

 LUCERNE FESTIVAL

audite

HISTORIC  
PERFORMANCES

# Pierre Fournier

**Dvořák Cello Concerto**

Swiss Festival Orchestra | István Kertész

**Saint-Saëns Cello Concerto No. 1**

Orchestre Philharmonique de la RTF | Jean Martinon

**Casals *El cant dels ocells***

Festival Strings Lucerne | Matthias Bamert





Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)  
Cello Concerto in B minor, Op. 104

- I. *Allegro* 14:38
- II. *Adagio, ma non troppo* 10:58
- III. *Finale. Allegro moderato* 11:30

PIERRE FOURNIER *cello*  
SWISS FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA | ISTVÁN KERTÉSZ

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921)  
Cello Concerto No. 1 in A minor, Op. 33

- I. *Allegro non troppo* 5:27
- II. *Allegretto con moto* 4:30
- III. *Tempo primo* 8:32

PIERRE FOURNIER *cello*  
ORCHESTRE PHILHARMONIQUE DE LA RTF | JEAN MARTINON

Dedication announcement: Pierre Fournier

Pablo Casals (1876–1973)  
*El cant dels ocells* 4:13

PIERRE FOURNIER *cello*  
FESTIVAL STRINGS LUCERNE | MATTHIAS BAMERT

**The singing cello –  
Pierre Fournier in Lucerne**

Piano, violin and cello: these three instruments ranked most highly in solo performances during the first decades of LUCERNE FESTIVAL – and it is hardly surprising that this is still the case today. Among the cellists, the frontrunner was, and still is, Enrico Mainardi who travelled to Lucerne each year between 1946 and 1967, appearing twenty-two times in total. Close on his heels was Pierre Fournier who gave as many as eighteen performances from 1950. When Fournier appeared for the last time in September 1976 as part of a memorial concert at the centenary of Pablo Casals' birth, he included the Haydn D major Cello Concerto in the programme and played Casals' Catalan *Cant dels ocells* as an encore. In his brief introduction, he emphasised that his performance was also dedicated to the memory of Mainardi who had died in Munich a few months previously.

This late live recording is contrasted here with two works from Fournier's core

repertoire of which he made several studio recordings: in the summer of 1962 he interpreted Camille Saint-Saëns' First Cello Concerto in A minor, Op. 33, alongside the Orchestre Philharmonique de la RTF and Jean Martinon, with whom he had recorded the work two years previously (together with a different orchestra, however – the Orchestre Lamoureux). Fournier's encounter with István Kertész in 1967, resulting in a memorable performance of Antonín Dvořák's Cello Concerto in B minor, Op. 104, proved to be a pinnacle in the festival's history.

Born in Paris in 1906, Pierre Fournier was dubbed the "aristocrat of cello playing", admired in equal measure for the lyrical nobility of his tone, his immaculately fluid bowing technique and the nimble agility of his fingers. He and his fellow French cellist Paul Tortelier humorously "envied" each other's merits: the left hand of one and the right arm of the other. Fournier felt at home with all styles and periods. His recording of Johann Sebastian Bach's six solo suites was and is a benchmark in the art of playing the cello, but contemporaries





including Albert Roussel, Bohuslav Martinů and Francis Poulenc also dedicated works to him. Soon his concert schedule became so busy that he had to give up teaching at the Paris École Normale de Musique in order to devote himself to his solo career. In 1956, he took up residence in Switzerland but remained a French citizen.

István Kertész, born in Budapest in 1929, embarked on his conducting career in the late 1940s, seemingly setting completely new standards, having narrowly escaped the Holocaust. Equipped with boundless knowledge of repertoire, analytical musicianship, an infectious pleasure in swift tempi and an unstoppable drive to conquer, he seized the top positions at orchestras and music institutions worldwide with an apparent ease and in record time – and all of them, from the “Big Five” in the USA through to Tel Aviv and Tokyo, knew to treasure him. The admiration for Kertész even extended to his physiognomy – there were those who believed that his profile bore striking resemblance to that of Mozart... Far too early, at the age of forty-three, Kertész died whilst on tour in Israel.

