



## Annual Awards 2024

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Voucher to PdSK e.V., Maison de France, Kurfürstendamm 211, 10719 Berlin  
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„In the Shadows“ – Works by Etienne-Nicolas Méhul, Ludwig van Beethoven, Gioacchino Rossini, Giacomo Meyerbeer, Vincenzo Bellini, Richard Wagner and others. Michael Spyres, Julien Henric, Jeune Chœur de Paris, Les Talens Lyriques, Christophe Rousset. Executive Producer: Alain Lanceron, Recording Producer: Daniel Zalay. Erato 5054197879821 (Warner)

Michael Spyres is a miraculous tenor, perhaps the greatest of recent times. Now aged 45, he was born into an American family of musicians. As if the tenor repertoire were not enough, he also occasionally sings baritone roles, and has even worked his way up to the countertenor range. He is the best Berlioz tenor ever, and his latest album „In the Shadows“ is an unrivalled tour de force, taking us on a journey from Grétry to Richard Wagner, with as many stops as possible along the way – Beethoven, Rossini, Meyerbeer, Weber, Auber, Spontini, Bellini and Marschner. He clearly has his sights set on Lohengrin (he already also sings the role on stage). This recording is a record-breaking undertaking, which some might find questionable or contrived. The attempt is commendable, because it shows us Wagner’s roots. Let’s hope that this musical high-wire gymnast continues his tightrope dance. The final sprint that he accomplishes on this album is unique in the history of singing.  
*(For the annual committee: Kai Luehrs-Kaiser)*

Ludwig van Beethoven: The 10 Violin Sonatas (Vol. 1-3). Antje Weithaas, Dénes Várjon. Recording Producer & Editing & Mastering: Christoph Franke. 4 CDs, CAvi 8553512, 8553535 & 8553508 (Bertus)

This album is truly Beethoven for everyone. With their recording of all the violin sonatas, Antje Weithaas and Dénes Várjon create a lush pleasure garden of sound in which everyone is welcome. You can guided through, and you will emerge refreshed, regardless of whether you are an expert in topiary, know the Latin names of the plants, or simply admire the flowers. The cycle, which this third CD completes, can be considered a benchmark recording. It forms a lyrical bracket around the composer’s lifelong abundance of tonal finesse and his joyous experimentation. Not highly polished, not self-promoting, but permeated with the freedom that Beethoven took for himself and demanded for all people. With a warmth that other interpretations lack, Beethoven the person becomes sound - solidly humorous, philosophical or raging from inner depths. Two musicians who no longer have to prove their profound knowledge of the work and their interpretative subtlety have come together here to give both away like a rich harvest to connoisseurs and newcomers alike.  
*(For the annual committee: Julia Kaiser)*

Johann Sebastian Bach: Goldberg Variations BWV 988. Víkingur Ólafsson. Recording engineer: Christopher Tarnow. CD/2 LPs, Deutsche Grammophon 486 4553 (Universal)

Since the „Goldberg Variations“ have been recorded more often than almost any other major keyboard work, anyone who dares to revisit them in the recording studio had better have something to say. It took Víkingur Ólafsson a quarter of a century to embark on this expedition through Bach's labyrinthine chamber of wonders, a „Clavier Übung“ cycle of one „Aria“ and its 30 „various variations“ first published in 1741. Ólafsson is able to amaze us with sounds, images, and musical architecture that we thought had long since been done to death. Sometimes exuberantly virtuosic, sometimes searchingly introverted, the 40-year-old pianist from Iceland visualises the enormous construction with an improvisatory intensity, summing up its history of interpretation in his own way. There is a lot of echoing here: from the brusque, artistic obstinacy of the young Glenn Gould to the soft cantabile of András Schiff. And yet: Ólafsson remains true to himself in every bar. Brilliant!  
*(For the annual committee: Albrecht Thiemann)*

