

Paul Tortelier: RIAS Recordings

aud 21.455

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Paul Tortelier's international career began in 1947 in which year he first visited Berlin to perform; the first of two concerts had to be cancelled because of the freezing conditions and lack of hall heating. Two years later, in February 1949, RIAS recorded him in their Berlin studios and Audite's 3-CD gatefold set surveys several visits to the city in the years up to 1964 – though he was to return and indeed performed for the final time in the city in 1989, the year before his death.

The most exciting thing about this tranche of previously unreleased broadcast performances is that Tortelier left no studio inscriptions of three of the works performed – the Casella sonata and, rather surprisingly, the Schumann Fantasiestücke, and his own *Trois p'tits tours*. Of this last he frequently performed as an encore, and recorded, the brilliant third piece, *Le Pitre* but he never recorded the remaining two.

That should be inducement enough at least to consider this splendidly realised release but then there are the more-or-less staples of his repertoire to consider as well. The sequence begins in 1949 with Brahms' *Sonata No. 1*, the Schumann, the Kodály and his *Trois p'tits tours*, all in typically fine sound and accompanied by Klaus Billing. The Brahms is eloquently refined though he tightened up the finale in his 1977 EMI recording with his daughter, Maria de la Pau. The Schumann is valuable not merely because of its absence in his commercial discography but also because it's a lyrical and persuasively sung reading. Tortelier fanciers will know that *Le Pitre* is a fizzy piece of Gallic wit but the companion pieces are almost as characterful in their different ways, not least the charming *Ballerine*, a winsome waltz. Whilst he may not have the public profile in the Kodály that János Starker did, Tortelier left behind a particularly memorable recording of it nearly thirty years after this Berlin reading. Superbly coordinated and expressively powerful, it and this Berlin performance offer a less explicitly tensile reading than Starker's but one that is similarly lucid. Later that same year RIAS recorded him in Bach's *Sixth Cello Suite*. Similar in conception to the much later 1982 London cycle, his voicings in the *Courante* are especially compelling and the close-up recording catches a few fingerboard details and shifts.

The Fauré and Casella sonatas come from January 1962, now with Lothar Broddack. Tortelier taped both Fauré sonatas with Jean Hubeau for Erato in the '60s – more recently reissued on Warner Classics CD – though the later Eric Heidsieck recordings for EMI in the very early 1970s will be better known. Both are beautiful but the Hubeau catches a real pair of near equals at work and was taped commercially at around the same time as this Berlin performance. Broddack was a fine artist but



hasn't quite the idiomatic flexibility of Hubeau. I wonder why the cellist never recorded the Casella as he plays it with real flair, extracting its Mediterranean rhythms and colour, its amiable crispness and moving tolling quotient, with great subtlety – his control of dynamics and bowing subtleties just as impressive as his left-hand mobility.

The final broadcast comes from 25 February 1964. Beethoven's Sonata No. 5 in D Major, Op. 102 No. 2 features a much more funereal slow movement than in his later LP with Heideck whilst in Mendelssohn's Sonata No. 2, where the Berlin tempo is mostly faster than his 1978 LP with de la Pau, neither performance sounds unduly rushed nor dawdling in comparison with the other. Tortelier recorded his own orchestrated arrangement of Paganini's Introduction and Variations on 'Dal tuo stellato soglio' with his wife Maud and the ECO in 1973. The piano-accompanied version in Berlin is the work of cellist Luigi Silva (1903-1961), who had in fact recorded the work for Electrola back in 1938 (it would be good to have Silva's small corpus of 78s restored; these days he's far better known as an arranger and teacher than performer and recording artist). Tortelier's wonderful insouciance never slides into complacency; this is refined but truly communicative virtuosity in action. Fauré's Papillon is the encore.

The pieces are not grouped by recording date but are scattered throughout as seems appropriate. The sound quality is not so radically different that this presents any concern but maybe some listeners would have preferred a chronological sequencing though I can't say it worried me at all. The three additions to Tortelier's discography, on the other hand – especially the Casella – are splendid to have and offer richly rewarding listening, as do all the recitals.

Paul Tortelier (cello)

RIAS Recordings

Lothar Broddack (piano), Klaus Billing (piano: Brahms, Schumann, Tortelier)

rec. 1949-64, RIAS Funkhaus and Kleistsaal, Berlin

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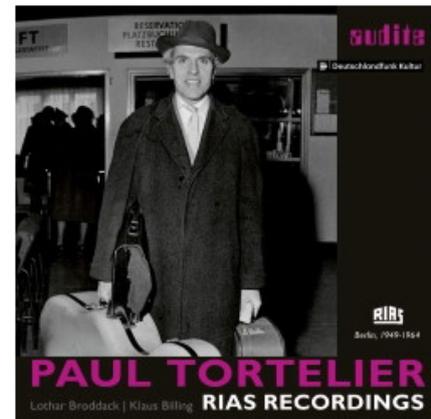
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