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CD Review by [Henry Fogel](#)

**SAINT-SAËNS Piano Concerto No. 2.** **DVOŘÁK Piano Quartet No. 2** • William Masselos (pn); <sup>1</sup>Pierre Monteux, cond; <sup>1</sup>New York PO; <sup>2</sup>Members of Guarneri Str Qrt • YVES ST-LAURENT 294 mono (63:10) Live: <sup>1</sup>Carnegie Hall, New York 3/8/1959; <sup>2</sup>Metropolitian Museum, New York 11/12/1971

& Bonus: Rehearsals, piano solo

This is the second of four volumes paying tribute to William Masselos by the Yves Saint Laurent label (no relation to the designer), whose discs are available from Norbeck Peters & Ford. The first volume is also reviewed in this issue, and I won't duplicate my comments here. Masselos (1920–1992) was a terrific pianist with a huge repertoire, but a musician so unconventional as to keep himself from stardom. This disc gives us an opportunity to hear him in live performances of music he did not record commercially. In addition, it makes available an important work of Saint-Saëns conducted by Pierre Monteux; I am not aware of any other example of Monteux in the Second Piano Concerto.

In both works the verve, energy, and imagination of Masselos's playing make for extremely engaging performances. The Dvořák suffers from rather muddy recorded sound (one suspects this was a private recording made by someone in the audience), but enough details come through to make clear the intense way in which the pianist and string players were listening to and playing off of each other. In the Saint-Saëns Concerto the monaural sound is actually very clean and well balanced (it comes from a Sunday afternoon broadcast), and the pianist's amazing ability to draw a huge range of color from the keyboard is evident throughout. So is the elegance of his phrasing and the coherence of his shaping. This finest of the five Saint-Saëns concertos needs to sound at once as if it is being improvised on the spot (that opening cadenza for the solo piano may well have been improvised by the composer before it was written down) while maintaining an overall architecture. Masselos and Monteux accomplish that here (much as Masselos and Haitink do in a somewhat more sober later performance from 1971, reviewed elsewhere in this issue). What soloist and conductor bring to this performance is a vital rhythmic pulse and a resulting effervescence that holds the listener and stays in the memory.

Saint Laurent Studios provide no notes for their releases. I did not find the solo piano rehearsal bonus (about seven minutes) to be particularly valuable. But if the production is bare bones, it is bare bones at an extremely high level of quality. This disc is a vivid display of the artistry of William Masselos.  
**Henry Fogel**

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