

The Czech-American pianist Rudolf Firkušný, despite a long and successful career as a pianist, made surprisingly few concerto recordings in his lifetime. However one might wish for a complete Firkušný Beethoven cycle, he only ever recorded two of the Beethoven concertos in the studio: the Third and the Fifth.

The two recordings here were the first of his Beethoven concerto recordings, made just eight months apart on opposite sides of the Atlantic. Firkušný recorded the first of his three studio recordings of the 'Emperor' Concerto in the United States with the Pittsburgh Symphony under William Steinberg in late October 1957, garnering a largely positive review in *The Gramophone* the following September:

"Firkusny gives a forthright performance of the *Emperor*. It is particularly effective in the slow movement, and in the finale, which is given very considerable rhythmic vitality. The orchestra, too, are sympathetic to the style, and provide in these movements an excellent partnership. The recording ... is excellent, both for soloist and orchestra, with the difficult timpani figure nearly at the end of the finale quite well caught both as to clarity and pitch."

Whilst he would return to the Emperor in 1964 with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Kempe (for Reader's Digest) and in 1973 with the New Philharmonia under Uri Segal (for Decca), the only other Beethoven concerto Firkušný recorded in the studio, the Third, originated in EMI's Abbey Road Studio 1 on 16 June 1958, with Czech-British conductor Walter Susskind and the Philharmonia. Once again, *The Gramophone* bestowed a largely positive review on the recording's (mono) release on Capitol Records in 1959:

"The thirteen current recordings of this concerto are readily divisible into sheep and goats: Firkusny is one of the sheep. Pleasant to say so, but the sheep are a numerous flock. His playing is neat and stylish, more classic than romantic; he takes the first movement at a good pace, not quite as quick as Serkin, but quicker than Arrau or Katchen or Solomon. Nevertheless I enjoyed his playing, most keenly in the finale which is strong and good-humoured and elegant all at once; the first movement is a trifle lacking in tension and excitement, and the expansive pace of the Adagio isn't quite steadily sustained. The recording is rather low in level and subfusc in timbre; there are two little grumbles - some notes are almost inaudible (e.g., the left-hand arpeggio figure at bar 223 of the first movement)..."

Happily, despite the reported shortcomings of Capitol's mono LP pressings, it turns out that both recordings were well made in good stereo, something that's made all the clearer in these clean, clear, vibrant Pristine XR remasters.

Admirers of Firkušný can currently find three other concerto recordings by the pianist at Pristine: a live 1955 Beethoven 3 (*PASC501*) and a live 1956 Brahms 1 (*PASC523*), both with the New York Philharmonic under Cantelli, together with his 1954 studio recording of the Dvořák concerto with Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra (*PASC045*). Perhaps the time has come to expand the pianist's rather limited presence at Pristine? Watch this space!

Andrew Rose



# firkušný

## plays beethoven

### BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, Op. 37

1. 1st mvt. - Allegro con brio (16:02)
2. 2nd mvt. - Largo (8:58)
3. 3rd mvt. - Rondo. Allegro (9:14)

Philharmonia Orchestra  
conducted by Walter Susskind

### BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 73, 'Emperor'

4. 1st mvt. - Allegro (19:49)
5. 2nd mvt. - Adagio un poco moto (7:48)
6. 3rd mvt. - Rondo. Allegro, ma non troppo (9:52)

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra  
conducted by William Steinberg

Rudolf Firkušný, piano

PRISTINE  
AUDIO

PASC 733

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a  
photograph of Rudolf Firkušný

Piano Concerto No. 3  
Recorded Abbey Road Studio 1,  
London, 16 June 1958

Piano Concerto No. 5  
Recorded Syria Mosque,  
Pittsburgh, 26 October 1957

Total duration: 71:43

For a full catalogue visit  
[www.pristineclassical.com](http://www.pristineclassical.com)  
or call : (00) 33 967 391 857

© 2025 Pristine Audio