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**SERGE  
PROKOFIEFF**

*and*  
**HIS ORCHESTRAL MUSIC**

*By*  
LOUIS BIANCOLLI

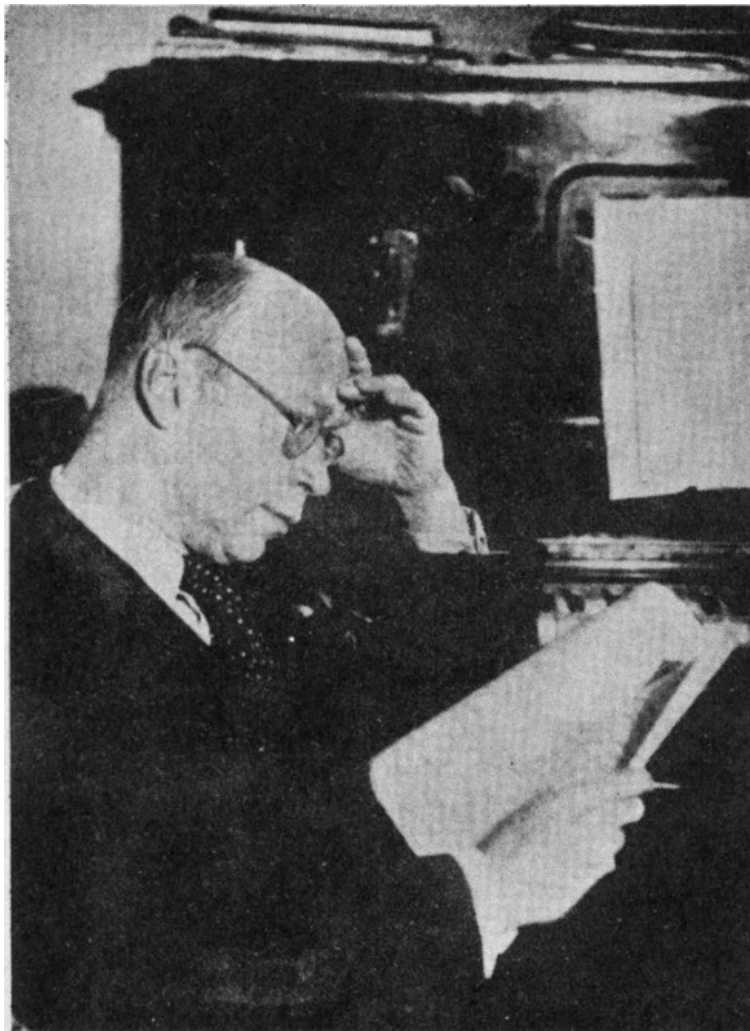
Written by  
LOUIS BIANCOLLI

(Author of "The Analytical Concert Guide" and co-author, with Robert Bagar, of "The Concert Companion")

and dedicated to  
the  
RADIO MEMBERS  
of  
THE PHILHARMONIC-SYMPHONY SOCIETY  
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Serge Prokofiev

3

## ***A COMPOSER'S CREED***

*The principal lines which I followed in my creative work are these:*

*The first is classical, whose origin lies in my early infancy when I heard my mother play Beethoven sonatas. It assumes a neo-classical aspect in the sonatas and the concertos, or imitates the classical style of the eighteenth century, as in the Gavottes, the Classical Symphony, and, in some respects, in the Sinfonietta.*

*The second is innovation, whose inception I trace to my meeting with Taneieff, when he taunted me for my rather "elementary harmony." At first, this innovation consisted in the search for an individual harmonic language, but later was transformed into a desire to find a medium for the expression of strong emotions, as in Sarcasms, Scythian Suite, the opera The Gambler, They are Seven, the Second Symphony, etc. This innovating strain has affected not only the harmonic idiom, but also the melodic inflection, orchestration, and stage technique.*

*The third is the element of the toccata or motor element, probably influenced by Schumann's Toccata, which impressed me greatly at one time. In this category are the Etudes Op. 2, Toccata, Op. 11, Scherzo, Op. 12, the Scherzo of the Second Piano Concerto, the Toccata in the Fifth Piano Concerto, the persistent figurations in the Scythian Suite, Le Pas d'acier, and some passages in the Third Piano Concerto. This element is probably the least important.*

*The fourth element is lyrical. It appears at first as lyric meditation, sometimes unconnected with melos, as in Fairy Tale, Op. 3, Réves, Esquisse automnale, Legend, Op. 21, etc., but sometimes is found in long melodic phrases, as in the opening of the First Violin Concerto, the songs, etc. This lyric strain has for long remained in obscurity, or, if it was noticed at all, then only in retrospection. And since my lyricism has for a long time been denied appreciation, it has grown but slowly. But at later stages I paid more and more attention to*

4

*lyrical expression.*

*I should like to limit myself to these four expressions, and to regard the fifth element, that of the grotesque, with which some critics are trying to label me, as merely a variation of the other characteristics. In application to my music, I should like to replace the word grotesque by "Scherzo-ness," or by the three words giving its gradations: "Jest," "laughter," "mockery."*

SERGE PROKOFIEFF

5

## SERGE PROKOFIEFF

*By*  
LOUIS BIANCOLLI

It is given to few composers to become classics in their lifetime. Of these few Serge Prokofieff was a notable example. At his death in Moscow on March 4, 1953, he was a recognized international figure of long standing, a favorite of concert-goers the world over, and in almost every musical form, whether opera, symphony, concerto, suite, or sonata, a securely established creator. Only two contemporaries could seriously dispute Prokofieff's dominant position in world music—his own countryman Dimitri Shostakovich and the Finnish Jean Sibelius. There were those who placed him first. His passing was mourned inside and outside Russia by all who respond to fastidious artistry and the strange wizardry of creative genius. Prokofieff had come to belong to the world. While his musical and cultural roots were firmly planted in the land of his birth, he had achieved a breadth and depth of expression that communicated to all. In the vast quantity of his output there is something for everyone everywhere—for the child, for the grown-up, for the less musically tutored, and for the most sophisticated taste. Serge Prokofieff is distinctly deserving of the word "universal." His music knows no boundaries....

