

# The Consummate Value of (Manitoba Chamber Orchestra's) Classical Music Recordings

by Conrad Sweatman

Anyone outside the Top 40 world who records CDs in this day and age might be accused of artistic vanity. Consider this [2015 headline](#) from impish classical blogger Norman Lebrecht on *Slipped Disc*: “Adele’s album sold 3.4M last week. The classical #1 sold 493.” The classical artist in question was Yo Yo Ma.

No shade on Adele, but for those of us who like coffee with our sugar, a bit of Beethoven alongside The Beatles, let’s not pretend this trend isn’t at least a *little* discouraging. But how much so? So much that it should stop Yo Yo Ma, or even those talented musicians among us who don’t chart in the Top 10, from gracing the world with a durable document of the miracles we conduct on stage?

Phrased that way, the question implies a clear answer in the negative. I’m biased, as a dedicated marketer of classical music, so I’ll relate a persuasive argument on this matter made by a non-musician friend of mine. Challenged to defend the social value of concert music in utilitarian terms, she argued that such value lay in concert music’s prominent place in the public domain. In a sense, we all have a stake in the preservation of classical music, just as we all have a stake in the preservations of *the commons*.

I might extend her argument to point out that most Canadian classical music organizations are non-profits, whose budgets are supported indirectly by democratic mandate, and who generally, in my experience, do their utmost to keep their concerts and recordings affordable for Jane Q. Citizen.

Take MCO Records, which I help to promote in my capacity as [Manitoba Chamber Orchestra’s](#) Marketing and Communications Manager. We’re about to release *Cello Concerto*, an EP featuring the excellent music of Canadian composer Michael Oesterle and a performance by the MCO and Canadian cellist Ariel Barnes. We’ve priced the CD at a mere \$12. The current

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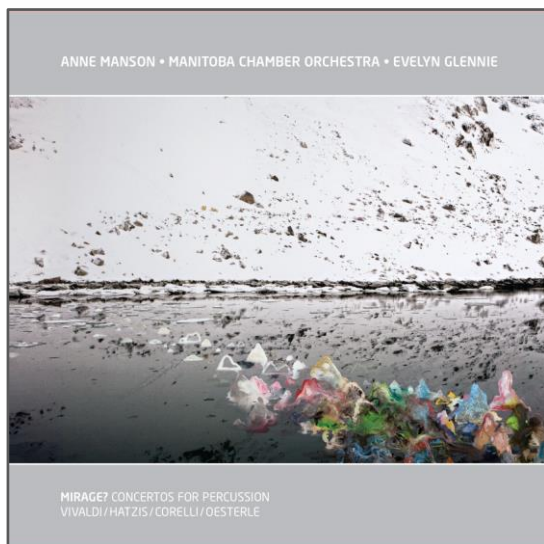
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retail price of our 2017 release of [Mirage?](#) [Concertos for Percussion](#)—which features Dame Evelyn Glennie and includes the music of Canadian composer Christos Hatzis, Vivaldi, and others—is \$10. Same goes for our JUNO-nominated album, [Troubadour and the Nightingale](#), with Canadian-Armenian soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian. Our concert ticket prices are also affordable, which probably explains why our concerts remain so popular with a diverse group of Manitobans and Canadians. And for those who can't make it to MCO's core concerts, there are free MCO workshops and satellite concerts across the province and free streamable concerts online.



Avid concert music fans will feel less pressure to justify the recording and production of concert music in utilitarian terms. They will purchase and recommend albums such as those just mentioned purely for their own sake, with little thought about the greater good. But in our world of ones and zeroes, pragmatism and penny-pinching politicians, there are many other ways to justify such expenditures. Here's one relevant to the MCO Records: our albums are a who's who of top Canadian soloists, orchestral players, and composers. In this sense, they provide the Canadian student of music with a useful virtual introduction to the world of Canadian professional music, as well as some very strong and instructive performances of the common practice tradition.



Contact me at [csweatman@themco.ca](mailto:csweatman@themco.ca) or visit our website [themco.ca](http://themco.ca) for more information about MCO Records' titles.