



Pierre Fournier plays Dvořák, Saint-Saëns and Casals

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GRAMOPHONE Fournier in Lucerne

Let me deal with the encore first! A Casals commemoration from September 1976 finds Pierre Fournier and the Festival Strings Lucerne under Matthias Bamert performing The Song of the Birds. It's utter perfection in every respect, a fair match for the master himself, whether for its rapt phrasing or warm-textured tonal projection. I played it again and again and cannot imagine anyone who connects with the soul of the cello not responding likewise.

The principal items are scarcely less engaging. Sadly Istvan Kertesz never got round to supplementing his LSO Dvorak symphony cycle for Decca with a commercial recording of the Cello Concerto, so it is especially fortuitous that Audite should have located this 1967 Lucerne tape with Fournier as the soloist and the Swiss Festival Orchestra under Kertesz's baton, a performance that combines great tenderness with the kind of outdoors-style exuberance that was so characteristic of Kertesz's Dvorak style. Climaxes blaze and Fournier's phrasing has a tenderness about it that recalls the best of his earlier recordings of the same work. Furthermore, the stereo sound is excellent (as it is in the Casals), whereas the 1962 relay of Saint-Saens's First Concerto with Jean Martinon conducting the RTF Philharmoric Orchestra enjoys a clear but relatively constricted mono sound frame, the performance similarly vital, with lyrically arched phrasing and a typically animated account of the orchestral score. Quite a find this, and much to be recommended.