\* \* \*

Serge Prokofieff was born on April 23, 1891, in an atmosphere of music and culture at Sontsovka in the south of Russia, where his father managed a large estate. He seems to have begun composing almost before he could write his own name, thanks to the influence and coaching of his mother, an accomplished pianist. At the age of five he had already put together a little composition called "Hindu Galop," and there is a photograph of the nine-year-old boy seated at an upright piano with the score of his first opera, "The Giant." Prokofieff himself has given us a picture of the boy and his mother in their first musical adventures together:—

6

"One day when mother was practising exercises by Hanon, I went up to the piano and asked if I might play my own music on the two highest octaves of the keyboard. To my surprise she agreed, in spite of the resulting cacophony. This lured me to the piano, and soon I began to climb up to the keyboard all by myself and try to pick out some little tune. One such tune I repeated several times, so that mother noticed it and decided to write it down.

"My efforts at that time consisted of either sitting at the piano and making up tunes which I could not write down, or sitting at the table and drawing notes which could not be played. I just drew them like designs, as other children draw trains and people, because I was always seeing notes on the piano stand. One day I brought one of my papers covered with notes and said:

"Here, I've composed a Liszt Rhapsody!"

"I was under the impression that a Liszt Rhapsody was a double name of a composition, like a sonata-fantasia. Mother had to explain to me that I couldn't have composed a Liszt Rhapsody because a rhapsody was a form of musical composition, and Liszt was the name of the composer who had written it. Furthermore, I learned that it was wrong to write music on a staff of nine lines without any divisions, and that it should be written on a five-line staff with division into measures. I was greatly impressed by the way mother wrote down my 'Hindu Galop' and soon, with her help, I learned something about how to write music. I couldn't always put my thoughts into notes, but I actually began to write down little songs which could be played."

7

Prokofieff also recalled how much his mother stressed the importance of a love for music and how she tried to keep it unmarred by excessive practising. There was only a minimum of that hateful chore, but a maximum of listening to the great classics of the keyboard. At first the lessons between mother and son were limited to twenty minutes a day. This was extended to one hour when Prokofieff was nine. "Fearing above all the dullness of sitting and drumming one thing over and over," Prokofieff wrote, "mother hurried to keep me supplied with new pieces so that the amount of music I studied was enormous."

This exposure to music continued when the family moved to Moscow. There Prokofieff attended the opera repeatedly and soon developed a taste for composing for voice himself. One of these early efforts was submitted to the composer Taneieff, who advised the family to send their son to Reinhold Gliere for further study. This early attraction for the theatre was later to culminate not only in several operas of marked originality but in numerous scores for ballet and the screen. To the end Prokofieff never quite lost his childhood passion for the stage. One has only to hear his music for the "Romeo and Juliet" ballet and the opera, "The Love of Three Oranges" to realize how enduring a hold the theatre had on him.

Emboldened by Taneieff's reaction, the eleven-year-old boy next showed him a symphony. Prokofieff himself told the story to Olin Downes, who interviewed him in New York in 1919 for the "Boston Post." Taneieff leafed through the manuscript and said:—"Pretty well, my boy. You are mastering the form rapidly. Of course, you have to develop more interesting harmony. Most of this is tonic, dominant and subdominant [the simplest and most elementary chords in music], but that will come."

"This," said Prokofieff to Mr. Downes, "distressed me greatly. I did not wish to do only what others had done. I could not endure the thought of producing only what others had produced. And so I started out, very earnestly, not to imitate, but to find a way of my own. It was very hard, and my courage was severely put to the test in the following years, since I destroyed reams of music, most of which sounded very well, whenever I realized that it was only an echo of some one's else. This often wounded me deeply. 8

"Eleven years later I brought a new score to Taneieff, whom I had not been working with for some seasons. You should have seen his face when he looked at the music. 'But, my dear boy, this is terrible. What do you call this? And why that?' And so forth. Then I said to him, 'Master, please remember what you said to me when I brought my G-major symphony. It was only tonic, dominant and subdominant.'

"'God in heaven,' he shouted, 'am I responsible for this?'"

Prokofieff was scarcely thirteen when another distinguished Russian composer entered his life—and again by way of an opera score. Alexander Glazounoff was so impressed by a work entitled "Feast During the Plague" that the boy was promptly enrolled at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. That was in 1904. There he remained for ten years, among his teachers being Liadoff, Tcherepnin, and Rimsky-Korsakoff. From them he absorbed much of the prodigious skill as colorist and orchestrator that later went into his compositions, besides a thorough schooling in the nationalist ideals of Russian music.

At the same time he was already feeling the urge to express himself in a bolder and more unorthodox style of writing. This rebelliousness was later to lead to controversial clashes over several of his scores. By the time he left the Conservatory in 1914, Glazounoff knew that Prokofieff had wandered off into paths of his own. Yet he arranged for a trial performance of Prokofieff's First Symphony. This proved crucial, for it attracted the notice of an influential group of vanguard musicians and, perhaps even more important, a publisher. Yet, when he graduated, it was not as composer but as pianist, that Prokofieff carried off first prize. Shortly after his graduation, Prokofieff's father died, and when the First World War broke out later that summer, he was granted exemption from military service because of his widowed mother. 9

During the war years Prokofieff composed two works that would appear to be at opposite extremes of orchestral style—the "Classical Symphony" and the "Scythian Suite". One is an unequivocal declaration of faith in the balanced serenity and suavity of the Mozartean tradition, and the other rocks with an almost savage upheaval of barbaric power. Over both, however, hovers the iron control and superb sureness of idiom of a searching intellect and an unflinching artistic insight. The two works represent two parts rather than two sides of a richly integrated personality.