„Sanctissima“ – Vespers & Benediction for the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary by Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, Francisco Guerrero, James McMillan, John Joubert, Oliver Tarney, Sven-David Sandström, Matthew Martin and others. ORA Singers, Suzi Digby. Recording engineer: Nick Parker, Mastering: Mike Hatch. 2 CDs, harmonia mundi HMM 905334.35 (harmonia mundi/Bertus)

To be able to create symbiotic connections between historical vocal music and contemporary compositions is an ambition shared by many but accomplished by few. However, the Assumption Vespers that Suzi Digby and her ORA Singers celebrate achieves just that. All eight commissioned works on the album, recorded here for the first time, are valuable additions to the repertoire, in which the variety of effective vocal sounds alone testifies to the intensive exchange between composer and choir, even after the commission. Audible reflective references to three model Renaissance motets as well as the liturgy performed in unison ensure stringency and encourage us to question rigid demarcations between tradition and modernity. Interpreted with noble perfection, harmonising the differentiated expression typical of the epoch with the prudent character of Vespers, the result is an album whose clear and multi-layered concept works on all levels.  
*(For the annual committee: Carsten Niemann)*

Harry Vogt, Martina Seeber (ed.): Radio Cologne Sound – WDR's Studio for Electronic Music. Works by Karlheinz Stockhausen, Iannis Xenakis, Marco Stroppa, Youngi Pagh-Paan, Nicolaus A. Huber, York Höller e.a. Recording engineers: Harry Vogt e.a. Book with 5 CDs, Wolke Verlag ISBN 978-3-95593-259-6

Just after the second world war, electronic music from Cologne was an international sensation that spread to popular music. The co-operation between composers, scientists and studio technicians made the WDR's Studio for Electronic Music a magnet for composers from all over the world. In addition to works by studio directors Herbert Eimert, Karlheinz Stockhausen and York Höller, previously-unheard sounds by Franco Evangelisti, György Ligeti, Mauricio Kagel and Iannis Xenakis were also created there. „Radio Cologne Sound“ tells a twofold media story of a special kind: The compilation traces the aesthetic development of electronic music in the studio over five decades under changing production conditions, and at the same time reminds us of how a public radio station promoted a place where epoch-making new forms of music were researched in order to then present the results in its programmes: „Praise the Lord“ (Stockhausen)!  
*(For the annual committee: Tim Caspar Boehme)*

HJirok: Hjirok. Producers: Hani Mojtahedy, Andi Toma. Recording engineers: Siamand Mohammadi, Constantin Carstens. LP/Digital, Altin Village & Mine AVM 077 (Bandcamp)

„Geliyê Hjirokê“, the „Valley of Figs“, near the Kurdish city of Erbil inspires „HJirok“. A utopia: Yazidis, Jews, Muslims and Christians live in peaceful coexistence in the villages. The same applies to the various musical influences on the album: Kurdish-Iranian folk elements are combined with the polyglot vocals of musician Hani

Mojtahedy and the electronic sounds of Andi Toma (known as one half of Mouse on Mars). But „HJirok“ is not about sound fusion. Daf drums, tombak and darbuka stand for themselves, unalienated. Field recordings from her travels in the Iraqi Kurdish region lend „HJirok“ a cinematic quality. In her native Iran, Mojtahedy is both a star and a victim of persecution; she served three prison sentences. The final track „Tehran“ is therefore a homage to the Iranian women's movement „Jon, Jiyan, Azadî - Woman, Life, Freedom“. „HJirok“ sets the zeitgeist to music that is as harrowing as it is enchanting and opens a sonic portal into a utopian, alternative reality.

