



## Annual Awards 2025

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Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina: Missa Papae Marcelli (Series: „The Golden Renaissance“).  
Stile Antico. Decca 4870791 (Universal)

There are moments in history when the wealth of future generations seems to hang on a single, fragile thread. Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina spun one of these precious threads in his time, almost single-handedly saving the world of sacred vocal music – or so the myth goes. At a time of schism in the Church, his Missa Papae Marcelli demonstrated that polyphony need not be incomprehensible, nor vocal complexity confusing. He created such a convincing model of compositional balance, that later generations would proclaim him the saviour of church music on the basis of this work alone. While the truth is a more nuanced business, it is fair to say that Palestrina's music helped complex polyphony, the subject of theological controversy, to gain acceptance and splendour. Along the way, his genre had shaped its own compositional style: the Stile Antico. The British vocal ensemble of the same name sings this work of genius with flawless diction, of course, and with a passionate closeness to the text, without restraint, organic, supple. *(For the annual committee: Julia Kaiser)*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Requiem KV 626, Miserere mei KV 90, O Gottes Lamm KV 343/1 and other sacred music. Ying Fang, Beth Taylor, Laurence Kilsby, Alex Rosen, Chadi Lazreq, Pygmalion, Raphaël Pichon. harmonia mundi HMM 902729

It was six years ago, in Aix-en-Provence, that Mozart's „Requiem“ began to dance: Romeo Castellucci directed, Raphaël Pichon and his Pygmalion ensembles delivered a seraphically luminous interpretation, the choir danced archaically, and the funeral mass became a celebration of life. Five years later, Pichon took his musical forces into the recording studio. As he had in Aix, he added several musical numbers to Mozart's work, this time the Gregorian chant „In Paradisum“, Mozart's canon „Ach, zu kurz ist unsers Lebens Lauf“, and (again) his early „Miserere mei“. Pichon understands Mozart's music as a „concentrate of humanity“, and his work represents a new seriousness in dealing with the tormented favourite of the gods. The Pygmalion Choir and Ensemble perform in historically-informed style, but leave the narrow-minded, often deliberately rough-edged approach of many of their competitors far behind. This breathtaking recording makes use of the much-maligned completion by Franz Xaver Süßmayr, as Pichon is convinced that there is much more original Mozart in the score than previously assumed. *(For the annual committee: Regine Müller)*

„Zarzuela“ – Arias by Federico Moreno Torroba, José Serrano, Pablo Luna, Ruperto Chapí, Gerónimo Giménez, Amadoc Vives, Pablo Sorozábal and others. Juan Diego Flórez, Orquesta y Coro Juvenil Sinfonía por el Perú, Guillermo García Calvo. Flórez Records JDF001 (Naxos)

Even the best tenor in the world has to reinvent himself from time to time. Juan Diego Flórez, now past the midpoint of his life and career, is doing so in the form of a genre that originally led him to opera. Zarzuela, a Spanish form of operetta, is also popular in Flórez's native Peru. Flórez, highly professional as always, has produced a magnificent and charming first album on his own label. With the participation of the Orquesta Juvenil Sinfonica por el Perú, he has turned this into a real youth project. Flórez sounds younger and less harsh than most zarzuela tenors; his singing is mellow, and it has verve and panache. He is able to portray the daring lover as well as the tenor sweetheart and the innocent layabout, incapable of wrongdoing. When he is rejected somewhere, in keeping with zarzuela tradition, this easy-going character simply flutters on to the next blossom. Oh, if only we could flutter along with him! (*For the annual committee: Kai Luehrs-Kaiser*)

Kalevi Aho: String Quartets Nos. 1-3. Stenhammar Quartet, production & sound: Marion Schwebel, Thore Brinkmann. SACD, BIS 2609 (Naxos)

