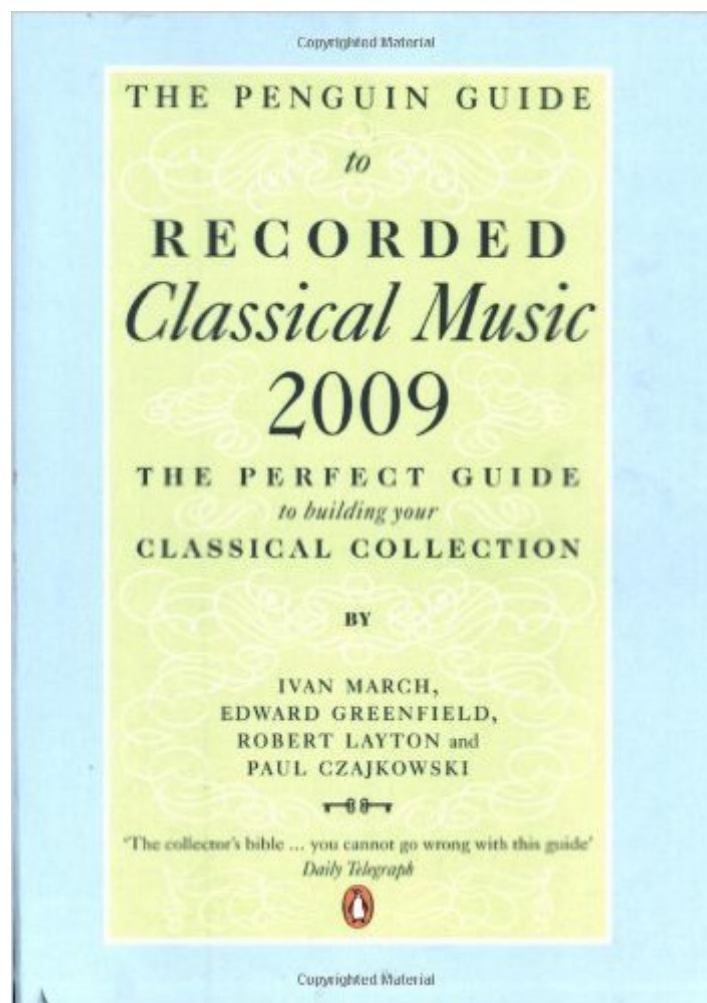


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The Penguin Guide To Recorded Classical Music 2009



Synopsis

This completely revised edition of the Penguin Guide reviews the major classical recordings issued and reissued over the past five decades, many of which dominate the catalogue because of their sheer excellence, irrespective of recording dates. More comprehensive than ever before and now updated annually, it indicates key recordings on CD, DVD and enhanced SACD, including those in surround sound. If you want the finest available version of any major classical work (including DVDs of opera and ballet) you will find it listed and assessed in these pages. Ranging from long-established recordings to the newest releases, the latest edition represents the cream of the international repertoire and has all the information you need to select the finest classical music available.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've owned the Penguin Guide continuously since 1984 and the 2008 version is about the tenth edition I've purchased. I've seen this guide go from having no competition to having some competition to being a model to be copied by the likes of the All Music Guide, Rough Guide to Classical Music, Third Ear Classical Music and the annual compendium of reviews Gramophone magazine puts together and markets under the moniker Gramophone Classical Music Guide 2008 (AKA Classical Good CD, DVD, & Download Guide) In all this time, no other guide has continuously challenged the Penguin Guide's leadership in relating what's new and different in the universe of

recorded classical music. Third Ear came closest but published only one edition in 2000. Today, the Penguin Guide is still the best at what it does but, based on my review of the 2008 edition, it is changing its ways and is slipping a bit behind the classical music industry. I say it is slipping because the 2008 edition is hardly representative of the greatest recordings that have been issued since the last edition was published in 2005. Two significant historical events occurred in 2006 -- the Shostakovich centenary and the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth. Both birthdays generated scores of new recordings, probably more for Shostakovich than in any single year ever before. They covered one of these celebrations pretty well in their pages but didn't do so well in the other. The new Penguin Guide did best representing the reams of new Shostakovich recordings that came out that year. The 2008 tome includes discussion on the super audio cycle of symphonies from Kitaenko on Capriccio, the excellent DVD "Shostakovich vs. Stalin: The War Symphonies", and lists as its No.

Over the years, I have found the Penguin guide a useful reference for getting an idea of available recordings of a particular piece, and some kind of general idea of their respective merits. This latest edition, however, seems to have become too selective. Where earlier editions often seemed to list all serious contenders for a work, this one is much more limited, for instance listing no more than four recordings of *Sacre du Printemps* (including neither of my favourites, Chailly and MTT). For some works you may not find a listing at all (e.g., Zemlinsky's *Seejungfrau*). This is a pity, because this way the Penguin guide loses its main advantage over the Gramophone Good CD Guide, that has always been far more selective, and in my opinion is the more reliable source when it comes to aesthetic judgment. (E.g, the Penguin continues to list the inadequate and incomplete Kliegel as a serious recommendation for Kodaly's cello solo sonata, but doesn't bother to mention Claret or Wispelwey). Also, recordings are listed that are no longer available (eg., the Abbado *Gurrelieder*). The rating system has acquired several new features that will guarantee utter confusion. Three stars used to be the top, but now exceptional recordings can get four. But that isn't all, exceptional recordings can also still get the familiar rosette, and moreover can be qualified as a 'key' recording, identified with a little key-symbol. What all this means is completely mysterious. There are four-star recordings with and without rosettes; three-star recordings with a rosette while four-star competition goes unrosetted; there are rosette-recordings that are key and others that aren't; and key recordings may be rated anything from two and a half to four stars.

The Penguin Guide has changed only slightly over the years. I am sitting here looking at my first

Penguin Stereo Record Guide from 1975 in hard back (small format, though). Back then I was wrapping up post-grad college, working in a large music store as Classical buyer, and the Guide was unquestionably the most respected and authoritative summary of classical music records that could be held in one hand. 1114 pages, quaintly including reviews of the Beatles' albums (influenced perhaps by Deryck Cooke?) comparing them to Stockhausen and Boulez and furthermore identifying George Martin as their Walter Legge (for the younger set, Legge was something of a genius classical/opera producer for EMI particularly after the war). It's true the Penguin Guide is flawed, that editorial gaffs persist, like non sequitur junk DNA accumulating over the evolutionary millennia. It is true that the rating system is ambiguous and redundant on its face. It's true that a few recordings are reviewed in the body text without their names appearing in the recordings list for a particular piece. It's true that some albums listed are out of print and other, worthy titles in print do not appear anywhere. It's true that it is not comprehensive. But all those weaknesses taken together amount to little more than annoyance, unless you really expect a single volume can satisfy the range of classical music consumers from novice to devoted long hair music buffs. It is still the most readable, fun, unputdownable single volume reference Guide. From the first, this Guide has given me a developing vocabulary in what differentiates classical music performances and recordings. It has shown me titles I would never have known about.

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