The revolution of February, 1917, found Prokofieff in the midst of rehearsals of his opera "The Gambler," founded on Dostoevsky's short novel, to a text of his own. Production was indefinitely suspended because of the hardships and uncertainties of the social and political scene. Actually it was not till 1929 that the opera was finally produced, in Brussels, Prokofieff having revised it from the manuscript recovered from the library of the Maryinsky Theatre of Leningrad. When the October Revolution had triumphed, Prokofieff applied for a passport. His intention was to come to America, where he was assured a lucrative prospect of creative and concert work. The request was granted, with this rebuke from a Soviet official:—

"You are revolutionary in art as we are revolutionary in politics. You ought not to leave us now, but then, you wish it. We shall not stop you. Here is your passport." 10

Prokofieff proceeded to make his way to America, following an itinerary that included Siberia (a small matter of twenty-six days), Hawaii, San Francisco, and New York, where he arrived in August, 1918. A series of recitals followed at which he performed several of his own compositions, and the Russian Symphony Orchestra featured some of his larger works.

A picturesque and revealing reaction to both Prokofieff's piano-playing and music was that of a member of the staff of "Musical America" who was assigned to review the visitor's first concert at Aeolian Hall on November 20, 1918.

"Take one Schoenberg, two Ornsteins, a little Erik Satie," wrote this culinary expert, "mix thoroughly with some Medtner, a drop of Schumann, a liberal quantity of Scriabin and Stravinsky—and you will brew something like a Serge Prokofieff, composer. Listen to the keyboard antics of an unholy organism which is one-third virtuoso, one-third athlete, and one-third wayward poet, armed with gloved finger-fins and you will have an idea of the playing of a Serge Prokofieff, pianist. Repay an impressionist, a neo-fantast, or whatever you will, in his own coin:—crashing Siberias, volcano hell, Krakatoa, sea-bottom crawlers! Incomprehensible? So is Prokofieff!"

A commission for an opera from Cleofonte Campanini, conductor of the Chicago Opera Company, was to result in what ultimately proved to be his most popular work composed for America—the humorous fairy-tale opera, "The Love of Three Oranges." Campanini, however, had died in the interim, and it was Mary Garden, newly appointed director (she styled herself *directa!*) of the Chicago company, who undertook the production of the opera in Chicago in 1921. Its reception in Chicago and later at the Manhattan Opera House was scarcely encouraging. Almost three decades were to pass before a spectacularly successful production, in English, by Laszlo Halasz at the New York City Center gave it a secure and enduring place in the active American repertory. 11

Prokofieff next went to Paris, where he renewed ties with a group of Russian musicians and intellectuals, among them the two Serges who were to become so helpful in the development of his reputation as a dominant force in modern music. These were Serge Diaghileff and Serge Koussevitzky. For Diaghileff he wrote music for a succession of ballets, among them "Chout" (1921), "Pas d'Acier" (1927), and "The Prodigal Son" (1929). Considerable interest was aroused by "Pas d'Acier", which was termed both a "labor ballet" and a "Bolshevik Ballet" by various members of the press both in Paris and in London, where the work was given in July, 1927. It was a ballet of factories and firemen, of lathes and drill-presses, of wheels and workers, and it brought Prokofieff the dubious title of composer laureate of the mechanistic age.

Koussevitzky had begun his celebrated series of concerts in Paris in 1921. This proved a perfect setting for the newcomer. Again and again the programs afforded him a double hospitality as composer and pianist. Koussevitzky introduced the Second Symphony and when he later took up the baton of the Boston Symphony, Prokofieff was among the first composers invited to appear on his programs in either or both capacities. In 1929, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Boston Symphony, it was to Serge Prokofieff that Koussevitzky went for a symphonic score to commemorate the occasion. The resulting work was Prokofieff's Fourth Symphony. It was not till 1927 that Prokofieff, absent from his homeland for nine years, decided to return, if only for a visit. Of this period away from home, Nicolas Nabokov, who knew Prokofieff well, had this to say in an article written for "The Atlantic Monthly" in July, 1942:—

"From 1922 until 1926 Prokofieff lived in France and travelled only for his annual concert tours. In Paris he found himself surrounded by a seething international artistic life in which the Russian element played a great part, thanks mainly to Diaghileff and his Ballet. Most of these people were expatriates, in various degrees opposed to the new regime in their motherland. Prokofieff had too close and too profound a relation with Russia to lose himself in this atmosphere. He kept up his friendships with those who stayed in Russia and those who were abroad by simply putting himself, in a certain sense, outside of the whole problem. It was interesting to watch how cleverly he succeeded in this position. There was nothing strained or unnatural about it. He earned the esteem of both camps and the confidence of everyone. From a production by the Ballet Russe of his latest ballet, Prokofieff would go to the Soviet Embassy, where a party would be given in his honor, and at his home you would find the intellectuals arriving from Russia, among them his great friend, Meyerhold, Soviet writers, and poets.

"In 1927 he dug out his old Soviet passport and returned for a short while to Russia. As a result of this first trip came his ballet 'Pas d'Acier'. This was Prokofieff's greatest success in Paris. It coincided with a turn in French public opinion toward Russia, with the beginning of the Five-Year Plan, and the increasing interest in Russian affairs among the intelligentsia of Western Europe. For several years to come Prokofieff kept up the dual life of going to Russia for several months and spending the rest of the time in Paris, until finally the demands of his country inwardly and outwardly became so strong that he decided definitely to return and settle in Moscow."

Prokofieff had again visited America in 1933. In New York, within the space of a few days, he performed his Fifth Concerto with Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony, and his Third Concerto with Bruno Walter and the Philharmonic-Symphony. So many references have been made in these pages to Prokofieff as his own soloist, that perhaps a few balanced words from Philip Hale on the subject may be appropriate at this point. After having heard him several times in Boston, the late critic and annotator, declared:—

"His pianistic gifts are unusually great; there was reason for his being recognized in America primarily as a pianist and only later on as a composer. Though possessed of all these exceptional attainments, Prokofieff uses them within the rigid limits of artistic simplicity, which precludes the possibility of any affectation, any calculating of effect whereby an elevated style of pianism is sullied. In any case I have never heard a pianist who plays Prokofieff's productions more simply and at the same time more powerfully than the composer himself."

