

The New York Times

Classical Playlist: Lewis Spratlan, Beethoven and Brahms

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Times critics share what they've been listening to lately.

Classical Playlist: 'Siegfried Idyll,' Rachmaninoff and 'I Have Set My Hert So Hy'

Classical Playlist: Hindemith, Shostakovich and Dutilleux

Classical Playlist: Christiane Karg, Alan Feinberg and More

LEWIS SPRATLAN: 'Hesperus Is Phosphorus'

The Crossing; Network for New Music; Donald Nally, conductor
(Innova)

Born in 1940, Lewis Spratlan came to international attention in 2000 when a concert performance of Act II of his 1970s opera "Life Is a Dream" won the Pulitzer Prize for Music before the full work had ever been staged. That complex and compelling opera was finally given its premiere in Santa Fe in 2010. This recording offers his 2012 vespers cantata, "Hesperus Is Phosphorus," performed by the Philadelphia forces that commissioned it: the Crossing, the superb contemporary-music vocal ensemble, and Network for New Music. The title plays on the belief of the early Greeks that Phosphorus was the morning star, and Hesperus the evening one, before they realized that the two were one celestial body, Venus. The inventive text draws together writings by David Eagleman, Wallace Stevens, Richard Feynman, Wallace Shawn and others. Mr. Spratlan's pungently modern language comes through

continually in this intricate 65-minute score. Still, he sets words for clarity, often in long stretches of spiky block chords. A beautiful recording of a sensual and mysterious work. (*ANTHONY TOMMASINI*)

BEETHOVEN: Missa Solemnis

Genia Kühmeier, Elisabeth Kulman, Mark Padmore, Hanno Müller-Brachmann, soloists; Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Choir; Bernard Haitink, conductor

(BR Klassik)

Bernard Haitink, 86, has been prolific in the core repertoire, so it's hard to believe that this is his first release of the elusive "Missa Solemnis." Recorded live last September, it's typical Haitink. On a first hearing, it might seem too neutral — clean, but short on thrills or terrors. With four fine soloists, a strong choir and supple playing, the work has details — the tenderness of the strings before the Benedictus, the bassoons in the Agnus Dei — that reward a second listen, then a third and more. (*DAVID ALLEN*)

BRAHMS: The Piano Trios

Christian Tetzlaff, violin; Tanja Tetzlaff, cello; Lars Vogt, piano

(Ondine)

Tried-and-true works, these three magnificent trios, but this group of musicians — each noted as a soloist and together known as the Tetzlaff Trio — brings to them rare polish and passion. I'm thinking about moments like the seething unanimity of the opening to the third trio, or the distance traveled (in a matter of seconds), as an ensemble, from vulnerability to strength in the slow movement of the second trio. The Trio No. 1, in the commonly performed revised version, finds the players moving from tidal lushness to blanched incisions of piano and piquant string plucks just before the recapitulation of the second movement's theme. At the start of the Adagio, hushed, husky, fragile strings alternate with a piano line played by Mr. Vogt with ineffable softness, yet a quality of looming grandeur. An excellent set. (*ZACHARY WOOLFE*)

SPOTIFY PLAYLIST

Tracks from the recordings discussed this week. (Spotify users can also find it here.)

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