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The annual want list is always one of the most daunting of tasks. There are just too many great recordings that one does not have the time to hear! As always, let me start by saying that these are not necessarily the best recordings of the year, but the ones which I have come back to again and again. Secondly, it is important to note that this year I have purposely chosen composers who all lived or produced some of their most important works in the twentieth century. As always I have heard wonderful performances of everything from Sweelinck to Bach, Mozart to Mendelssohn, and Rossini to Brahms, and I hate to not include some recordings of more familiar music. But for those looking to explore some repertoire out of the traditional framework, these releases have provided me with some of my most fruitful and rewarding listening experiences this year. Perhaps they will for you too. So let's get started!

Scriabin's most important works are his piano sonatas. That's how I justify owning as many sets of these pieces as I do. And though I have a few notable recordings of his etudes, preludes, and poemes, along with more than one set of his orchestral works, only a few of the mazurkas can be found on various recitals throughout my collection. What a surprise it was then to listen to an entire recital of just these dances. They are small gems, each and every single one of them—especially when performed by one of the greatest overall musicians of the entire century, Samuel Feinberg. His way with them can only be described as magical. He brings a composer's understanding of their unique rhythms, a much needed sensuality, and a real sense of improvisation. In his hands it is hard to tell where the composer ends and the performer begins. If you buy only one disc of Scriabin's music this year, buy this one.

My first experience with the music of Anders Koppel, a musician of wide interests and wide talents, was this disc featuring the composer's four marimba concertos. From the opening of the very first of them, I was mesmerized. The unique sonorities that this composer conjures, along with his true understanding of the implications of the genre—that is, a constant flux between competition and coexistence—make for consistently enjoyable listening experiences. And when performed with the energy and the sheer *joie de vivre*, as here, by Marianna Bednarska and the Aalborg Symphony Orchestra under Henrik Vagn Christensen, there is little to not recommend.

There are many fine recordings of Walton's Cello Concerto—as there should be: it is a masterpiece! But when paired with the Hindemith Concerto as here, along with solo works by both of these composers, the piece truly shines. The ravishing tone and astute musicality of Christian Poltéra, along with the ever-attentive São Paulo Symphony Orchestra, under the late Frank Shipway, all combine to truly bring this music to life. With such fabulous performances all captured in SACD-quality sound, these pieces may have never sounded better than they do here.

Leopold van der Pals was a name new to me. And no wonder! This recording is one of the few available of his music. That will hopefully change, as more attention is brought to this once neglected composer. Having travelled extensively, he absorbed

virtually everything to which he came in contact. His music incorporates free tonality, impressionism, certain romantic tendencies of melody and harmony, and counterpoint galore! Though his music may at times remind one of Hindemith, of Martin, of Honegger, and others, it is still Pal's own voice which comes through most of all. And whether that is in music of quiet reflection or grand gestures, it is a voice with something definite to say.

Shostakovich's string quartets have often been labeled the most important collection after Beethoven's (my apologies to fans of Bartók's supreme set of six, the Russian master surely does match his German predecessor not just in sheer number, but in quality as well!). What makes this set particularly attractive—beyond the phenomenal playing of the Pacifica Quartet, who consistently prove themselves knowledgeable, passionate, and thought-provoking guides—is the addition of the music of other, lesser-known Soviet-era composers interspersed throughout these discs. How wonderful it is to trace not only Shostakovich's development here, but also that of the Soviet string quartet in general. A magnificent cycle, captured in pristine sound, with all the added extras—that is surely a winner in my book!

SCRIABIN Mazurkas • Feinberg • MELODIYA 10 02192

KOPPEL Marimba Concertos Nos. 1-4; P.S. to a Concerto • Bednarska/Christensen/Aalborg Symphony Orchestra • DACAPO 6.220595 (SACD)

WALTON Cello Concerto; Passacaglia for Cello Solo HINDEMITH Cello Concerto; Sonata for Solo Cello • Christian Poltéra/Shipway/São Paulo Symphony Orchestra • BIS 2077 (SACD)

PALS Piano Sonata No. 3; Duo-Sonata; Piano Trio; 3 Fugues • Schneider/Pals/Hyldig • POLYHYMNIA PF14002

SHOSTAKOVICH String Quartets 1-15 PROKOFIEV String Quartet 2 MIASKOVSKY String Quartet 13 WEINBERG String Quartet 6 SCHNITTKE String Quartet 3 • Pacifica Quartet • CEDILLE BOX 1003 (8 CDs)