Prokofieff's return to Russia opened a new and active chapter of his career. Almost overnight he began to identify himself with the ideals of Soviet musical organizations insofar as they were concerned with education and the fostering of a community feeling of cultural solidarity. The attraction of the theatre was stronger than ever, and soon he was composing operas, ballet scores, incidental music for plays, and music for films. Indeed, the composition that virtually reintroduced him to the Russian public was the striking score for the film "Lieutenant Kije." This delighted one and all with its pungent wit and satiric thrusts at the parading pomp and stiffness of the court of Czar Paul. Less successful was the first performance in Moscow in 1934 of a "Chant Symphonique" for large orchestra. This drew the reproach that it echoed "the disillusioned mood and weary art of the urban lyricists of contemporary Europe."

Another composition of this period was a suite prepared by Prokofieff from a ballet entitled, "Sur le Borysthène." Interest attaches to this ballet because of a significant verdict pronounced by a Paris judge in Prokofieff's favor. The ballet had been commissioned by Serge Lifar and produced at the Paris Opéra in 1933. The contract had stipulated one hundred thousand francs as payment for the work. Only seventy thousand francs were paid, and Prokofieff sued for the remainder. Lifar contended in court that the unfriendly reception accorded the production proved the ballet was "deficient in artistic merit." The court's judgment, rendered on January 9, 1934, read in part: "Any person acquiring a musical work puts faith in the composer's talent. There is no reliable criterion for evaluation of the quality of a work of art which is received according to individual taste. History teaches us that the public is often mistaken in its reaction."

Prokofieff made his last trip to the United States in February, 1938. In several interviews with the press he laid particular stress on how Russia provided "a livelihood and leisure" for composers and musicians of all categories. Later, the League of Composers invited him to be guest of honor at a concert devoted entirely to his music. Prokofieff was to have made still another visit to America late in 1940 on the invitation of the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Society. The invitation was accepted, but Prokofieff never came. The reason given was that he could not secure the required visas. Prokofieff was to have conducted a series of concerts with the Philharmonic-Symphony. The Society accordingly asked another distinguished Russian composer to direct the

concerts, a Russian who had not set foot in his native land since the Revolution—Igor Stravinsky.

Prokofieff was again at work on an opera—"The Duenna"—when his country once more found itself at war with Germany. Both the opera and a new ballet, "Cinderella", were immediately shelved, and Prokofieff dedicated his energies and talents to expressing in music the determination of the Soviet people to resist the Nazi invasion and join in the world struggle to crush Fascism. Instead of light operas and fairy-tale ballets, he now composed a march, two war songs, and a symphonic suite "1941," a title which explains itself. As the war dragged on with its deadening weight of horror, and its unprecedented drama of resistance, the feelings it gave rise to inspired Prokofieff to compose an opera based on Tolstoy's monumental historical novel, "War and Peace." America learned of its completion on January 1, 1943 in a communication that conveyed New Year's greetings "to our American friends on behalf of all Soviet composers." 15

The opera caused Prokofieff considerable trouble because of its unparalleled length. Cuts and revisions were made, scenes transposed and replaced, and yet Prokofieff was never quite satisfied with the work. Excerpts were performed in Moscow, and again the music of Prokofieff became a bone of lively contention between those who thought he had captured the spirit of the novel and those who thought he had not. There was general agreement, however, that Prokofieff had written a magnificent and stirring tribute to Russian valor and patriotism. Together with his music for the films "Ivan the Terrible" and "Alexander Nevsky", the new opera offered an impressive panorama of Russian history. There are in "War and Peace" eleven long scenes and sixty characters. The work was much too long for a single evening, and when it was finally produced in Moscow in 1946, only the first part was performed. A stage premiere had been promised in Moscow as early as 1943, but technical difficulties caused its postponement. Plans for a Metropolitan production for the season of 1944-45 also had to be abandoned.

In 1945 Prokofieff composed his Fifth Symphony, which is considered by many critics the greatest single achievement of his symphonic career. Prokofieff has himself spoken of it as "the culmination of a large part of my creative life." The symphony was warmly received both in Russia and in America. It has generally been assumed that it depicts both the tragic and heroic phases of the world crisis and an unshaken confidence in final victory over Nazi barbarism. Prokofieff himself would provide no clue to its program other than that it was "a symphony about the spirit of man." 16

When Germany was at last defeated, Prokofieff's pen was again busy celebrating the event. This time it was an "Ode to the End of the War", scored for sixteen double basses, eight harps and four pianos. In 1947 Prokofieff composed his Sixth Symphony, and it was shortly after its first performance that the Central Committee of the Communist Party issued its stinging denunciation of certain tendencies in the music of Prokofieff and six other Soviet composers. The occasion of the official rebuke was a new opera by Vano Muradeli, "Great Friendship." This work was found offensive as a distortion of history and a false and imperfect exploitation of national material. Having disposed of Muradeli, the Committee concentrated its attack on the Symphonic Six—Shostakovich, Prokofieff, Khatchaturian, Shebalin, Popoff, and Miaskovsky.

"We are speaking of composers," read the statement, "who confine themselves to the formalist anti-public trend. This trend has found its fullest manifestation in the works of such composers [naming the six] in whose compositions the formalist distortions, the anti-democratic tendencies in music, alien to the Soviet people and to its artistic taste, are especially graphically represented. Characteristics of such music are the negation of the basic principles of classical music; a sermon for atonality, dissonance and disharmony, as if this were an expression of 'progress' and 'innovation' in the growth of musical composition as melody; a passion for confused, neuropathic combinations which transform music into cacophony, into a chaotic piling up of sounds. This music reeks strongly of the spirit of the contemporary modernist bourgeois music of Europe and America, which reflects the marasmus of bourgeois culture, the full denial of musical art, its impasse." 17

Like the other six composers, Prokofieff accepted the rebuke and made public acknowledgment that he had pursued paths of sterile experimentation in some of his more recent music. He declared that the Resolution of the Central Committee had "separated decayed tissue from healthy tissue in the composers' creative production," and that it had created the prerequisites "for the return to health of the entire organism of Soviet music."

Prokofieff's *mea culpa* was first contained in a letter addressed to Tikhon Khrennikoff, general secretary of the Union of Soviet composers. It had been Khrennikoff, who, in a semi-official blast at these "tendencies" had first hurled the charge of "formalism" at Prokofieff and his colleagues, Khrennikoff evidently had in mind certain patterns and formulas of the more extreme innovations of modern music, like Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-tone row and the many flourishing European schools of atonality, dissonance, and startling instrumental groupings.

