



Pierre Fournier plays Dvořák, Saint-Saëns and Casals

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Three previously unreleased, live Lucerne Festival performances document the great French cellist Pierre Fournier (1906-1986) at the height of his career before Rostropovich, Jacqueline du Pré, and Yo-Yo Ma took center stage. He was an elegant stylist with a fine, classic technique, an organic sense of portamento, and a wonderful ability to float a line.

He was, in many ways, an alter ego to his more spontaneous contemporary, Paul Tortelier. Since 1962, Fournier's studio recording of Dvorak's Concerto in B minor, Op. 104, with the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by George Szell, has remained an example of the music's aristocratic splendor in which the orchestra sets up the cello. In this live performance from 1967, with the Lucerne Festival Orchestra conducted by István Kertész, the orchestra listens to the cello with more affectionately intimate, yet still exciting results. The big tune in the first movement has never been more exquisitely, more lyrically played, either by French horn or the soloist – Fournier is staggeringly in command of the big octave run with precision-cut separate notes leading to the glissando covered by the orchestra at the end. As an example of the role courage plays in making it to the top, Fournier ramps up his intensity, size, and sweep whenever he loses his way or misses his mark – especially in his 1962 performance of Saint-Saëns' Cello Concerto in A minor, Op. 33, with Jean Martinon conducting, which otherwise is similarly satisfying without the sheer illumination. The CD concludes with Fournier's performance of Casals' Cant dels ocells in 1976, accompanied by strings at a memorial concert of the centenary of the great cellist's birthday – he brief announcement he made playing tribute to Casals and Enrico Mainardi who had died a few months before, is included.