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Rudolf Serkin

Early and Unpublished Recordings

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This release provides admirers of Rudolf Serkin with one 'first time complete on CD' and two 'first time issued in any form' performances. For admirers of his great duo with his father-in-law Adolf Busch, it offers a substantial portion of one of their most celebrated interpretations.

Serkin's first solo 'records' were Welte-Mignon rolls and he did not make a solo disc recording until 3 November 1936, when he set down Beethoven's 'Appassionata' Sonata at Abbey Road on six 12-inch sides. By then he was already an experienced 78rpm recording artist, having worked with Busch in Berlin and London studios since April 1928. The 'Appassionata' was always among his finest interpretations: those who know his later renderings will find this one predictably youthful in its nervous energy, yet already mature in its shaping and sense of structure. It was never put out on LP, and all previous CD issues stem from a botched transfer, omitting one chord. A heroic Serkin performance of this sonata was given at Town Hall, New York, on 30 November 1940, when Busch had a heart attack during a Beethoven violin sonata evening and could not return for the scheduled 'Kreutzer' in the second half. Rather than disappoint the audience, Serkin delivered what Karl Ulrich Schnabel felt was 'the most remarkable rendition' of the 'Appassionata' he had ever heard.

Ferruccio Busoni was a god to both Busch and Serkin. In the late summer of 1921 they prepared his Second Sonata and at the end of October were able to play it to the composer and some of his acolytes in Berlin. Busoni, already mortally ill, sat white-faced and still throughout the performance, which lasted almost 50 minutes. 'When we asked him if he liked it, all he would say was that it was "different" but that we had played it with love and enthusiasm – and that this was much more important than that we should have his opinion,' Serkin recollected. 'Then by chance, about two weeks later we heard him play the last movement himself with Egon Petri in Berlin, in the arrangement for two pianos, and we understood. That last movement is a set of variations on a Bach chorale and we played this in the German way, very reverently; but of course Busoni, being an Italian, played it twice as fast. So we completely restudied the work and reduced our playing time from 48 to about 30 minutes.' This WABC broadcast from the Library of Congress on 19 January 1940 joined the recital only at the end of the Presto, but the Variations were captured complete.

The Schumann is Serkin's second concerto recording, preceded only by the Fifth 'Brandenburg' with the Busch Chamber Players. It was given at Queen's Hall on 29 October 1936 for the Royal Philharmonic Society: Sir Hamilton Harty was to conduct the LPO but was ill, so composer Julius Harrison presided instead. The young Robert Threlfall was at the performance and during the interval encountered his piano teacher Solomon, who said he had greatly enjoyed Serkin's interpretation – as, indeed, had Threlfall. No doubt Harty would have been a more dynamic conductor but there are still gains in hearing the young Serkin with Britain's best orchestra of the era, not least Léon Goossens's oboe playing.

Tully Potter



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rudolf serkin
early & unpublished recordings

schumann
piano concerto in a minor
julius harrison, conductor
london philharmonic orchestra
(first release)

busoni
violin sonata no. 2 in e minor
adolf busch, violin
(first release)

beethoven
sonata no. 23 in f minor
"appassionata"

Robert-Thorn
studio and live recordings • 1936 & 1940

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BEETHOVEN Piano Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57 "Appassionata"

- 1 1st Mvt. - Allegro assai (9:18)
- 2 2nd Mvt. - Andante con moto (6:56)
- 3 3rd Mvt. - Allegro ma non troppo (8:09)

Recorded 3 November 1936 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3, London
Matrix nos. - 2EA 4440-1, 4441-1, 4442-1, 4443-1, 4444-1A & 4445-1
First issued on HMV C 2879/81

BUSONI Violin Sonata No. 2 in E minor, Op. 36a

- 4 2nd Mvt. - Presto [incomplete] (4:08)
- 5 3rd Mvt. - Andante con moto (13:59)

Live recording, 19 January 1940 in the Coolidge Auditorium, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
(previously unpublished)

Adolf Busch *violin*

SCHUMANN Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54

- 6 1st Mvt. - Allegro affettuoso (14:24)
- 7 2nd Mvt. - Intermezzo: Andante grazioso (5:15)
- 8 3rd Mvt. - Allegro vivace (10:12)

Live recording, 19 October 1936 in Queen's Hall, London (previously unpublished)

London Philharmonic Orchestra *Julius Harrison*

Rudolf Serkin *piano*

Producer and Audio Restoration
Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Rudolf Serkin

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providing source material

Original transfer of Schumann
Concerto by Roger Beardsley;
additional restoration and
editing by Mark Obert-Thorn

Total duration: 72:21

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