*(For the annual committee: Laura Aha)*

**Ghost Train Orchestra, Kronos Quartet: Songs and Symphoniques – The Music Of Moondog.**  
Producer: Brian Carpenter, Engineer: Zach Miley, Aaron Nevezie, Marc Urselli, Mixed: John Kilgore, Brian Montgomery, Mastered: Bob Ludwig. CD/2 LPs, Cantaloupe Music CA21192 (Naxos)

You can't get rid of this music. „Enough about human rights! What about worm rights?“ Yes, what about worm rights? Those of frogs, of trees? This song from the universe of the blind composer, musician, performer and singer Louis Hardin, aka Moondog, who was once active in New York, is part of his unique artistic world. Philip Glass and Steve Reich called him the „godfather of minimalism“. The Ghost Train Orchestra and Kronos Quartet present seventeen new, vibrant arrangements of Moondog's music by musical director Brian Carpenter and members of the Brooklyn-based ensemble. It is a captivating rediscovery of this artist, who died in 1999 and whose songs and madrigals are influenced by classical, jazz, Native American and Latin American music. They are sung by famous guests such as Karen Mantler, Sam Amidon, Aoife O'Donovan and Jarvis Cocker, and we are amazed by their timeless beauty, the abysses and the humour.

*(For the annual committee: Petra Rieß)*

**The Neptune Power Federation: Goodnight My Children.** Mastering: Carl Staff, Recording engineers: Jazzy Geoff Lee, Jaytanic Ritual. CD/LP, Cruz Del Sur Music CRUZ620LP (Soulfood)

Singer Screaming Loz Sutch leads the Australian band on this sixth album, and there is a lot to discover. Influences from various rock traditions are brought into focus in the eight songs: psychedelic, glam, stoner, hard rock and punk. Though the band's musical roots lie primarily in the 1970s, they haven't stopped there. Such versatility is undoubtedly a challenge, but the Australians skilfully mirror all of these facets on „Goodnight My Children“. Crowning it all the highly expressive and skillful vocals of their Imperial Princess, complemented by detailed choral lines. The guitars, both in the backing and in the solos, are played with absolute conviction – to the point, crisp and tasteful. The loudspeakers emit a sonorous clarity full of subtleties. It's a pleasure to listen to!

*(For the annual committee: Sabrina Palm)*

**Cat Power: Sings Dylan: The 1966 Royal Albert Hall Concert.** Producer: Andrew Slater, Mastering: Mark Chalecki. 2 CDs/2 LPs, Domino Records WIGCD524 (Believe Digital)

Many strands come together in the album „Cat Power Sings Dylan – The 1966 Royal Albert Hall Concert“. Historically, the original recording of Bob Dylan in Manchester – once wrongly attributed to the Royal Albert Hall – marks a transitional phase in which traditional folk music became rock music. Cat Power's interpretation stages this epochal leap, including the original division into solo and band sections, under new auspices. She bows to the significance of the original, brings the revolutionary Dylan closer to a contemporary audience, and takes his ideas further into the present. The songs deal with social criticism, social responsibility and self-realisation and are not just hits, but anthems of resistance against the narrow-minded America of the sixties. From the appreciative perspective of a songwriter, Cat Power turns them into current, contemporary messages. And she sings them with captivating presence and compassion, as a critical admirer of an ancestor of her craft.

*(For the annual committee: Ralf Dombrowski)*

Nitai Hershkovits: Call On The Old Wise. Producer: Manfred Eicher. Sound engineer: Stefano Amerio, Mastering: Christoph Stickel. CD/LP, ECM Records 2779 (Universal)

It seldom happens that musicians sit down at their instruments, play without the constraints of a composed programme and manage to sound as clear and creative as if they had planned every nuance down to the last detail. The New York pianist Nitai Hershkovits has succeeded in creating just such a masterpiece. „Call On The Old Wise“ was intended as a solo piano recital for his mentor, largely improvised on the spur of the moment. It was recorded on the bright-toned grand piano of the Auditorio Stelio Molo RSI in Lugano, Switzerland, and developed into a programme of 18 miniatures. Nitai Hershkovits also plays with references to pianistic romanticism as well as abstract contemporary harmonic layers, with hints of jazz entertainment as well as free textural work. „Call On The Old Wise“ is thus a pianistic stroke of luck. Lightness and depth, emotion and a fine pinch of humour all come together here.

*(For the annual committee: Ralf Dombrowski)*

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