

Brahms

Symphony No.1 in C minor, Op.68

Cleveland Orchestra

George Szell

Recorded 1 & 2 March 1957 at Severance Hall, Cleveland

Speakers Corner 180gm LP: BC1010

Performance: 5

George Szell was one of the great Brahms conductors and here with the orchestra he built into one of the world's greatest, he gives a power-house performance of the First, where the introduction is fast, the chords incisive, the timpani crash out and in the movement proper he drives forward with every sforzando in place, but isn't afraid to relax for the second subject. The Andante sostenuto is eloquently – the woodwind surpass themselves, the string tone lustrous - sung; as you might expect Szell doesn't hang around in the Allegretto, where the textures are beautifully light, the rhythms sprung and the Trio is a tempo. Unsurprisingly the finale is a tour-de-force of seething energy and orchestral virtuosity; indeed you will probably never hear it better played.

Sound

Balance: 5

Inner balance: 3

Detail and clarity: 4

Dynamic range: 3

This 1957 performance is not to be confused with the 1966 recording that also appeared on British Columbia. For comparison a first label Epic LP was used and being solid-state the Speakers Corner is slightly more forwardly balanced and there is greater clarity, which means the timpani are even more audible. Both capture the svelte Cleveland string sound and highly distinctive timbre of the woodwind; although the original is obviously more tube-like. Neither can do anything about the horns sounding as though they are in a different acoustic, which was a common problem on many early stereo LPs. Nevertheless this should become the first choice for all lovers of great Brahms conducting.