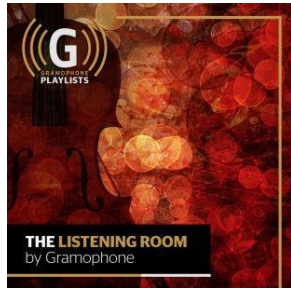


# GRAMOPHONE

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## The Listening Room: Episode 8

[James Jolly](#) Fri 15th December 2017



*Schumann's First from San Francisco, a fine new Scriabin Piano Concerto from Oslo and Julia Varady in Wagner. Baroque delights from Califano and Stradella and a few tasty morsels from brand-new releases*

The symphonic cycle of choice in the past couple of years has not been the Beethovens or the Brahmses (though we've had a handful of those): no, it's been

the **Schumann** symphonies. After Holliger, Dausgaard, Rattle, Nézet-Séguin and Ticciati, a

new set arrives from San Francisco with Michael Tilson Thomas at the helm. Not bothered about following any performance trend or practice, MTT simply gives us the four symphonies in beautifully crafted performances that are particularly striking for some very classy orchestral playing (above all, from the woodwinds). I've chosen the fresh, songful First Symphony for this week's Listening Room.

Dipping into the archives, I stumbled across a recording I'd completely forgotten – **Wagner's** *Wesendonck-Lieder* sung by the wonderful Julia Varady with her husband, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, conducting the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester. It's gloriously sung and with such intelligence – a trademark of this great singer, and the orchestral playing is very fine too.

**Scriabin's** Piano Concerto is a work that really should be heard more often in concert – it's a language, rich and melodic, that sometimes reminds me of Rachmaninov with its sweep and ambition, and harmonically it's got some surprises. Kyrill Gerstein is just the sort of 'thinking pianist' to take it on and he does a terrific job, and Vasily Petrenko and the Oslo Phil are highly sympathetic partners.

From the Baroque era, chamber music by **Arcangelo Califano**, a Dresden-based musician who worked in the first half of the 18th century. Ensemble Zefiro, on a disc entitled 'Dresden', make wonderful guides to his music, which they place alongside some of his contemporaries.

I've always had a soft spot for the music of **Bohuslav Martinu** and don't subscribe to the 'he wrote too much and the quality suffered' point of view. He was prolific, sure, but he had a facility that was very, very impressive. And his music is always highly distinctive. So it was with great excitement that I noticed that Supraphon has recently released a new recording of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, an English-language oratorio inspired by one of the oldest works of literature in the world. Manfred Honeck conducts the Czech Phil, the Prague Philharmonic Choir and a handful of English-speaking soloists (as well as Simon Callow as narrator). It's got terrific power, as you can soon tell from the First Part.

Three tasters of brand-new releases are Nelson Goerner in a **Chopin** Nocturne, part of a complete set – really impressive playing; a lovely aria from **Stradella's** *La Susanna* with the very fine Chantal Santon Jeffrey joining the Galilei Consort; and a fun miniature by **Hindemith** conducted by Paavo Järvi, soon to adorn *Gramophone's* front cover alongside his father and brother.

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