

ALFRED CORTOT

Concertos, Volume One

Pristine
XR

Chopin, Piano Concerto No. 2 - Historic Review

I have been able to get down from the office two other recordings of this—the Columbia (Marguerite Long and the Paris Conservatoire Concerts Orchestra: Gaubert. LX4-7), and the Rubinstein-L.S.O. (Barbirolli). This is H.M.V. DB1494-7. Each {cutting slightly the first movement) takes seven sides, and has a fill-up: Mile. Long playing the Mazurka, Op. 59, No. 3, and Rubinstein the C sharp minor Waltz, Op. 64, No. 2. I have no strong preference among the three. The Col. tone is distinctly slighter. On the whole Rubinstein's is the biggest and most even, but I find Cortot's the most interesting interpretation. There are few pianists whose poetry I find more congenial, though he does not record as well as some others. The balance and shaping of a few of those slow movement phrases are worth analysis. But Rubinstein produces a more impressive flow of tone, where that is wanted. Neither H.M.V. set, in the recorded orchestral tone, comes to my ideal. Cortot's last side but one seems to me, again, the more pure Chopin in impulse. These things are hard to analyse (though I am sure they can be divided down to minute particulars), and quite mad to argue about. One just enters some particular interpretative artist's heaven and is thankful to let everybody else do likewise with his or her blissful abode.

Saint-Saëns, Piano Concerto No. 4 - Historic Review

At side 2, 33, a second melody follows the chorale, and there is some good Schumannesque matter for a minute or two. The air darkens, and the pianist wreaks mightily upon the chorale, towards the end of the side. Side 3 begins with the secondary melody, which is now pondered upon very prettily. All the way, Cortot's feeling for the graces and simple depths of the music is entirely enjoyable. His quality does not record sensationally, as we know, but he is always, for me, one of the most satisfying of pianists, because of his fine feeling, his beautiful timing and phrasing, and his blend of firmness and suavity.

WRA, The Gramophone, May 1939, May 1938 (*Exerpts*)

Producer's Note

Alfred Cortot's extensive studio recordings for EMI included very few with full orchestra. He seemed more at home in a solo or chamber music environment when in the recording studio, and yet these recordings demonstrate amply just what a fabulous concerto player he also could be. It is notable that the Gramophone reviewer of the day felt that Cortot didn't record as well as his rivals when placed in front of the orchestra. Perhaps the limitations of the recording medium and its replay equipment had something to do with this assertion, for with Cortot it is surely the finer details and nuances, rather than bombast and flashiness, which are at the forefront of his unique brilliance. In these new XR remasters I have aimed to delve deeper into those 1930s grooves than ever before in order to illuminate Cortot's finer nuances. The focus here is, first and foremost on the piano. Capstan pitch stabilisation gives his piano a solidity it has not displayed before, and the instrument's excellent and sturdy tone throughout seems curiously at odds with the at times vintage style of the orchestral playing. In all three cases I've been not just delighted, but truly astonished by the detail within these recordings - each one can now be heard afresh and anew, and each is truly special. **Andrew Rose**

Cortot

CONCERTOS Volume One

RAVEL

Piano Concerto for the Left Hand

CHOPIN

Piano Concerto No. 2 in F minor

SAINT-SAËNS

Piano Concerto No. 4 in C minor

PASC 443

Studio recordings, 1935 & 1939

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