



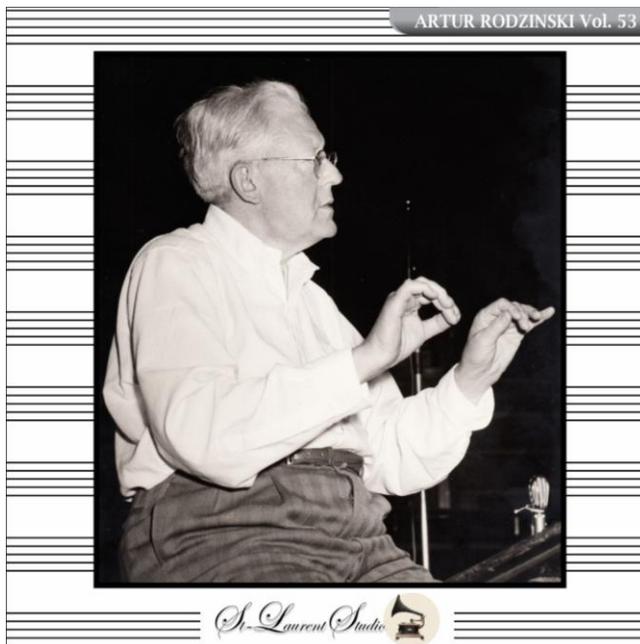
YSL 0913 T Rodzinski Vol. 53

“This is a rather odd release, particularly in St. Laurent Studio’s Artur Rodzinski series, of which, amazingly, this is volume 53! It contains two performances of Rachmaninoff’s much loved Second Piano Concerto, with the same soloist, conductor, and orchestra, given only 13 months apart. Nonetheless, I enjoyed it immensely.

There was a time when Russian-born Alexander Brailowsky (1896–1976) was a quite famous pianist. He studied with both Leschetitzky and Busoni, and built his reputation particularly as a Chopin specialist, giving series of multiple recitals that featured Chopin’s complete output. Born to a Jewish family in Kiev, Brailowsky made his Paris debut in 1919. He settled in France, where he lived for most of his life. He recorded in the 1920s and 30s, and then had a recording renaissance with RCA and Columbia in the 1960s. His star has faded, however, and he doesn’t figure much in discussions today of important pianists from the past.

These are both terrific performances, displaying virtuosity and temperament. Rodzinski accompanies flexibly and convincingly on both occasions. I was surprised to find Brailowsky playing the same concerto in two successive New York Philharmonic subscription seasons, with the same conductor, and so I checked the New York Philharmonic archive. Indeed, in January, 1945, he played the Rachmaninoff on a program that also included Lukas Foss’ THE PRAIRIE, and in February, 1946 the Rachmaninoff was paired with the Shostakovich Fifth Symphony. One guesses that the combination of Brailowsky and Rachmaninoff was used to sell tickets for both concerts.

The 1946 performance has a somewhat lighter touch than the 1945 reading. Both feature great clarity and crispness of touch, but there is a more pearly legato and slightly greater dynamic variety in 1946. The later performance is also quicker, most notably in the slow movement. Despite the faster tempo, the later reading actually sounds a bit more relaxed. In both performances I would say the overall impression one gets is of brilliance and drive rather than warmth or poetry. But the concerto can take that and in some ways might even benefit from it. Brailowsky and Rodzinski bring real belief in the music, so there is nothing dutiful or routine about the performances. There was still a vestige of portamento in the New York Philharmonic strings in the 1940s, which is welcome in this music.



Clearly this is a specialist’s CD rather than something for the general collector. But it is a welcome reminder of a pianist who enjoyed a prominent career. It also offers a vivid demonstration that the performers took nothing for granted and could find different things to say about this warhorse from one season to the next.

This release is up to St. Laurent Studio’s normal high standard for reproducing historic broadcast material.”

Henry Fogel, FANFARE