



## **Beethoven**

Triple Concerto in C major, Op. 56

Rudolf Serkin (pf)

Jamie Laredo (vln)

Leslie Parnas (cello)

Marlboro Festival Orchestra

Alexander Schneider

Recorded May 1962 at Columbia 30th Street Studio, New York

Producer: Thomas Frost

Recording Engineers: Ed Michalski and John Johnson

Remastered by Masterdisk, New York

Speakers Corner 180gm LP: MS 6564

Performance: 4

For modern listeners the line-up of performers on this LP may appear rather odd, in that while Rudolf Serkin is quite rightly revered as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's greatest pianists (and merits bigger print on the LP sleeve), Jaime Laredo, Leslie Parnas and Alexander Schneider (his name and that of the orchestra appear in dismissively small print!) are not household names, yet all were regulars at the Marlboro Festival that Serkin was Artistic Director of from 1951 until his death in 1991. More importantly, does this mean the performance isn't first rate?

The short orchestral introduction is suitably terse and incisive, the tempo a true allegro, and yet when one remembers the stunning accompaniment (partnership is a more appropriate word) that Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic provided for Serkin in the Fifth Piano Concerto, you know that it could be done better. When Laredo and Parnas play the first subject they sound like chamber musicians and throughout the movement one is constantly drawn to Serkin, with them playing a subordinate role. Effectively if you have one of the great Beethoven pianists on the

platform you need musicians with as bigger personalities to match, which Laredo and Parnas don't have. That said Parnas does sing the start of the sublime Largo very beautifully, as does Laredo when he takes the theme over, and the movement flows serenely by. The Rondo finale's main subject is in Polonaise rhythm, here the two string players really seem to catch fire, the whole movement has real bounce and panache, and despite the misgivings, this is a performance I will return to, in the final analysis it has a very life-affirming quality and is far more than the sum of its parts.

Balance: 4

Inner balance: 2

Detail and clarity: 2/3

Dynamic range: 2/3

As two previous Speakers Corner remasterings of 1950s CBS LPs - featuring Gershwin and Prokofiev, conducted by Bernstein and Mitropoulos - demonstrated, CBS didn't always (as thought by most audiophiles) produce bad sound, but this Beethoven disc is far from ideal in both new and old masterings. In the orchestral introduction there is little definition, clarity, or sense of depth, and the violins seem to have lost – when compared to a first label US pressing – their upper register and sparkle, which further deadens the sound. The treble on the Speakers Corner remastering of Serkin and Ormandy playing the two Mendelssohn Piano Concerti had exactly the same problem, it is as though the top has been filtered and/or the master-tapes were compromised (one can only hope that the remastering engineers don't suffer from that terrible modern disease, the totally unnecessary desire to eliminate background hiss).

Whichever recording of the Triple Concerto you listen to there is a problem in balancing what is in effect a piano trio with the rest of the orchestra, CBS's solution is to let the soloists fill the entire foreground of the image with the orchestra somewhere in the background, which further compromises the sound, and this is the same on both new and old.

On the positive side, the overall balance is excellent, the new remastering has greater weight and presence, and once again if you want perfect copies that are readily available then Speakers Corner have to be the first port-of-call.