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Year in Review | Classical music

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Shu-Ying Li in *Madame Butterfly*

The Concert Association of Florida ended its 42-year presence on the area classical music scene, going into bankruptcy in February. The Broward and Adrienne Arsht performing arts centers responded by announcing modest classical series of their own. The Florida Grand (which ended music director Stewart Robertson's contract a year early) and Palm Beach opera companies announced they were cutting one full production each, but Seraphic Fire's profile rose as it added a summer concert series.

New music by Libby Larsen, Paul Crabtree and Thomas Sleeper was first heard by South Florida audiences, and the Cleveland Orchestra's Miami residency saw the big band from Ohio making a compelling case for Shostakovich's *Leningrad Symphony*.

Anthony Davis offered glimpses of his work in progress -- an opera about Fidel Castro -- at the University of Miami, and, on its farewell tour, the Guarneri Quartet brought late Beethoven to South Florida.

TOP FIVE

1. Itzhak Perlman, scold: In January, the legendary Israeli violinist upbraided a packed Kravis Center audience in West Palm Beach for its tepid response to an early piece by the French modernist Olivier Messiaen -- and then played it again. In early March, Perlman was the focus of the Festival of the Arts Boca, playing a radiant Beethoven Violin Concerto and then fulfilling a longtime dream by leading the Russian National Orchestra, chorus and soloists in a powerful reading of the same composer's Ninth Symphony.

2. Jeremy Denk, piano titan: This fine pianist played one of the great monuments of American music, the *Concord Sonata* of Charles Ives, in magnificent style during the New World Symphony's celebration of the composer in February. Denk, also familiar to audiences for his stellar work as Joshua Bell's keyboard partner, is one of the most rewarding all-

arounders working today. In April, he plays the Copland Piano Concerto at the New World.

3. Shu-Ying Li, modern Butterfly: The Chinese soprano wrapped up FGO's 68th season in April and May with a definitive Cio-Cio San for our time in Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*: not a submissive, naive girl but a calculating old-soul teenager who knows exactly what she's doing when she marries Pinkerton and whose betrayal becomes infinitely more shattering because of it. Li sang beautifully, acted superbly and blew everyone else right off the stage.

4. Miami Symphony resurgent: Eduardo Marturet opened the 21st season of his orchestra at Festival Miami in October with a world premiere of a piece by a UM grad student and a persuasive account of the Shostakovich Ninth Symphony. Marturet, who also led the Bolivar Orchestra of his native Venezuela on a sizzling recording released in April of the Vivaldi and Piazzolla *Four Seasons* with star Canadian fiddler Lara St. John, is determined to make MISO, as intimates call it, an orchestra to be reckoned with.

5. James Judd's return: Late in the year, the former Florida Philharmonic chief conducted on local stages again for the first time since 2001, reuniting in December with former Philharmonic colleagues in the Boca Raton Symphonia and Master Chorale of South Florida for three performances in three counties of the Handel's complete *Messiah*. His secret weapon: Four young, terrifically talented singers from the Curtis Institute of Music as his engaging, able soloists.

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