Swimming in the Mediterranean, off the coast of Tel Aviv, he, an Icarus lost in a foreign element, had veered too far from shore.

A pioneer in advocating Antonín Dvořák, whose works, although popular, were then only recognised as first-rate in Bohemia, Kertész was the first conductor to record all nine symphonies. These recordings, alongside his interpretation of the Requiem, Op. 89, are regarded as discographic classics to the present day. However, Kertész did not manage to record Dvořák’s Cello Concerto before his death: it is therefore particularly fortunate that the Swiss Radio recorded the opening concert of the Internationale Musikalische Festwochen Luzern, today’s LUCERNE FESTIVAL, in 1967 – a performance which, as the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* wrote two days later, occurred under “a lucky star with regard to all artistic aspects”.

Although Dvořák claimed that the cello was “a piece of wood that screeches at the top and creaks at the bottom”, he then, as though to prove himself wrong, proceeded to compose his Cello Concerto in B minor. It was written not in his native Bohemia but

in New York in 1894-95, during Dvořák's tenure as director and composition teacher at the National Conservatory of Music of America, founded and supported by Jeanette Thurber, a music patron (temporarily) worth millions. Whilst in America, Dvořák was afflicted by homesickness which he allayed by visiting Bohemian inhabitants of the town of Spillville, Iowa. He was, however, also inspired by the music of the Native Americans, the African American Spirituals and the songs of the "American Schubert", Stephen Foster. Dvořák's Cello Concerto bursts with melodic ideas; the soloist tirelessly engages in eloquent dialogues with other solo instruments such as the flute, horn, the clarinets or the first violin (played here by concertmaster Anton Fietz). This work is a model case of music which can afford to be lavish and bountiful as it – despite its tendency towards musing, and its duration of around forty minutes – does not waste time.

This becomes unusually clear in the interpretation of Fournier and Kertész: they prefer the high definition of separate

sounds, always keep to mobile tempi and are not tempted to fall for folklore frenzy or sentimental melancholy. An additional advantage of a live recording is that the unpredictable emotional value of the concert situation is preserved, with musicians taking risks without any sense of aseptic prudery. This may, at times, result in Fournier, who takes many liberties in terms of tempo and accentuation, rushing away from the orchestra. But it is precisely this urgency which gives the interpretation its intensity; and even with a precision fanatic and rigorous rhythmic master such as George Szell on the podium – as the famous 1962 studio recording of Dvořák's Cello Concerto with the Berlin Philharmonic reveals – several minor coordination problems remain, which are due to Fournier's dedicated style of playing.

The daily press, meanwhile, emphasised other aspects of the performance: "The soloist, Pierre Fournier, has always been an introverted artist", the *Tages-Anzeiger* commented on 18 August. "The virtuoso passages were played perfectly, but they





yielded to his musical statement which could hardly have been more refined and transcended.” On the same day, Andres Briner summarised in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*: “The introverted and velvety warmth of Pierre Fournier’s tone initially seems almost incompatible with Dvořák’s concerto. However, the deeper one immerses oneself into this interpretation, the plainer it becomes that Fournier’s subtlety bestows a noblesse upon the piece where it almost gives this up itself, and how this personal, unmistakeable gentility of the cellist manages to embrace the deep sentiments of the complex and colourful concerto. Where one might fear a (tone-induced) constriction, a pleasant expressive widening ensues; moments such as the ‘Molto sostenuto’ in the first movement development and the tenderly intimate but always restless figures in the last movement will not easily be forgotten. Fournier naturally never is a triumphator of external sound volume, but he always triumphs – the B major apotheosis of the finale was perhaps the most impressive

example of this – thanks to the ennobling power of his inner energy and the quality of his sense of sound.”

István Kertész, who conducted Brahms’ Second Symphony in the second half, received particular acclaim: Fritz Schaub of the *Luzerner Tagblatt* described him as “a man of contrasts and the *al fresco* style [...], who strives for a full orchestral sound and who loves juxtaposing tender *piano* passages with mighty *tutti* blows; his accents, the rhythmic and dynamic shifts, however, always remain attuned to the organic development of the individual movements”. And the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* was amazed to witness that “the musicians of the Festival Orchestra achieved in this first concert what one would wish for from a year-round Swiss élite orchestra. That also, in no small part, must have been down to István Kertész.”

