

Many musicians considered her interpretation of the Beethoven concerto to be her supreme achievement. Certainly when Karajan conducted Neveu in this work in Austria during 1948 he immediately approached HMV with the suggestion to record the concerto with her. (This, along with immediate plans to record the Tchaikovsky, Walton and possibly the Elgar concerti were thwarted by her unexpected death.) After a 1949 London performance of the Beethoven with John Barbirolli she apparently rushed to the telephone to inform her mother that she had for the first time been able to express all that she felt about that score, a further indication of the musical transformation her art was undergoing. Such a transformation is apparent from this near contemporary broadcast performance, a miraculous amalgam of the unsullied sweetness and purity characteristic of her early playing, as typified by her pre-War recordings, and the abandoned, intense playing of the post-War years, all of which is enveloped by a deeper interpretative insight. Neveu was also fortunate in having as her conductor Hans Rosbaud (1895-1962) whose accompaniment to the Beethoven concerto was considered outstanding in both Europe and America. (Rosbaud, incidentally, did much pioneering work concerning the serious broadcasting of music and spent the last fourteen years of his life as Chief Conductor of the South-West German Radio Orchestra.) Two shorter works for which she had a special affinity and both of which she had recorded commercially

round out this album of live performances: Chausson's *Poème* and Ravel's *Tzigane*, from a 1949 New York concert conducted by Charles Munch.

Ginette Neveu's tragic death and the resultant sadness of a career still unfulfilled brought forth countless tributes: her country posthumously awarded her the Cross of the Legion of Honour, and her confrères contributed many kind words. Casals wrote that "her playing was one of the greatest revelations, both instrumental and musical" whilst Jacques Thibaud, himself to die in an air crash four years later, described her as an "high priestess of an art which she bore triumphantly to the ends of the earth." History has fortunately ensured that this art remains available to us all, not least through these new-found and incomparable interpretations.

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# Ginette Neveu

BEETHOVEN & BRAHMS: Concertos  
CHAUSSON: *Poème*  
RAVEL: *Tzigane*



Music & Arts

## GINETTE NEVEU

Ginette Neveu was cruelly snatched from a disbelieving world well over thirty years ago, yet her name still elicits deep respect and admiration not only from those fortunate enough to have heard her in the flesh but also from a legion of admirers who came to know a supreme artist via only her recordings. Neveu's true international career was to last hardly five years, yet at the time of her death at thirty she had already won for herself an indelible, illustrious position in the annals of violin playing. A further forty-five years or so on, the nineties are proving a rich and rewarding opportunity for a thorough evaluation of her highly individual art. Following the release of her complete studio recordings made in Europe between 1938 and 1948 come these readings of some of the repertoire's greatest classical violin works, which she essayed with unquenchable vigour and penetrating musicianship.

Neveu was born in Paris on the 11th August 1919 and displayed all the characteristics of a prodigiously gifted child. Although there were earlier public appearances she made her "official debut" at the age of seven and a half with a performance of Bruch's *C-minor Violin Concerto* at the Salle Gaveau. At the age of nine she won first prize at the *École Supérieure de Musique* as well as the *City of Paris Prix d'Honneur*. Great care

was taken, however, to avoid harming her precious gifts: public appearances were kept to a minimum and studies were uppermost during these vitally important years. After working with Georges Enesco (1881-1955), one of this century's most influential violin teachers, she entered the *Paris Conservatoire*. She was then eleven years old. Unbelievably, she gained the *Premier Prix* within eight months, the only person to have equalled a feat established by Wieniawski half a century earlier.

