

Richard Dyer's picks

By Richard Dyer
GLOBE STAFF

Although the classical record business is regularly described as dying or dead, the German web-store JPC lists 644 new classical releases within the last 30 days. No individual person could possibly have heard a year's worth. But here are some CDs of 2005, listed in no particular order, that this collector particularly enjoyed.

1. "Musica Proibita" - Cecilia Bartoli Les Musiciens du Louvre, Marek Minkowski, conductor *Decca*. Bartoli, the best selling female classical singer in the world, has maintained her status not by crossover projects but by serious musical endeavors like this one, a collection of arias from oratorios written by Handel, Caldara, and Alessandro Scarlatti composed in Rome during a period when opera was forbidden.

2. Bach: Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, Julia Fischer, violin *Pentatone*. The most exciting debut artist of this Boston Symphony season so far, the charismatic young German violinist plays Bach with complete technical and musical assurance in an expressive, old-fashioned style.

3. "The Uncovered Ruggles": Piano Music of Carl Ruggles. Donald Berman, piano *New World Records*. Boston-based pianist Berman who has recovered and recorded two volumes of unknown music by Ives turns his attention to another rugged (and neglected) American individualist, with rewarding results.

4. Albeniz: "Iberia" and other works for piano. Esteban Sanchez, piano *Brilliant Classics*. The Spanish pianist died in 1997, and this idiomatic and amazing performance, originally released on a hard-to-find label, has finally become widely available on at a superbudget price.

5. Wagner: "Tristan und Isolde," Nina Stemme, Placido Domingo, with Antonio Pappano, conductor *EMI*. The beloved and sometimes controversial tenor, now in the twilight of his career, gives one of his most compelling and committed performances in a role he never sang on stage.

6. Michael Raucheisen: The Man at the Piano *Membran*. In the beginning in 1942, the collaborative pianist Michael Raucheisen recorded more than 2500 Lieder with the most prominent singers active in Germany. Jewish composers and poets were conspicuously absent from recordings made during the Third Reich, but the survey was otherwise comprehensive. Even today this selection of more than 1000 songs includes some not otherwise represented on records. The 66 CDs come in a box that costs just over \$100.

7. Caldara: Cantatas. Max Emanuel Cencic, countertenor, with Ornamente 99 conducted by Karsten Eric Ose *Capriccio*. The early-music event of 2004 was the Boston premiere of Vivaldi's "Andromeda Liberata," by the Venice Baroque Ensemble, and the most memorable singing in it came from countertenor Max Emanuel Cencic. *Capriccio* heard Cencic's star potential, and this delightful Caldara CD is the most recent of his solo CDs for the label.

8. Beethoven: Piano Concertos 2 and 3 - Martha Argerich piano, with Claudio Abbado, conductor *Deutsche Gramophon*. No record by the mercurial pianist is merely a duplicate, even when she is playing repertoire as familiar and overrecorded as this, she has something unique to offer.

9. "A Mediterranean Christmas," The Boston Camerata, Joel Cohen, music director *Warner Classics*. A joyous seasonal album drawing on music from multicultural sources and featuring a mix of early-music artists and specialists in Arab music.

10. Brahms: Piano Music. Joyce Hatto, piano *Concert Artist/Fidelio Recordings*. Hatto, a British pianist now in her mid-70s, was my great discovery of 2005. Although illness has kept her off the concert platform for decades, she has made well over 100 CDs surveying virtually the major piano repertory. None of the 50 or so I have heard is disappointing and the best join the company of the best piano record ever made. A particular favorite is this Brahms volume that includes the "Paganini" Variations.