The First Cello Concerto in A minor, Op. 33, by the thirty-seven-year-old Camille Saint-Saëns unites most desirable virtues that make both the virtuoso and the audience happy: the soloist is given the opportunity

to pull out all the stops of his prowess, to demonstrate rapid fingering, to give space to heartfelt melodic meditations, to cover many contrast changes and styles without becoming long-winded, and to explore brilliant heights and sonorous depths. All this happens with perfect balance; there is not one bar in which solos outweigh tutti, or vice-versa. All three movements (or rather: one single movement whose three parts are interconnected) add up to a pleasantly diverting total duration of less than twenty minutes, and composers such as Sergei Rachmaninov or Dmitri Shostakovich declared it – in the face of occasionally fashionable disdain – “the greatest of all cello concertos”.

Saint-Saëns, the universalist (his compatriot Gabriel Fauré called him “our most perfect musician”), had already conducted the *Symphonic Poems* of his revered fellow composer Franz Liszt and also made use of the latter’s procedure of thematic transformation within his own compositions, however eschewing any orchestral bombast and keeping his works slim and

lithe. Fournier and Jean Martinon, who focussed on dynamics, precision and decisiveness, were thus the ideal performers for this music. The *Luzerner Tagblatt* attested Fournier the “highest admiration. His tone is not in the first place concerned with being sonorous and mellifluous (although he manages effortlessly to keep the orchestra in check): rather, this is the natural basis for refined music-making. The lightness of his bowing, blessed with the most subtle of shades, seems unattainable.” Even the critic of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, who did not count himself amongst the enthusiasts of this concerto, which he deemed to be “not exactly on the highest level”, recognised Fournier’s “winning performance of the solo part which was interpreted with technical and musical delicacy both in virtuoso and in lyrical passages”. This Lucerne live recording of 10 September 1962 is also striking in the way that Fournier sometimes allows details to go wrong, but then imparts an impetus to the performance that remains until the final chord.





The cellist Pablo (Pau) Casals abhorred the *franquismo*, the regime of the *caudillo* Francisco Franco, who had, in a *coup d'état* against the democratically elected republican government, bestowed a civil war upon Spain. Casals went into exile, to Prades on the French side of the Pyrenees. There, he compressed the Catalan *Cant dels ocells* into a cello version of around four minutes and made it into an obligatory constituent of his concerts and festivals. In so doing, he promoted this old Christmas carol – which, in fifteen verses, gives voice to no fewer than thirty-one types of bird, from the imperial eagle (*águila imperial*) to the sparrow (*pardal*), singing both festively and mournfully in their highest and lowest registers at the birth of their saviour – to a secret hymn for all refugees and emigrants longing for home.

When Franco died in November 1975, a period of *transición* began. Just under nine months later, on 4 September 1976, Pierre Fournier came to Lucerne for the last time in order to play at the afore-mentioned memorial concert in honour of Pablo Casals

which fitted beautifully into that year's festival focus of "Spain". The centrepiece of this concert was Mozart's Piano Concerto K. 415 in C major, interpreted by Mieczysław Horszowski, Casals' long-standing friend and piano accompanist; Matthias Bamert, who was to become the festival's director in 1991 and remain in that position until 1998, gave his Lucerne debut conducting the Festival Strings. Fournier played the *Cant dels ocells* as an encore: according to the *Luzerner Tagblatt* "this hymn, moving in its simplicity and symbolising freedom in general, was played most wonderfully. It only seemed incomprehensible that some members of the audience did not respect the interpreter's wish to remember in silence." Casals himself had appeared twice at LUCERNE FESTIVAL: in 1939 performing Haydn's D major Concerto, and in 1945, immediately after the end of the Second World War, when he interpreted the Dvořák Cello Concerto.

