

Shostakovich

Cello Concerto No.1 in E flat, Op. 107
Symphony No.1 in F major, Op.10

Mstislav Rostropovich (cello)
Philadelphia Orchestra
Eugene Ormandy

Speakers Corner 180gm LP: MS 6124

Performance: 5

Shostakovich dedicated his First Cello Concerto to Mstislav Rostropovich who remains its supreme interpreter. The technical command is absolute, so the intonation is well-nigh perfect, double and triple stopping are effortless, the dynamic range huge, on top of this there is a massive musical personality, frightening intensity and a seemingly innate ability to interpret this great composer and friend, which means he lives and breathes the music; while Ormandy and his orchestra are equally brilliant partners, who also give a superb account of the First Symphony, where the attack, incisive rhythms, drive and acerbic phrasing are not what you might expect, yet in the slow movement the string sound is wonderfully rich and refined and Ormandy really gets them to sing.

Sound

Balance: 5
Inner balance: 3/4
Detail and clarity: 4
Dynamic range: 3

For comparison an early UK CBS LP was used and the first things one notices are that the overall balance on the new disc is more forward, the level and the dynamic range are greater (although it remains limited in the Symphony because of the engineers cramming it onto one side) and there is more treble extension. This gives the image more immediacy and impact, as does the richness of the instrumental sound, which is vitally important when trying to reproduce Rostropovich's immediately recognisable timbre and both versions capture that a different more reverberant venue was used for the Symphony, where the internal balancing gives the percussion greater prominence. If asked to choose then it would be the Speakers Corner LP because it is more alive and vibrant.