"Composers have become infatuated," said Khrennikoff, "with formalistic innovations, artificially inflated and impracticable orchestral combinations, such as the including of twenty-four trumpets in Khatchaturian's 'Symphonic Poem' or the incredible scoring for sixteen double-basses, eight harps, four pianos, and the exclusion of the rest of the string instruments in Prokofieff's 'Ode on the End of War.'"

In pleading guilty to the charge of formalism, Prokofieff attempted to explain how it had found its way into his music:— 18

"The resolution is all the more important because it has demonstrated that the formalist trend is alien to the Soviet people, that it leads to the impoverishment and decline of music, and has pointed out with definitive clarity the aims which we must strive to achieve as the best way to serve the Soviet people. *Speaking of myself, the elements of formalism were peculiar to my music as long as fifteen or twenty years ago. The infection was caught apparently from contact with a number of Western trends.*"

The spectacle of one of the world's most cherished and gifted composers making apologetic obeisance to political officialdom was hardly a comfortable one for observers outside Russia. The non-Communist press pounced

righteously on the Central Committee's resolution as an arbitrary invasion of the sacred province of art. Charges of irresponsible government interference with the free workings of creative endeavor were widely made, and even writers who had been at least culturally sympathetic to the accomplishments of Soviet art and education waxed indignant over the episode. Many wondered why Prokofieff, of advanced musical craftsmen of our time perhaps the most classical and even the most melodious, should have been singled out at all. This bewilderment was perhaps best expressed by Robert Sabin, of the "Musical America" staff:—

"His music is predominantly melodious, harmonically and contrapuntally clear, formally organic without being pedantic, original but unforced—in short an expression of the basic principles of classical music.

"Many of the phrases in the Central Committee's denunciation are fantastically inappropriate to Prokofieff's art. Prokofieff has never espoused atonality. He is eminently a democratic composer. Peter and the Wolf is loved by children and unspoiled adults the world over. His music for the film Alexander Nevsky and the cantata he later fashioned from it have been enormously popular. His suite Lieutenant Kijé, originally composed for another motion picture, charmed audiences as soon as it was heard, in 1934. On the contrary, among contemporary masters Prokofieff is precisely one whom we can salute as being close to the people, able to write music that is equally appealing to connoisseurs and less demanding listeners, a man who understands the musical character of simple human beings. 19

"Perhaps the outstanding psychological trait of Prokofieff's music has been its splendid healthiness. His Classical Symphony of 1916-17 bounds along with exhilarating energy and spontaneity; and in his works of the last decade, 1941-51, such as the ballet, 'Cinderella', the String Quartet No. 2, and the Symphony No. 5, we find the same fullness of creative power, the same acceptance of life and ability to find it good and wholesome. Prokofieff belongs to the company of Bach and Handel in this respect—not to that of Scriabin and other composers whose genius had been tinged with neurotic traits and a tendency to cultism."

Nothing deterred by this unprecedented official spanking, Prokofieff went about his business, which was composing. The demands and necessities of this post-war period of reconstruction in Soviet life drew him deeper and deeper into the orbit of its community culture. A large proportion of his music became markedly topical and "national" in theme and orientation. Yet for all the strictures levelled at his music, and Khrennikoff was to scold him yet once more for "bourgeois formalism", Prokofieff, in most essentials, followed the unhampered bent of his genius. Ballet music, piano and cello sonatas continued to show that preoccupation with living and exciting form that in the best art can be dictated only by the exigencies of the material. It is possible that towards the very end Prokofieff had found a new synthesis that brought to full flower the abiding lyricism of his nature. That he was now determined to achieve an emotional communication through a lyrical simplicity of idiom about which there could be no mystery or confusion is clear. How much of this was owing to any official effort to discipline him and how much to the inevitable direction of his own creative logic it must remain for later and better informed students to assess. 20

The Seventh Symphony would seem to be a final testament of Prokofieff's return to this serene transparency of style. The new symphony was proof conclusive to the editors of "Pravda" that Prokofieff "had taken to heart the criticism directed at his work and succeeded in overcoming the fatal influence of formalism." Prokofieff was now seeking "to create beautiful, delicate music able to satisfy the artistic tastes of the Soviet people."

Prokofieff's death on March 4, 1953, the announcement of which was delayed several days perhaps because of the overshadowing illness and death of Premier Stalin, came with the shock of an irreparable loss to music-lovers everywhere. A chapter of world music in which a strong and fastidious classical sense had combined with a healthy and sometimes startling freshness of novelty, seemed to have closed. Dead at sixty-two, Serge Prokofieff had now begun that second life in the living memorial of the permanent repertory that is both the reward and the legacy of creative genius. It is safe to predict that so long as the concert hall endures as an institution, a considerable portion of his music will have a secure place within its hospitable walls.

21



*The picture of him with his wife and two children was taken when he was living in Paris.*



# THE MUSIC

## SYMPHONIES

### *“Classical Symphony in D major, Opus 25”*

“If we wished to establish Prokofieff’s genealogy as a composer, we would probably have to betake ourselves to the eighteenth century, to Scarlatti and other composers of the good old times, who have inner simplicity and naivete of creative art in common with him. Prokofieff is a classicist, not a romantic, and his appearance must be considered a belated relapse of classicism in Russia.”

So wrote Leonid Sabaneyeff, and it was the “Classical Symphony” more than any other composition of Prokofieff that inspired his words, as it has the pronouncements of others who have used this early symphony as an index of the composer’s predilections. Yet it is dangerous to so classify Prokofieff, except insofar as he remained loyal to a discipline of compression and a tradition of craftsmanship that seemed the very antithesis of the romantic approach to music. Nor was Prokofieff interested in imitating Mozart or Haydn in his “Classical Symphony.” Whatever has been written about his implied or assumed intentions, he made his aim quite explicit. What he set out to do was to compose the sort of symphony that Mozart might have written had Mozart been a contemporary of Prokofieff’s; not, it is clear, the other way around—that is, to compose the sort of symphony he might have written had he, instead, been a contemporary of Mozart’s.