From a young autodidact with an enthusiasm for the traditional form of the string quartet to an established figure in international concert life – Kalevi Aho, born in 1949, follows an exciting trajectory as a composer, traced in the Stenhammar Quartet's latest recording. Aho's genuine inventiveness and his sense of form, which allow him to play in an elevated, gripping manner with succinct and even naive motifs, also makes it possible to tell this story conclusively in a counterclockwise direction. His first tonal work, composed in 1967, can stand as the conclusion of the album directly after the Third String Quartet of 1971, which strives for a higher degree of abstraction in terms of harmony, but – like modern Finnish design – does not seek contemporary expression through deconstruction. Aho's delight in colourful experimentation with defined forms and his virtuosic handiwork are viscerally embodied by the performers. The result is an extremely intelligent, fresh declaration of love for the string quartet genre with a Scandinavian-Nordic accent that leaves a lasting impression. (*For the annual committee: Carsten Niemann*)

„Furrer 70“ – Media box. A project by Klangforum Wien. Beat Furrer, Klangforum Wien and others. 6 CDs, 3 films, 2 books, Klangforum Wien 658606291324 (direct distribution)

Klangforum Wien presents composer Beat Furrer with a suitably festive gift for his 70th birthday: a media box containing six CDs, three films and two books. This is more than just a comprehensive retrospective of the composer, who was born in Schaffhausen in 1954. Klangforum Wien plays in a league of its own, and is the very first port of call when it comes to Furrer. The ensemble and composer have grown up together like siblings, since Furrer himself founded the ensemble in 1985. Its founding coincided with a spirit of optimism, with the inauguration of the „Wien Modern“ Festival, and with Claudio Abbado shaping the climate. Furrer and his ensemble have contributed significantly to Vienna's status as a capital of new music today. Furrer's thought process of expressive sounds can be experienced here in the most sophisticated manner, with 18 key works from his oeuvre performed in new recordings; the composer conducts. A lesson in listening, with benchmark interpretations. (*For the annual committee: Regine Müller*)

Maria Faust Sacrum Facere: Marches Rewound And Rewritten. CD/LP, Stunt Records STUCD 25072 (in-akustik)

It begins with a pounding, stomping sound, footfalls in four-four time. Trumpet and saxophone join in unison, followed by a cutting snare drum, then tuba, trombone, alto saxophone and clarinet. Left-right-left-right. And in no time we are marching along. In 2014, Estonian saxophonist Maria Faust founded the ensemble Sacrum Facere, which has been alluding to forms of violence and tyranny on its concept albums for years. That is also the case here. Maria Faust grew up in the Soviet Union, and marching was part of the soundtrack of her life. But these nine marches are unsettling, with jarring dissonances and an increasingly stumbling rhythm when the wind instruments break out with free improvisation. These are moments of beguiling beauty. Of freedom. We haven't

heard marches like this since Mauricio Kagel's „Ten Marches to Miss Victory“. The album „Marches Rewound And Rewritten“ sends a powerful, multi-layered message. Listen to it! (*For the annual committee: Petra Rieß*)

### Dascha Dauenhauer: No Beast. So Fierce Digital, DD Records (direct distribution)

This soundtrack is a real beast – of the kind you wouldn't want to encounter alone on a dark street. Film music composer Dascha Dauenhauer is perhaps best-known for her perfectly-tailored, atmospheric sound mix for „Berlin Alexanderplatz“ with director Burhan Qurbani. „No Beast. So Fierce“, a dark update of Shakespeare's „Richard III“, whispers and creaks in way that is both archaic and menacing. The story of two rival clans in Berlin-Neukölln now sounds manic, brutal, hopeless. Ice cold. The beats pulsate nervously beneath the goose bumps; there is never even a hint of light in this soundtrack. Dauenhauer doesn't just want to provide subtle accompaniment; she wants to get involved in the plot and drive the drama forward. Given the sensational cast of actors and the radical interpretation of this classic, you can't take your eyes off the screen for a moment. Nor can you stop listening. This is the kind of film music for which a firearms licence should be required. (*For the annual committee: Joachim Mischke*)

