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Clifford Curzon plays Schubert

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"Schubert has been well served this month by his interpreters in the records that have come my way. Clifford Curzon, like Elizabeth Schwarzkopf and Edwin Fischer, in the Lieder recital reviewed elsewhere in this number, achieves the same intimacy of presentation and, in an eminent degree, gives one the impression that he is with you, playing to you in your room. That is indeed a most delightful impression: but the matter goes further, for, in a way that defies verbal description, Mr. Curzon's great artistry makes one feel that Schubert just in this way played and improvised to his friends. Only pianists will realise the technical skill that lies behind Mr. Curzon's playing of the first F minor Impromptu which, as Kathleen Dale writes in her chapter on the piano music in the *Schubert Symposium* edited by Gerald Abraham, is "perhaps the most difficult to play of all the eight Impromptus, for it contains some of Schubert's trickiest cross-hand passages and calls for very neat finger-work in many places."

What a joy, also, to have a meditative and not a jaunty and jerky performance of the well-loved A flat Impromptu. The phrase ends, with their little flicks of notes, are beautifully moulded in Mr. Curzon's exquisite performance of the equally well-loved variations on the *Rosamunde* B flat theme, and the brilliant last variation is enchantingly played: but I personally like a slightly more *cantabile* treatment of the rocking bass figure in the preceding G flat variation. There are Czech influences, Miss Dale tells us, in the fourth Impromptu, in which we never get the expected singing tune but instead "gay, springing figures, scintillating scale-passages and swirling decorative runs." This fascinating piece is gloriously played, and as Mr. Curzon ended his grand performance of these Impromptus I thought of Schubert's lovely song, *An mein Klavier*, in which the composer seems to be thanking his dear piano for all the beauty it has yielded up to him."

A. R., *The Gramophone*, September 1953, review of *4 Impromptus, D935*

"Curzon was a highly self-critical performer, and although he signed for the Decca recording company in 1937 and remained with them throughout his career, he was rarely at ease in the studios, and frequently refused to allow the release of recordings in which he felt dissatisfied with his performance." – *Wikipedia*

It is a shame that Clifford Curzon left so few recordings. His solo studio recordings were particularly thin on the ground. This disc brings together the three major Schubert recordings he made in the earlier part of his career – a glance at the recording dates indicates that he would return again and again to the studio to remake 78rpm sides he was unhappy with, the *Wanderer-Fantasie* taking four sessions over three years to complete.

Not surprisingly the sound quality increases dramatically from the earliest to the most recent of these recordings. Nevertheless, these Ambient Stereo XR remasters bring new clarity and life to all three pieces, as well as ameliorating numerous pitching instability problems heard on previous transfers.

Andrew Rose

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curzon
plays schubert

schubert
4 impromptus, d899
4 impromptus, d935
wanderer-fantasie, d760

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studio recordings, 1941-52



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SCHUBERT IMPROMPTUS, WANDERER-FANTASIE
CLIFFORD CURZON

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XR Remastered by **Andrew Rose**

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Clifford Curzon

Total duration: **79:20**

SCHUBERT Four Impromptus Op. 90, D899

1. No. 1 in C minor (9:06)
2. No. 2 in E flat major (3:47)
3. No. 3 in G flat major (4:57)
4. No. 4 in A flat major (7:02)

Recorded 4 June, 11 November & 18 December 1941, West Hampstead Studios, London

SCHUBERT Four Impromptus Op. 142, D935

5. No. 1 in F minor (9:09)
6. No. 2 in A-flat major (6:24)
7. No. 3 in B flat major (10:47)
8. No. 4 in F minor (7:03)

Recorded 9-11 December 1952, West Hampstead Studios, London

SCHUBERT Wanderer-Fantasie Op. 15, D760

9. 1st mvt. - Allegro con fuoco ma non troppo (5:52)
10. 2nd mvt. - Adagio (7:18)
11. 3rd mvt. - Presto (4:31)
12. 4th mvt. - Allegro (3:24)

Recorded 19/20 July 1949, 31 May 1950 & 9 January 1951, West Hampstead Studios, London

Clifford Curzon, piano

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