The symphony was begun in 1916, finished the following year, and first performed in Leningrad on April 21, 1918. Prokofieff conducted the work himself when he appeared in Carnegie Hall, New York, at a concert of the Russian Symphony Society on December 11, 1918. The occasion was its American premiere, and the “Classical Symphony” speedily became a favorite of the concert-going public. And no wonder! It is music that commends itself at once through a limpid style, an endearing precision of stroke, an unflinching wit of melody, and a general salon-like atmosphere of courtly gallantry. 23

I. *Allegro, D major, 2/2*. The first violins give out the sprightly first theme, the flutes following with a subsidiary theme in a passage that leads to a development section. The first violins now chant a second theme, friskier than the first in its wide leaps and mimicked by a supporting bassoon. Both major themes supply material for the main development section. There is a general review in C major, leading to the return of the second theme in D major, the key of the movement.

II. *Larghetto, A major, 3/4*. The chief melody of this movement is again entrusted to the first violins after a brief preface of four measures. “Only a certain rigidity in the harmonic changes and a slight exaggeration in the melodic line betray a non-‘classical’ feeling,” wrote one annotator. “The middle section is built on a running pizzicato passage. After rising to a climax, the interest shifts to the woodwinds, and a surprise modulation brings back the first subject, which, after a slight interruption by a recall of the middle section, picks up an oboe counterpoint in triplets. At the end the accompaniment keeps marching on until it disappears in the distance.”

III. *Gavotte: Non troppo allegro, D major, 4/4*. This replaces the usual minuet in the classical scheme of things. One senses a scherzo without glimpsing its shape. The strings and the woodwinds announce the graceful dance theme in the first part, which is only twelve measures long in a symphony which lasts, in all, as many minutes. In the G major Trio that follows, flutes and clarinets join in sustaining a theme over a pastoral-like organ-point in the cellos and double-basses. A counter-theme is heard in the oboe. The first part returns, and the movement is 24 over in a flash.

The Gavotte was a widely used dance form in the music of the eighteenth century. It was said to stem from the Gavots, the people of the Pays de Gap. Originally a “danse grave”, it differed from others of its kind in one respect. The dancers neither walked nor shuffled, but raised their feet. The gavotte was supposedly introduced to the French court in the sixteenth century as part of the entertainment enacted by natives in provincial costumes.

IV. *Finale: Molto vivace, D major, 2/2*. A bright little theme, chattered by the strings after an emphatic chord, serves as principal subject of this movement. A bridge-passage leads to a two-part second subject, in A major, the first part taken up by the woodwinds in a twittering melody (later passed to the strings), the second a counter-theme for solo oboe. The material is briefly and lucidly developed, and a recapitulation brings back the first section, with the woodwinds assuming the theme over a web of string pizzicati. A miniature coda follows, and there is a sudden halt to the music, as if at the precise, split-second moment that its logic and breath have run out.

### *Symphony No. 5, Op. 100*

Of Prokofieff’s subsequent symphonies it is only the Fifth thus far that has established itself with any promise of endurance in the concert repertory. The First, composed in 1908 and not included in the catalogue of Prokofieff’s

works, may be dismissed as a student experiment. The Second, following sixteen years later, proved a stylistic misfit of noisy primitivism and even noisier factory-like mechanism. The Third, an impassioned and dramatic fantasy, dating from 1928, drew on material from an unproduced opera, "The Flaming Angel." Prokofieff also tells us that the stormy scherzo movement derived in part from Chopin's B-flat minor Sonata. The symphony was first performed in Paris on May 17, 1929, and carries a dedication to his life-long friend and colleague, the composer Miaskovsky. "I feel that in this symphony I have succeeded in deepening my musical language," Prokofieff wrote after his return to Russia and when the work had received its initial performances there. "I should not want the Soviet listener to judge me solely by the March from 'The Love of Three Oranges' and the Gavotte from the 'Classical Symphony.'" According to Israel Nestyev, Prokofieff's Soviet biographer, the Third Symphony was "something of an echo of the past, being made up chiefly of materials relating to 1918 and 1919." 25

With the Fourth Symphony we come to what might be termed Prokofieff's "American" Symphony. This was composed in 1929 for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Boston Symphony. Much of the music harks back to the suave and courtly style of the "Classical" Symphony, without its uniform elegance of idiom, however. It was certainly a change from an explosion like the "Scythian" Suite, that had fairly rocked the sedate and cultivated subscribers of Symphony Hall out of their seats.

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It is the Fifth that constitutes Prokofieff's most ambitious contribution to symphonic literature. It is a complex and infinitely variegated score, yet its composition took a solitary month. Another month was given over to orchestrating the work, and somewhere in between Prokofieff managed to begin and complete one of his most enduring film scores, that to Eisenstein's "Ivan the Terrible." The fact is that Prokofieff had been jotting down themes for this symphony in a special notebook for several years. "I always work that way," he explained, "and that is probably why I write so fast."

Composed during the summer of 1944, the Fifth Symphony was performed in America on November 9, 1945, at a concert of the Boston Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Serge Koussevitzky. Five days later, under the same auspices, it was introduced to New York at Carnegie Hall. Prokofieff had himself directed the world premiere in Moscow in January of that year. At that time Prokofieff, asked about the program or content of the symphony would only admit that it was a symphony "about the spirit of man." The symphony was composed and performed in Moscow at a time of mounting Soviet victories over the German invaders. It seemed inevitable that a mood of exultation would find its way into this music. To Nestyev the symphony captured the listeners "with its healthy mood of affirmation." Continuing, this Soviet analyst declared that "in the heroic, manly images of the first movement, in the holiday jubilation of the finale, the listeners sensed a living transmutation of that popular emotional surge ... which we felt in those days of victories over Nazi Germany." 26

In four movements, the Fifth Symphony is of basic traditional structure, despite its daring lapses from orthodoxy. The predominant mood is heroic and affirmative, at times tragic in its fervid intensity, sombre recurringly, but essentially an assertion of joyous strength, with momentary bursts of sidelong gaiety reserved for the last movement. A terse and searching analysis of the Fifth Symphony was made by John N. Burk for the program-book of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. It reads:

"I. *Andante*. The opening movement is built on two full-voiced melodic themes, the first in triple, the second in duple beat. Contrast is found in the alternate rhythm as both are fully developed. There is an impressive coda.

