

U3A IGO, Exploring Classical Music, 20 July 2023

Great performers – a personal choice

Rosemary J.

Angela Hewitt (piano) I have only recently discovered this marvellous pianist, courtesy, as so often, of BBC Radio 3. A Canadian, born in 1958, she was a child prodigy, going on to perform worldwide, and being best known for her interpretations of Bach. As an example, here is **the last movement of Bach's Partita no. 1**.

Play <https://youtu.be/zPCh5HLkOfU> 1.41

Tasmin Little (violin) It was thanks to her, and again the BBC, that I was introduced to a composer new to me, and I heard my first piece by **Arvo Part, Spiegel im Spiegel (Mirror in the Mirror)**. I was driving to work, and on reaching the car park I just had to stay until the music had finished, whether I was late or not! I bought Tasmin Little's Classics for Pleasure CD, featuring eight of Arvo Part's pieces. Martin Roscoe accompanies. I have not heard another interpretation that comes near the ethereal, meditative beauty of this performance.

Play <https://youtu.be/gpPPM7d-x20> 8.19

Janet Baker (mezzo-soprano) Out of her outstanding performances I have, with difficulty, chosen a movement from one of my favourite works, **Berlioz, Nuits d'ete (1841)** a song cycle of poems by his friend Theophil Gautier.

Play <https://youtu.be/D3lqNUoMtPM> 5.00

Yo-Yo Ma (cello) **The Swan, from Carnival of the Animals, by Saint-Saens**, is such a familiar piece that I didn't give much thought as to why it is so popular. This performance by Yo-Yo Ma has opened my ears. A transformation indeed.

Play <https://youtu.be/3qrKjywjo7Q> 3.04

James Galway (flute) In the 1970s James Galway, The Man with the Golden Flute, sparked a surge of young people taking up the flute. Now, Lizzo (the 'all the rage' American rap, pop, and flute performer) is having a similar effect. James Galway was her childhood idol, and in 2023 they performed a duet at the Met Gala. His performance here of **Poulenc's Flute Sonata (1st movement)**

is one of my favourites. Play <https://youtu.be/2zxkh9JZVE> 4.30

John Williams (guitar) **Rodrigo's popular Concerto de Aranjuez** is possibly John Williams' most performed work. His wonderful technique and expressive playing are a joy, and is a long-time favourite of mine.

Play <https://youtu.be/plNaMK8cQQI> 23.50

Alison Balsom (trumpet) b.1978 - another wonderful, much awarded, performer. Her **Variations on Bellini's Norma** is, I think, a winner!

Play <https://youtu.be/agAbVUux1F4> 6.23

Sarah Willis (French horn b.1968) A member of the Berlin Philharmonic, she is a popular presenter on German TV and online programmes about classical music. A brass trio arrangement of the **Rondo from Mozart's Horn Concerto no. 4** is beautifully played here.
Play <https://youtu.be/OJoBwDErM3M> 3.59

Michael Flanders and Donald Swann (singer and piano) They were a British comedy duo, collaborating together in writing and performing comic songs. In the 1950s and 1960s they toured world-wide with their revues *At the Drop of a Hat* and *At the Drop of Another Hat*. I still cannot help laughing at their performance of **'Ill Wind'** – I'm sure Mozart still does too!
Play <https://youtu.be/bkYrj2DQIVc> 2.57

Gillian Weir (organ) New Zealand-British, born 1941. A most distinguished organist, particularly noted for her interest in and performances of Messiaen. I am, however, more sympathetic towards Bach than Messiaen, so I've chosen **Bach's ever popular Toccata and Fugue in D minor** – an amazing performance.
Play <https://youtu.be/hAdyOZAoTt4> 11.00

Lisa della Casa (soprano – 1919-2012) She was a Swiss soprano most admired for her interpretations of major heroines in operas by Mozart and Richard Strauss, and of German lieder. She was also described as 'the most beautiful woman on the operatic stage'. I came across her recording of Richard Strauss' *Four Last Songs*, and have preferred it ever since (Elisabeth Schwarzkopf coming a close second). Her performance of **Mozart's Marriage of Figaro, Act 3, 'Dove sono I bei Momenti'** shows her in a similar light.
Play <https://youtu.be/Ed4WYNBSwfl> 4.26

Yehudi Menuhin and Ravi Shankar (violin and sitar) Yehudi Menuhin was widely considered to be one of the great violinists of the 20th century. What is possibly less well-known is his love of jazz. I've been told that when playing, he did not improvise and that the notes were written out for him. Verification, if possible, please.

Ravi Shankar was an Indian sitarist and composer. A sitar virtuoso, he became the best-known expert of North Indian classical music in the second half of the 20th century. He had a long association and deep friendship with Menuhin, leading to joint performances, and a concerto for violin, sitar and orchestra by Alan Hovhaness, entitled *Shambala* (c.1970). This predated Shankar's own sitar concertos, but he and Menuhin never recorded them. This piece is just listed on you tube as **Ravi Shankar plays with Yehudi Menuhin, Medici TV**.
Play <https://youtu.be/StT66EFdGWw> 2.50

Stephan Grappelli and Yehudi Menuhin (violins) Born Stefano Grappelli, he was a French jazz violinist, best known as a founder of the Quintette du Hot Club de France with guitarist Django Reinhardt in 1934. He has been called 'the grandfather of jazz violinists' and continued playing concerts around the world well into his eighties. He worked with his great friend Menuhin, and in the 1970s they brought out the album *'Jalousie'*, an album of 1930s classics, backed by the Alan Claire Trio. Playing here is Jerome Kern's **Pick Yourself Up**
Play <https://youtu.be/-CHN4Z7QS0s> 2.50