



Alfred Cortot

Chopin - The Wartime Recordings



"In both 1942 and 1943, the pianist not only re-recorded the Etudes but also the Preludes and Waltzes; less known is the fact that he recorded all of the Polonaises and Scherzi, which he did not record at any other time and pressings of which have not been found (one certainly hopes that copies will be located). Recorded at the Studio Albert in Paris on November 2 and 4, 1942, this later cycle of Etudes was released on 78rpm discs at the time and then on a French HMV LP in the 1950s, but were rarely available outside of France or anywhere after that time. They first came to wider attention when they were included in a 1990s 6-CD set produced by EMI France featuring a great many of Cortot's Chopin recordings.

At the time of that CD release, critics found them less interesting than the pianist's more known cycle from the previous decade – and certainly, the poor transfers and quick fade-outs after each short work didn't do much to warm the listener to these readings. However, upon closer examination, one can appreciate that Cortot is in fact in remarkably fine form in these accounts, in some cases playing with more precision and just as much fire as in his performances from almost ten years earlier. Op.10 No.1, for example, is taken at the same tempo and at the very least has different dropped notes (a refreshing change!) but in fact even fewer than the equally dashing earlier performance. Instantly recognizable are the élan, elegance, refinement, and nobility of Cortot's playing: fluid phrasing, a singing tone at all dynamic shadings (and even in rapid works), creative voicing, and the pianist's inimitable rubato are all on full display."

Mark Ainley, *The Piano Files* (www.thepianofiles.com), September 2019

Alfred Cortot's recording career is awash with recordings of Chopin, a composer he had a "passionate predilection" for and whose music he performed more than any other composer. As a student he worked with and studied under musicians who had had direct personal contact and tutorage with Chopin, who he regarded as the consummate Romantic composer. On 21 March 1925 Cortot made the first ever commercial electrical recording of classical music for Victor in New Jersey, and it's no great surprise to find him including a recital of Chopin in that historic session. By the time the present recordings were made he had already set down the Preludes at least five times (though not all were released) and had made successful commercially issued recordings of both the Etudes and Waltzes.

The present release offers all of the French-issued recordings Cortot made in Paris in 1942 and 1943. My aim has been to present the piano tone as fine a quality as possible, despite higher than normal amounts of background surface noise, most particularly in the Etudes, which I have attempted to keep to a minimum, but which is, unavoidably, still clearly present on some of the tracks. This issue notwithstanding, the listener will find much quieter backgrounds than previous releases, as well as improved piano tone. Pitch correction and stabilisation further enhances the perceived solidity of the instrument, which here also can be heard with a much fuller and more realistic tone thanks to Pristine's XR remastering and Ambient Stereo presentation.

Andrew Rose



cortot

wartime chopin

disc one (54:51)

CHOPIN Études Op. 10 (r. 2 & 4 Nov. 1942)

1. No. 1 in C major 'Waterfall' (2:05)
2. No. 2 in A minor 'Chromatique' (1:28)
3. No. 3 in E major 'Tristesse' (4:00)
4. No. 4 in C sharp minor 'Torrent' (2:07)
5. No. 5 in G flat major 'Black Keys' (1:40)
6. No. 6 in E flat minor 'Lament' (2:54)
7. No. 7 in C major 'Toccata' (1:35)
8. No. 8 in F major 'Sunshine' (2:27)
9. No. 9 in F minor (2:10)
10. No. 10 in A flat major (1:57)
11. No. 11 in E flat major 'Arpeggio' (1:50)
12. No. 12 in C minor 'Revolutionary' (2:46)

CHOPIN Études Op. 25 (r. 4 Nov. 1942)

13. No. 1 in A flat major 'Aeolian Harp' (2:04)
14. No. 2 in F minor 'The Bees' (1:26)
15. No. 3 in F major 'The Horseman' (1:45)
16. No. 4 in A minor 'Paganini' (1:34)
17. No. 5 in E minor 'Wrong Note' (2:47)
18. No. 6 in G sharp minor 'Thirds' (2:00)
19. No. 7 in C sharp minor 'Cello' (4:29)
20. No. 8 in D flat major 'Sixths' (1:08)
21. No. 9 in G flat major 'Butterfly' (1:07)
22. No. 10 in B minor 'Octave' (3:05)
23. No. 11 in A minor 'Winter Wind' (3:36)
24. No. 12 in C minor 'Ocean' (2:51)

Alfred Cortot, piano

disc two (75:50)

CHOPIN Préludes Op. 28 (r. 2 Dec., 1942)

1. No. 1 in C major (0:35)
2. No. 2 in A minor (2:01)
3. No. 3 in G major (0:59)
4. No. 4 in E minor (1:35)
5. No. 5 in D major (0:34)
6. No. 6 in B minor (1:33)
7. No. 7 in A major (0:34)
8. No. 8 in F sharp minor (1:41)
9. No. 9 in E major (1:13)
10. No. 10 in C sharp minor (0:30)
11. No. 11 in B major (0:35)
12. No. 12 in G sharp minor (1:10)
13. No. 13 in F sharp major (2:40)
14. No. 14 in E flat minor (0:34)
15. No. 15 in D flat major, 'Raindrop' (4:30)
16. No. 16 in B flat minor (1:08)
17. No. 17 in A flat major (2:46)
18. No. 18 in F minor (0:51)
19. No. 19 in E flat major (1:15)
20. No. 20 in C minor (1:25)
21. No. 21 in B flat major (1:34)
22. No. 22 in G minor (0:44)
23. No. 23 in F major (0:40)
24. No. 24 in D minor (2:38)

CHOPIN Waltzes (r. 24 May 1943)

25. No. 1 in E flat major, Op. 18 'Grande Valse brillante' (4:35)
26. No. 2 in A flat major, Op. 34 No. 1, 'Valse brillante' (4:31)
27. No. 3 in A minor, Op. 34 No. 2 (4:06)
28. No. 4 in F major, Op. 34 No. 3, 'Valse brillante' (2:04)
29. No. 5 Grande Valse in A flat major, Op. 42 (3:40)
30. No. 6 in D flat major, Op. 64 No. 1, 'Minuite Waltz' (1:33)
31. No. 7 in C sharp minor, Op. 64 No. 2 (3:00)
32. No. 8 in A flat major, Op. 64 No. 3 (2:53)
33. No. 9 in A flat major, Op. 69 No. 1, 'L'Adieu' (3:14)
34. No. 10 in B minor, Op. 69 No. 2 (2:53)
35. No. 11 in G flat major, Op. 70 No. 1 (2:55)
36. No. 12 in F minor, Op. 70 No. 2 (2:12)
37. No. 13 in D flat major, Op. 70 No. 3 (1:53)
38. No. 14 in E minor, Op. posth. (2:36)

XR Remastered by
Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based
on a photograph of
Alfred Cortot

Recorded at Studio
Albert, Paris

Total duration:
2hr 10:41