"II. *Allegro marcato*. The second movement has earmarks of the classical scherzo. Under the theme there is a steady reiteration of a staccato accompaniment, 4/4. The melody, passed by the clarinet to the other woodwinds and by them variously treated, plays over the marked and unremitting beat. A bridge passage for a substantial wind choir ushers in (and is to usher out) the Trio-like middle section, which is in 3/4 time and also rhythmically accented, the clarinet first bearing the burden of the melody. The first section, returning, is freshly treated. At the close the rhythm becomes more incisive and intense. 27

"III. *Adagio*. 3/4. The slow movement has, like the scherzo, a persistent accompaniment figure. It opens with a melody set forth *espressivo* by the woodwinds, carried by the strings into their high register. The movement is tragic in mood, rich in episodic melody. It carries the symphony to its deepest point of tragic tension, as descending scales give a weird effect of outcries. But this tension suddenly passes, and the reprise is serene.

"IV. *Allegro giocoso*. The finale opens *Allegro giocoso*, and after a brief tranquil passage for the divided cellos and basses, gives its light, rondo-like theme. There is a quasi-gaiety in the development, but, as throughout the symphony, something ominous seems always to lurk around the corner. The awareness of brutal warfare broods over it and comes forth in sharp dissonance—at the end."

### ***The Sixth Symphony, in E-flat minor, Opus 111***

In a letter to his American publishers dated September 6, 1946, Prokofieff announced that he was working on two major compositions—a sonata for violin and piano and a Sixth Symphony. "The symphony will be in three movements," he wrote. "Two of them were sketched last summer and at present I am working on the third. I am planning to orchestrate the whole symphony in the autumn."

The various emotional states or moods of the symphony Prokofieff described as follows:—"The first movement is agitated in character, lyrical in places, and austere in others. The second movement, *andante*, is lighter and more songful. The finale, lighter and major in its character, would be like the finale of my Fifth Symphony but for the austere reminiscences of the first movement." 28

How active and productive a worker Prokofieff was may be gathered from other disclosures in the same letter. Besides the Symphony and Sonata, he was applying the finishing touches to a "Symphonic Suite of Waltzes," drawn from his ballet, "Cinderella", his opera, "War and Peace" (based on Tolstoy's historical novel), and his score for the film biography of the Russian poet Lermontov. Earlier that summer he had completed three separate suites from "Cinderella" and a "big new scene" for "War and Peace". No idler he!

The first performance of Prokofieff's Sixth Symphony occurred in Moscow on October 10, 1947. Four months later, on February 11, 1948, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union issued its resolution denouncing Prokofieff and six other Soviet composers for their failure to "permeate themselves with a consciousness of the high demands made of musical creation by the Soviet people." The seven composers were charged with "formalist distortions and anti-democratic tendencies in music" in several of their more recent symphonic and operatic works. It has been assumed that the Sixth Symphony was among the offending scores which the Central Committee had in mind. While it was not placed under the official ban, it did not figure subsequently in the active repertory. To Leopold Stokowski, who conducted its American premiere with the New York Philharmonic on November 24, 1949, in Carnegie Hall, we owe the perceptive analysis of the Sixth Symphony that follows:— 29

I. "The first part has two themes—the first in a rather fast dance rhythm, the second a slower songlike melody, a little modal in character, recalling the old Russian and Byzantine scales. Later this music becomes gradually more animated as the themes are developed, and after a climax of the development there is a slower transition to the second part."

II. "I think this second part will need several hearings to be fully understood. The harmonies and texture of the music are extremely complex. Later there is a theme for horns which is simpler and sounds like voices singing. This leads to a warm *cantilena* of the violins and a slower transition to the third part."

III. "This is rhythmic and full of humor, verging on the satirical. The rhythms are clear-cut, and while the thematic lines are simple, they are accompanied by most original harmonic sequences, alert and rapid. Near the end a remembrance sounds like an echo of the pensive melancholy of the first part of the symphony, followed by a rushing, tumultuous end."

Mr. Stokowski has also stated that the Sixth Symphony represents a natural development of Prokofieff's extraordinary gifts as an original creative artist. "I knew Prokofieff well in Paris and in Russia," he writes, "and I feel that this symphony is an eloquent expression of the full range of his personality. It is the creation of a master artist, serene in the use and control of his medium."

### ***The Seventh Symphony, Opus 131***

At this writing the Seventh Symphony has yet to be heard in New York. Its American premiere by the Philadelphia Orchestra has been announced for April 10, to be followed by its first performance in Carnegie Hall, by the same orchestra, on April 21, with Eugene Ormandy to conduct on both occasions. The work was composed in 1952 and performed for the first time in Moscow on October 11, 1952, under the direction of Samuel Samosud. It is a comparatively short symphony as the symphonies of our time go, lasting no more than thirty minutes. For Prokofieff the orchestration is relatively modest and the division of the symphony is in the four traditional movements:— 30

- I. Moderato
- II. Allegretto
- III. Andante espressivo
- IV. Vivace

From first note to last it is a transparent score, lyrical, melodic, and easily grasped and assimilated. Recurring themes are readily identified. "The harmonic structure could hardly be called modern in this *anno domini* 1953," writes Donald Engle, "and the scoring is generally open and concise, at times even spare and lean."

The overall impression is that the music has two inevitable points of being, its beginning and its end, and that the symphony is the shortest possible distance between them. Such, in a sense, has been the classical ideal, and thus we find Prokofieff completing the symphonic cycle of his career by returning once more, whether by inner compulsion or outer necessity, to a classical symphony.