Karl Dietrich Gräwe  
Translation: Viola Scheffel

#### LUCERNE FESTIVAL Historic Performances

In cooperation with audite, LUCERNE FESTIVAL is presenting outstanding concert recordings of the work of artists who have shaped the Festival throughout its history. The aim of this edition is to retrieve treasures – for the most part previously unreleased – from the first six decades of the Festival, which was founded in 1938 with a special gala concert led by Arturo Toscanini. These recordings come from the archives of Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen (SRF), which, from the outset, has regularly broadcast the performances from Lucerne. Carefully remastered and supplemented with materials and photos from the LUCERNE FESTIVAL archive, they represent a history of the Festival in sound.

 LUCERNE FESTIVAL

recording: live recording at LUCERNE FESTIVAL (Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern)



recording date: 16 August 1967 (Dvořák) | 10 September 1962 (Saint-Saëns) | 4 September 1976 (Casals)  
 recording location: Kunsthaus, Lucerne  
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The historical publications at audite are based, without exception, on the original tapes from broadcasting archives. In general these are the original analogue tapes, which attain an astonishingly high quality, even measured by today's standards, with their tape speed of up to 76 cm/sec. The remastering – professionally competent and sensitively applied – also uncovers previously hidden details of the interpretations. Thus, a sound of superior quality results. Publications based on private recordings from broadcasts cannot be compared with these.

Cover: Pierre Fournier © IMAGNO/Lebrecht

© Archive LUCERNE FESTIVAL: ① Pierre Fournier signing autographs, Lucerne 1963 / Felix Scheidegger | ② Pierre Fournier | ③ István Kertész conducting the Swiss Festival Orchestra, Lucerne 1967 / Paul Weber | ④ Pierre Fournier, Lucerne 1963 / Anthony Altaffer | ⑤ Pierre Fournier and István Kertész, Lucerne 1967 / Paul Weber | ⑥ Pierre Fournier, Wolfgang Schneiderhan (left) and Ferenc Fricsay (right), Lucerne 1960 / Paul Weber | ⑦ Pierre Fournier in rehearsal, Lucerne 1950 | ⑧ Pierre Fournier and Jean Martinon, Lucerne 1962 / Lisa Meyerlist

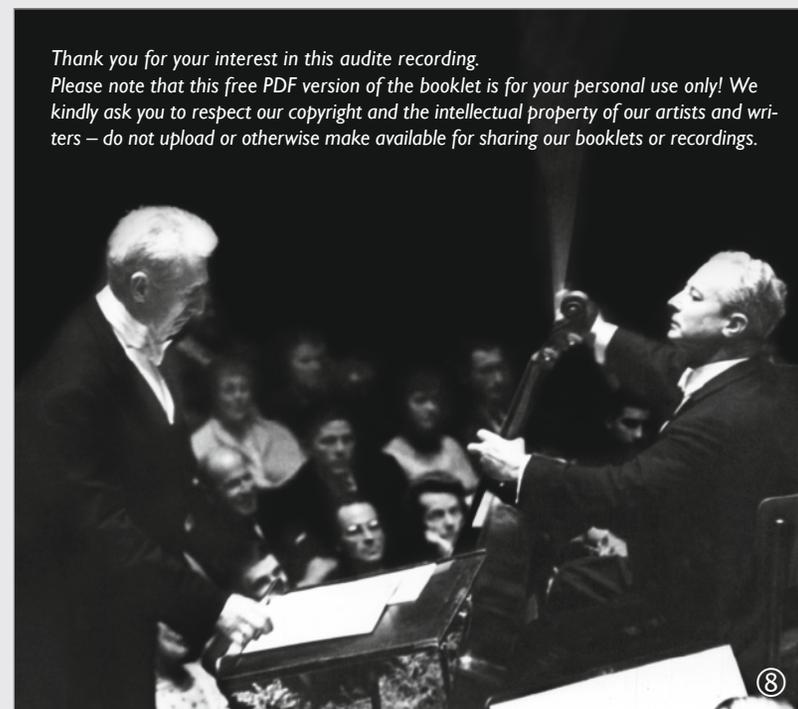
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