

Culture Desk: Notes on arts and entertainment from the staff

2011 YEAR IN REVIEW | By Russell Platt | January 5, 2012 | [LINK](#)

Classical Recordings: Eleven for 2011

“Liszt: Lise de la Salle” (Naïve). Lise de la Salle, piano.



Liszt: *Années de Pèlerinage* (Chandos; two disks). Louis Lortie, piano.

Liszt: “*Romance Oubliée*,” other works; Smetana: *Piano Trio in G Minor* (Harmonia Mundi). Trio Wanderer.

2011 was, above all else, the bicentenary of the birth of Franz Liszt, who was not only the pianist who epitomized the nineteenth-century virtuoso showman, but a composer whose output ranged from salon bonbons and technical display pieces to visionary masterworks that anticipated the musical complexities of the century to come. In regard to Liszt’s orchestral tone poems (once immensely popular) and choral works, the various record labels took a collective yawn, and the concertos for piano and orchestra were imperfectly realized in disks by Lang Lang and Daniel Barenboim. But in the more intimate realms of solo piano and chamber music, there was more the cheer about.

Alex Ross has rightly noted the excellence of the veteran pianist Nelson Freire’s compendium of solo works on Decca, “*Harmonies du Soir*,” but a number of younger artists (all Francophone) took bold stands that repay repeated listening. **The remarkable French musician Lise de la Salle excels in such works as “Après une Lecture du Dante,” “Lacrymosa” (after Mozart’s Requiem), and the Ballade No. 2, revealing a singular combination of digital dexterity, impetuous phrasing, and lofty, delicate expressivity.** The French-Canadian pianist Louis Lortie

is more of an elegant artist in the grand manner, but, in performing all three books of “Années de Pèlerinage,” a feat that he has also accomplished in public, he gives us the full Liszt, from the Byronic swoons of the young composer’s “Vallée d’Obermann” to the savage austerities of the third book’s “Angelus!” and “Sursum Corda.”

It was out of this late style that Liszt, no longer the dashing keyboard cavalier but an old, deeply religious, and nearly broken man, created an unlikely chamber-music repertory in the last few years of his life. Such gems as the “Romance Oubliée” and “La Lugubre Gondola” (a premonition, in Venice, of the death of his son-in-law Wagner) remain compelling in their ascetic mysticism and startling in the daring of their harmonies, and Trio Wanderer performs them with both passion and refinement. The album also offers a bracing account of Bedrich Smetana’s Piano Trio in G Minor, a forthright alternative to the sepulchral works of the older master, who was himself an influence on the Czech composer’s style.

John Blow: “Venus and Adonis” (CPO). Boston Early Music Festival.

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Mark-Anthony Turnage: “Anna Nicole” (Opus Arte DVD). Orchestra, chorus, and soloists of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Antonio Pappano, conductor.

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Scott Joplin: “Treemonisha” (New World). Paragon Ragtime Orchestra and soloists; Rick Benjamin, conductor.

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“Joseph Calleja: The Maltese Tenor” (Decca). L’Orchestre de la Suisse Romande; Marco Armiliato, conductor.

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Shostakovich: String Quartets, 5-8; Miaskovsky: Quartet No. 13 (Cedille, two disks). Pacifica Quartet.

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Feldman: Piano and String Quartet (Bridge). Eclipse Quartet, Vicki Ray, piano.

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“Evgeny Starodubtsev: Hindemith, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Szymanowski” (Honens).

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“Yuja Wang: Rachmaninov” (Deutsche Grammophon). Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Claudio Abbado, conductor.

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