### Jenn Butterworth: Her By Design. CD/Digital, One in Ten 110CD001 (direct distribution)

The music on Jenn Butterworth's new solo album washes over you like a wonderfully warm, soft wave. The arrangements are striking for their magnificent dimensionality, revealing new facets with every listen. „Her by Design“ shows just how much the Scottish folk scene can achieve. Jenn Butterworth is justifiably acclaimed her accomplished playing on various string instruments and for her formidable singing. For this album, she has collected songs from the folk tradition that focus on women. Central to the arrangements, alongside Butterworth's own playing, are the expansive string sounds – fantastically arranged by Seonaid Aitken – in combination with tasteful synthesizer tracks, skilfully-woven second voices and magnificent communication between bass, drums and percussion. The music draws the ear to the loudspeaker, demands rapt attention and then lingers in the mind for a long time afterwards. Simply brilliant! (*For the annual committee: Sabrina Palm*)

### Älice: Wo die Mango wächst. Digital, Raposa (direct distribution)

Her dream destination is „where the mango grows“. Could it be Italy? In any case, the underlying tone of her second solo album is distinctly summery. Hamburg-based Älice combines reggae, R&B, a little chanson, electronics and Latin pop into a sweet mixture. The lyrics are by no means all sweetness and light: „Take the flower out of your words, because what you say is far too good“, she sings. Healthy scepticism expressed in clear words is one of her strengths, and it makes the twelve songs on this album into exciting little stories from her life. Among them is a Polish song, which she says is a tribute to her grandmother and childhood. Since 2023, Älice has been the new front woman of the Munich-based urban brass band Moop Mama, and in Hamburg she is also known as part of the dancehall duo Chefboss. We are lucky that the singer, songwriter and producer sets aside time for her solo projects. It would be a shame if these groovy yet thoughtful songs had remained in the drawer. (*For the annual committee: Petra Rieß*)

### Fuffifufzich: Feel zu spät. Digital, Flirt99 (direct distribution)

Fuffifufzich's „Feel zu spät“ tells of being in love, being abandoned, missing someone, and of time as a dimension that encompasses everything and everyone. And it always stings a little when Fuffifufzich sings: „I'm so attached to this time which is called the past.“ The (in)finite nature of love (and time) is explored, measured, felt. In search of one last song, one last feeling, perhaps „real“ closure. Between pop and synth pads, a cosmos of deep tenderness opens. The voice: fleeting, demanding, sometimes shallow; but always („... maybe forever“) on point. The lyrics: expressing the zeitgeist, close, overly abstract, vulnerable, sublime in staccato. „Feel zu spät“ is defiant, arty and relatable for all those who are racing against time, have raced, will race. It is music for the journey home or away, for the big moment, before, after; for being crushed and for heartbreak. For this: the German Record Critics' Annual Award. (*For the annual committee: Nastassja von der Weiden*)

Mars-Leo Frei: Der Schwobbel. Ein Schleim zieht ein. Mechthild Großmann. Digital, sauerländer audio ISBN 978-3-7324-4430-4 (Argon Verlag)

It's hard to resist the charm of the subtitle „Ein Schleim zieht ein“ (A slime moves in). The children's and young adult book „Der Schwobbel“ by Mars-Leo Frei (an anagram of Mario Fesler, winner of the Mannheim Youth Literature Prize) tells the story of a pile of pudding that unexpectedly appears on the doorstep one day. The slime wants to come in. And, while eating rubbish, despising books and acting defiantly, it turns the lives of Akim, his friends and his family upside down. You could say it happens every day. But it is the brilliant Mechthild Großmann, known as „The Voice“, who brings the text down to earth with her grainy Münsterland bass, making the whole thing immortal. Großmann has a sense of rhythm and of austere sensuality, and possesses an almost tangibly aggressive irony and smugness. Brilliant! And completely incomprehensible that one of the most distinguished narrators ever has made so few audiobooks to date. That's not right. Mechthild Grossmann is the best! And we can't get enough of her. (*For the annual committee: Kai Luehrs-Kaiser*)

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