

Saint-Saëns Piano Concerto No. 4 in C minor, Op. 44^a. Etude en forme de valse^b. **Schumann** Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54^c; **Brahms** (arr. Cortot) Wiegenlied, Op. 49 No. 4^d.
Alfred Cortot (pf); ^aorchestra / **Charles Munch**; ^cLondon Symphony Orchestra / **Sir Landon Ronald**.

St Laurent Studio mono (M) (D) YSL78-002 (61mins; ADD). Item marked ^a from HMV DB2577/9 (rec. 9/7/35); ^bDB1535 (13/5/31); ^cDB1059/62 (22/6/27); ^dHMV DA691 (21/3/25).
www.78experience.com.

This is billed as Alfred Cortot, Vol. 1 from St Laurent Studio, and, as in the case of the recent Edwin Fischer releases, hopes are kindled for subsequent volumes.

The delicacy and ensuing ardour of the strings in the long line of the Saint-Saëns opening is matched by Cortot's limpid tone and perfectly balanced delivery. The pianist's fluency, too, seems perfect for Saint-Saëns's demanding writing; there is delicacy and also real rapport between soloist and conductor. The transfer, which retains some surface noise, reveals not only much detail but also much tonal truth. The *tendresse* of Cortot's delivery of the central Andante panel of the second movement impresses most.

The *Etude en forme de valse* (Cortot's second recording – there is a 1919 version) is given a transcendent account, feather-light and magnificently modulated. A pity the Schumann comes in so cruelly shortly thereafter; also, the orchestra is recessed, and several vital chords are

not together with Cortot. This is Cortot's second recording (a 1922 version, with the same conductor preceded it; in fact Ronald conducted Cortot's third official recording, also). Cortot is on fine form, interacting in dialogue with the orchestral soloists with real sensitivity. A side change at 4'42" brings increased levels of hiss. The first movement actually lasts 14'51", not 11'39" as St Laurent suggests. The second movement's whispered dialogue is the clear highlight; the finale's upward rush on strings is clumsy, as are the ensuing bars with Cortot. At 3'24" there is a sudden dulling of the sound that is most distracting; yet through it all glistens Cortot's pearly touch. There are technical fallibilities here, but this remains a tender reading with moments of real, exciting glow.

The idea of appending a short solo piece after each concerto (in the nature of an encore) works well. The *Wiegenlied* that follows the Schumann is actually the Brahms Op. 49 No. 4 (not Schumann, as St Laurent claim) in the first of Cortot's recordings, a remarkable study in intimacy.

There are no booklet notes for this release.

Colin Clarke

*ALL ERRORS CORRECTED

Yves St-Laurent