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Alfred Cortot

Preludes: Chopin & Debussy

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There can be little to be said at this time of day about Cortot's playing of the twenty-four Preludes. His complete recording of them seven years ago has a place in gramophone history; the significance of this set is in what good piano recording of to-day has been able to do for it. It tells tremendously, of course, in such as Nos. 8, 12, the middle part of No. 15 (the "raindrops"), and No. 19. Those, indeed, are the ones that most move me to marvel; No. 8 can only be compared to lightning, or to a rapid, crystal-clear stream scintillating in the sun. There may be an occasional unevenness, and not all the sustained tone we might like; expressiveness may be sought by the holding back of the right hand after the left, or by spread chords, with rather palling frequency; but it yet remains to one of the young pianists of to-day to give us such level satisfaction throughout, or more brilliant high-lights.

C. M. Crabtree, *The Gramophone*, March 1934 - *first review of Cortot's 1933/4 Chopin Preludes*

Transfer notes

I've attempted on a number of occasions to work on the solo piano recordings Alfred Cortot left us in the earlier years of electrical recordings, but on previous occasions found my source material lacking, or my technical resources not up to the job. There is little point reworking this repertoire unless and until one can bring something really special to it.

That is what this volume, which I hope will be the first of many, has I hope achieved. For the first time the vagaries of 1930s pitch stability have been treatable, bringing an iron-like stability and solidity to Cortot's piano. This, coupled with the re-equalisation of 32-bit XR remastering, brings Cortot's instrument back to life as never before. I've also used the sympathetic resonances of the small recital hall at Santa Cecilia in Rome to further bring a sense of "being there" to the sound of these unsurpassed performances, and for this reason would recommend listeners to the Ambient Stereo editions of this release - they retain the mono integrity of the original recording whilst offering breathing space around the instrument.

As with our remastering of Schnabel's Beethoven sonatas, the combination of these approaches will surely allow those already familiar with these recordings to hear them almost afresh, to re-evaluate Cortot's artistry again, and greatly enhance the pleasure of listening to one of the greatest of pianists at his very finest. **AR**

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
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Cortot

CHOPIN 24 Preludes, Op. 28
DEBUSSY Preludes, Book 1

Studio recordings, 1930 - 1934

CHOPIN 24 Preludes, Op. 28

- 1 No. 1 in C major - *Agitato* (0:39)
- 2 No. 2 in A minor - *Lento* (2:16)
- 3 No. 3 in G major - *Vivace* (1:00)
- 4 No. 4 in E minor - *Largo* (1:50)
- 5 No. 5 in D major - *Molto allegro* (0:37)
- 6 No. 6 in B minor - *Lento assai* (1:50)
- 7 No. 7 in A major - *Andantino* (0:37)
- 8 No. 8 in F sharp minor - *Molto agitato* (1:42)
- 9 No. 9 in E major - *Largo* (1:14)
- 10 No. 10 in C sharp minor - *Molto allegro* (0:32)
- 11 No. 11 in B major - *Vivace* (0:30)
- 12 No. 12 in G sharp minor - *Presto* (1:07)
- 13 No. 13 in F sharp major - *Lento* (2:33)
- 14 No. 14 in E flat minor - *Allegro* (0:33)
- 15 No. 15 in D flat major - *Sostenuto* (4:44)
- 16 No. 16 in B flat minor - *Presto con fuoco* (1:03)
- 17 No. 17 in A flat major - *Allegretto* (2:40)
- 18 No. 18 in F minor - *Molto allegro* (0:49)
- 19 No. 19 in E flat minor - *Vivace* (1:16)
- 20 No. 20 in C minor - *Largo* (1:25)
- 21 No. 21 in B flat major - *Cantabile* (1:37)
- 22 No. 22 in G minor - *Molto agitato* (0:47)
- 23 No. 23 in F major - *Moderato* (0:43)
- 24 No. 24 in D minor - *Allegro appassionato* (2:56)

Alfred Cortot piano

DEBUSSY Preludes, Book 1

- 25 I. Danseuses de Delphes
Lent et grave (2:48)
- 26 II. Voiles
Modéré (2:50)
- 27 III. Le vent dans la plaine
Animé (2:05)
- 28 IV. «Les sons et les parfums tournent
dans l'air du soir»
Modéré (2:41)
- 29 V. Les collines d'Anacapri
Très modéré (2:48)
- 30 VI. Des pas sur la neige
Triste et lent (3:03)
- 31 VII. Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest
Animé et tumultueux (3:17)
- 32 VIII. La fille aux cheveux de lin
Très calme et doucement expressif (1:51)
- 33 IX. La sérénade interrompue
Modérément animé (2:14)
- 34 X. La cathédrale engloutie
Profondément calme (4:35)
- 35 XI. La danse de Puck
Capricieux et léger (2:25)
- 36 XII. Minstrels
Modéré (1:54)

XR remastering by
Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of **Alfred Cortot**

Chopin Preludes

Recorded 5 July 1933 & 20 April
1934, Abbey Road Studio 3
Matrix Nos 2B.5214-21
Catalogue Nos. HMV DB.2015-18

Debussy Preludes

Recorded 2 June 1930, 12/13 May
1931, 2 July 1931, Studio C, Small
Queen's Hall, London
Matrix Nos OB.867-72, 875, 878,
985, 28877, CF.3328
Catalogue Nos. HMV DB.1240-44

Total duration: **67:31**

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