She was soon studying with the other great violin pedagogue of the century, Carl Flesch (1873-1944). He was so impressed by her talent that he financed her entry into what remains for many the most prestigious violin contest in living memory, the 1935 *International Wieniawski Violinists' Competition*. A late entrant, she had just six weeks to prepare an unaccompanied Bach Sonata, numerous Wieniawski compositions, including the *Second Violin Concerto*, and the work of her choice, Ravel's *Tzigane*. Of the 180 competitors, David Oistrakh, Neveu's senior by eleven years, was considered to be the strong favourite. He was beaten into second place by the unknown teenage girl and Neveu's career commenced on a note of sensation. International horizons quickly opened and she made both her American and

Russian debuts during the following year, though the disturbing prelude to and outbreak of the Second World War prevented her from consolidating this career. Obstinate refusing vast sums of money to play in Germany where she was adored, she remained isolated in France devoting the majority of her time to the expansion of her repertoire, notably the Poulenc Violin Sonata and the Elizalde Violin Concerto both of which she premiered during those troubled years, and to the perfecting of her technique. Her exceptional capacity for work frequently alarmed and concerned both family and friends: she would insist on practising at least five hours a day every day and if incarcerated on a plane or train during a tour would attempt at least four hours.

Once the war was over Neveu resumed her career in earnest. By November 1945 she had returned to the recording studios, making her first concerto recording—the Sibelius concerto, the second recording of that work ever made. Much of 1946 was spent touring Great Britain and in further visits to the recording studios during which time she committed the Brahms' *Violin Concerto* to disc. A tour of North and South America occupied a large part of 1947 whilst the following year was spent on a gruelling tour of Europe, Australia and America. It was during 1948 that she significantly wrote, "I am aware of a new evolution taking place within me. May it lift me higher in my art." It was indeed a phase recognised by her public

and critics, even those who had previously found her playing at times over-forceful. The result of this metamorphosis was never to be captured in the recording studio: on the evening of the 28th of October 1949 Ginette Neveu, with her brother Jean as accompanist, left on board a *Constellation* bound for America. Hours later it crashed in the Azores; there were no survivors. Jean's body was never recovered whilst Ginette's was incorrectly identified and buried in Alsace. She was eventually brought home and buried, close to Chopin's grave, in the *Père Lachaise Cemetery*.

These broadcast performances do, however, provide us with a unique opportunity to hear "the new Neveu". Many of her followers considered the Brahms Concerto to be tailor-made for her unique style, that perfectly balanced blend of lyricism and drama. Impossible as it might appear to those familiar with her 1946 HMV recording with Issay Dobrowen, this broadcast performance is at times even more potent. It displays a greater control whilst revealing no diminution in the power and attack of her playing. The lyrical episodes are more relaxed and there are glimpses of an awesome concentration (i.e. the cadenza of the first movement).

The Beethoven concerto recording is a unique document, the only extant recording (at the time of writing) of Neveu's performance of this concerto, interpretatively the Everest of all fiddle concerti.

# Ginette Neveu (1919-1949)

## HISTORIC PUBLIC PERFORMANCES

### CD No. 1 (54:50)

#### BEETHOVEN: *Violin Concerto in D, Op. 61*

Southwest German Radio Orchestra (Baden-Baden), cond. Hans Rosbaud (rec. Sept. 1949)

- |   |                         |       |
|---|-------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I Allegro ma non troppo | 23:57 |
| 2 | II Larghetto            | 9:51  |
| 3 | III Rondo (Allegro)     | 10:18 |

#### 4 RAVEL: *Tzigane for Violin & Orchestra* 10:30

Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra, cond. Charles Munch (rec. 2 Jan 1949)

### CD No. 2 (57:08)

#### BRAHMS: *Violin Concerto in D, Op. 77*

The Hague Residentie Orchestra, cond. Antal Dorati (rec. 10 June 1949)

- |   |   |       |
|---|---|-------|
| 1 | I Allegro non troppo                      | 22:32 |
| 2 | II Adagio                                 | 9:21  |
| 3 | III Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo vivace | 8:19  |

#### CHAUSSON: *Poème for Violin & Orchestra, Op. 25* 16:42

Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra, cond. Charles Munch (rec. 2 Jan 1949)

TECHNICAL NOTE: CD No. 1, [1] - [3] from Magnetophon tape recording; all other selections mastered from transcription discs which had surface noise, distortion, and limited fidelity.



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