



St Laurent Studio T-1080

Louis Fourestier Vol. 2

“Originally a cellist, Louis Félix André Fourestier (1892–1976) studied at the Paris Conservatoire under Guilmant, Dukas, and D’Indy, among others. In 1928, along with Ernest Ansermet and Alfred Cortot, he co-founded the Orchestre Symphonique de Paris. From 1938 to 1965 he was the principal conductor of the Paris Opéra, and from 1945 to 1963 taught at the Paris Conservatoire. Today Fourestier is known to most record collectors exclusively through one recording: the famous 1946 premiere set of Saint-Saëns’ SAMSON ET DALILA with Hélène Bouvier and Jose Luccioni. Other than that, he made a set of the five Saint-Saëns piano concertos with Jeanne-Marie Darré between 1955 and 1957, a disc of Saint-Saëns tone poems, a Berlioz Symphonie fantastique, Debussy’s Nocturnes and La mer, and a few recordings of ballet music and miscellaneous short orchestral works. There are also a live 1947 MANON from the Metropolitan Opera (where he also conducted CARMEN, LOUISE, and LAKMÉ, in days when French repertoire had a much greater presence there) and a 1955 FAUST from the Paris Opéra. Except for a balletic adaptation for orchestra of Schumann’s CARNAVAL, and a suite from SWAN LAKE, all of his surviving recordings heretofore have been of French music. This release offers a welcome opportunity to gain broader acquaintance with Fourestier’s art.

Throughout all three works presented here, a single consistent interpretive profile predominates, and one that is unexpected. In contrast to the typical expectation of a French interpreter offering brisk renditions characterized by clarity of textures, bright instrumental colors, and crisp rhythms, Fourestier could easily be mistaken for a German conductor instead. The tempos are uniformly broad, the textures weighty (though not at all muddy), the colorings dark, and rhythms relaxed in favor of emphasis on a flowing legato line. As D’Indy’s ISTAR shows, there is no lack of definition of detail - indeed, I heard here all sorts of nuances I have not encountered before - but it is definitely on the more languorous side of sensuality. (For those unfamiliar with the piece, it depicts the ancient Semitic fertility goddess progressively disrobing as she descends to the underworld to retrieve her lover; to depict this process, D’Indy reverses the usual musical order and places the series of variations first, with the theme on which they are based occurring only at the close.) The ‘Rhenish’ Symphony receives a reading of great heft and breadth throughout all five of its movements; this is a Rhine of gentle undulations without any swift undertows. I personally favor swift tempos in all the movements except the fourth, marked ‘Feierlich’ (solemn) that depicts the giant medieval cathedral in Köln, which for we should have a Furtwänglerian breadth. Usually I would discount a performance such as this one as being turgid and of no interest, but instead here I was quite engrossed in a very convincing rendition.

Violinist Janine Andrade (1918–1997) is an even more obscure figure today. A pupil of Jacques Thibaud, her career was prematurely curtailed by a massive stroke in 1972. Her only studio recordings appear to be of concertos by Brahms, Tchaikovsky, and Mozart with obscure orchestras and conductors, plus violin sonatas by Fauré and Franck, and a few encore pieces. Here she displays plenty of temperament and nimbleness of technique, but a tone that is rich in its lower and middle registers is a bit acidic on top. Her one failing here is that she persistently plays slightly flat; it's not terrible, but noticeable and persistent. Once again, Fourestier contributes a weighty account in the orchestral accompaniment, taking the climax to the first movement at a more deliberate pace than I've ever heard in any other version, along with a relaxed account of the finale. Andrade's intonation issues aside (which may bother some listeners more than others), this rendition also draws one in and holds attention.

The sound quality is excellent, 'clear as a bell' top FM broadcast standard. As usual, St. Laurent provides a tray card with photos and basic details but no notes. Definitely recommended to those interested in Fourestier, and with the aforementioned caveat to fans of Andrade."

- James A. Altena, FANFARE

