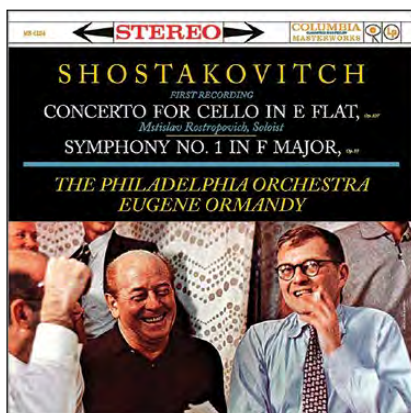




MUSIC ●●●●● SONICS ●●●●●

Shostakovich: Cello Concerto No. 1; Symphony No. 1. Philadelphia, Ormandy. Speakers Corner (LP).

For Cello Concerto No. 1, Shostakovich balanced length and a complex structure with brilliant colors, catchy folk-derived themes, and melodies that everyone can latch onto. Shostakovich himself supervised the recording. Rostropovich isn't flawless, and I prefer more drive to the ending, but the crackling atmosphere is undeniable. Those famed Philadelphia strings are ravishing in the second movement. The Speakers Corner sound is deeper and more vivid than my brown-label Columbia LP, and it's warmer, clearer, and better balanced than the Sony Masterworks Heritage CD reissue. Columbia's background isn't completely quiet—there is some hiss, and the close-miking picks up extra noises. Conductors usually emphasize the youthful spunk and shenanigans in the symphony; Ormandy balances that with grandeur and an occasional hint of menace. The solos in the first movement's waltzes are often loopy, but here they are appropriately dignified; the cello solo in the fourth movement is divine. The symphony handles this approach quite well. The sound is more diffuse than in the concerto, but there is less hiss. All-analog mastering from the original tapes. **Stephen Estep**

Further Listening: Ravel & Shostakovich: Piano Concertos (New York, Bernstein/Impex)

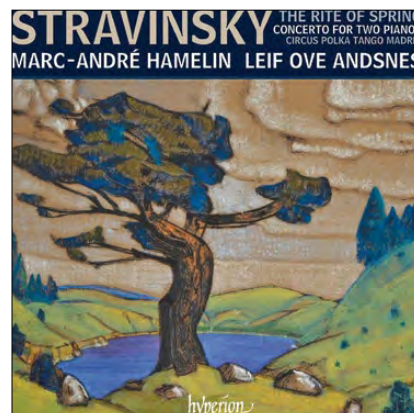


MUSIC ●●●●● SONICS ●●●●●

Saint-Saëns: Piano Concerto No. 2; Grieg: Lyric Pieces; Liszt: Hungarian Rhapsodies. Berlin Radio Symphony, Fischer, Freire. Audite.

Brazilian pianist Nelson Freire was just into his 40s in 1986 when the Saint-Saëns concert was recorded for broadcast; his playing is full of youth, elan, and humor, yet easy-going, confident, and even humble at the same time. The first movement has a grand opening built on a Bach-like figure, dramatic thunderations, and then a ravishing melody worthy of the greats. All through this, the colors and shadings of Freire's tone are on full display; I kept having to hit rewind for a breathtaking arpeggio at the 4:30 mark. The Scherzo is a delight; when Freire takes the bouncy second theme from the orchestra, he turns it into something eager yet tender. There's a little audience noise between the Scherzo and Finale, but the riveting, hell-bent for leather Presto makes up for any disturbance. This astounding performance is a must have; the sonics are clean and warm, if the soundstage is a little narrow. The Grieg and Liszt are from a 1966 studio recording in mono. There's a clutch of affectionately played Lyric Pieces, but the Hungarian Rhapsodies 5 and 10 are a bigger draw, suffused with melancholy and nobility. **SE**

Further Listening: *Radio Days: The Concerto Broadcasts* (Freire/Decca)



MUSIC ●●●●● SONICS ●●●●●

Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring. Hamelin, Andsnes. Hyperion.

In his search for new timbres and textures Mozart experimented with how winds might shroud or cushion the hard percussive sonorities of the piano. That's as good a reason any to justify a four-hand piano version of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*: shorn of their orchestral garb, the savage rhythms, brutal accents, and chordal dissonances land with naked force and power. A better reason is that the score was first heard this way, the composer himself and Debussy playing it on a single piano before a very small audience. Since then performances typically employ two pianos. Hamelin and Andsnes are all about clarity, brilliance, and high-voltage drive and excitement, qualities that match the reference-caliber recording, close up yet with stunning dynamic range, definition, and clarity. More Stravinsky fills out the program: an equally superlative account of Concerto for Two Pianos, one of his neo-classical masterpieces; *Madrid* and *Tango*, miniatures arranged for two pianos by his son; and *Circus Polka*, a commission from the Barnum and Bailey Circus to be choreographed by George Balanchine for dancing elephants—the irregularity of the rhythms reportedly frightened the pachyderms! **Paul Seydor**

Further Listening: *Le Sacré du Printemps*, Bernstein/New York Philharmonic