's when Hadelich performs with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and you can bet he'll be performing one or more of these Caprices as an encore. (If not, the marketing department at Warner Classics will have a word with him.) Revel in the tone here — singing, facile, at times gritty — and, as required by the Caprices, stunningly virtuosic.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR's ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com



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