## **PIANO CONCERTOS**

### ***Concerto No. 1, in D-flat major, Opus 10, for Piano and Orchestra***

Prokofieff's first piano concerto was his declaration of maturity, according to Nestyev. It followed the composition in 1911 of a one-act opera, "Magdalene" that proved little more than an advanced student exercise for the operatic writing that was to come later. That same year Prokofieff completed his concerto and dedicated it to Nicolai Tcherepnine. Its performance in Moscow early the following year, followed by a performance in St. 31

Petersburg, served to establish his name as one to conjure with among Russia's rising new generation of composers. The work suggested the tradition of Franz Liszt in its propulsive energy and strictly pianistic language. But it revealed the compactness of idiom and phrase, the pointed turn of phrase, and lithe rhythmic tension that were to develop and characterize so much of Prokofieff's subsequent music. The Concerto brought a fervid response, but not all of it was on Prokofieff's side. "Harsh, coarse, primitive cacophony" was the verdict of one Moscow critic. Another proposed a straitjacket for its young composer. On the other side of the ledger, critics in both cities welcomed its humor and wit and imaginative quality, not to mention "its freedom from the mildew of decadence." A particularly prophetic voice had this to say: "Prokofieff might even mark a stage in Russian musical development, Glinka and Rubinstein being the first, Tschaikowsky and Rimsky-Korsakoff the second, Glazounoff and Arensky the third, and Scriabin and Prokofieff the fourth." Daringly this prophet asked: "Why not?"<sup>[1]</sup>

Prokofieff was his own soloist on these occasions, and it was soon apparent that besides being a composer of emphatic power and originality, he was a pianist of prodigious virtuosity. "Under his fingers," ran one report, "the piano does not so much sing and vibrate as speak in the stern and convincing tone of a percussion instrument, the tone of the old-fashioned harpsichord. Yet it was precisely this convincing freedom of execution and these clear-cut rhythms that won the author such enthusiastic applause from the public." Most confident and discerning of all at this time was Miaskovsky, who, reviewing a set of Four Etudes by Prokofieff, challengingly stated: "What pleasure and surprise it affords one to come across this vivid and wholesome phenomenon amid the morass of effeminacy, spinelessness, and anemia of today!"<sup>[2]</sup>

The First Piano Concerto was introduced to America at a concert of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on December 11, 1918. The conductor was Eric De Lamarter, and the soloist was again Prokofieff himself.

The Concerto is in one uninterrupted movement, Prokofieff considering the whole "an allegro movement in sonata form." While the music ventures among many tonalities before its journey is over, it ends the way it began, in the key of D flat major. One gains the impression, though only in passing, of a three-movement structure because of two sections marked, respectively, *Andante* and *Allegro scherzando*, which follow the opening *Allegro brioso*. Actually the *Andante*, a sustained lyrical discourse, featuring, by turn, strings, solo clarinet, solo piano, and finally piano and orchestra, is a songful pause between the exposition and development of this sonata plan. When the *Andante* has reached its peak, the *Allegro scherzando* begins, developing themes already presented in the earlier section. One is reminded of the cyclical recurrence of theme adopted by Liszt in his piano concertos, both of which are also in one movement, though subdivided within the unbroken continuity of the music.

### ***Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Opus 16, for Piano and Orchestra***

The Second Piano Concerto of Prokofieff belongs to the lost and found department of music. It was written early in 1913, that is, two years after the First Concerto, and performed for the first time, with Prokofieff at the keyboard, on August 23 at Pavlovsk, a town not far from St. Petersburg. A performance, with the same soloist, took place at a concert of the Russian Musical Society on January 24, 1915. Early the following month Prokofieff left for Italy at the invitation of Sergei Diaghileff, who liked the Concerto and for a while even toyed with the possibility of using it for a ballet. On March 7, 1915 Prokofieff, through the intervention of Diaghileff, performed his Second Concerto at the Augusteo, Rome, the conductor being Bernardino Molinari. The reaction of the Italian press was pretty much that of the Russian press—divided. There were again those who decried Prokofieff's bold innovations of color and rhythm and harmony, and there were those who hailed these very things. There was one point of unanimity, however. One and all, in both countries, acclaimed Prokofieff as a pianist of brilliance and distinction.<sup>[3]</sup>

Now, when Prokofieff left Russia for the United States in 1918, the score of the Second Piano Concerto remained behind in his apartment in the city that became Leningrad. This score, together with the orchestral parts and other manuscripts, were lost when Prokofieff's apartment was confiscated during the revolutionary exigencies of the period. Luckily, sketches of the piano part were salvaged by Prokofieff's mother, and returned to him in 1921. Working from these sketches, Prokofieff partly reconstructed and partly rewrote his Second Piano Concerto. There is considerable difference between the two versions. Both the basic structure and the themes of the original were retained, but the concerto could now boast whatever Prokofieff had gained in imaginative and technical resource in the intervening years. Thus reshaped, the Second Piano Concerto was first performed in Paris with the composer as soloist, and Serge Koussevitzky conducting. The following analysis, used on that occasion, and later translated by Philip Hale and extensively quoted in this country, was probably the work of Prokofieff, who was generally quite hospitable to requests for technical expositions of his music.<sup>[4]</sup>

I. *Andantino-Allegretto-Andantino*. The movement begins with the announcement of the first theme, to which is opposed a second episode of a faster pace in A minor. The piano enters solo in a technically complicated cadenza, with a repetition of the first episode in the first part.

II. *Scherzo*. This *Scherzo* is in the nature of a *moto perpetuo* in 16th notes by the two hands in the interval of an octave, while the orchestral accompaniment furnishes the background.

III. *Intermezzo*. This movement, *moderato*, is conceived in a strictly classical form.

IV. *Finale*. After several measures in quick movement the first subject is given to the piano. The second is of a calmer, more cantabile nature—piano solo at first—followed by several canons for piano and orchestra. Later the two themes are joined, the piano playing one, the orchestra the other. There is a short coda based chiefly upon the first subject.

### ***Concerto No. 3, in C major, Opus 26, for Piano and Orchestra***

Prokofieff did not begin work on his Third Piano Concerto till four years after he had completed the first version of his Second Concerto. This was in 1917 in the St. Petersburg that was now Petrograd and was soon to be Leningrad. However, a combination of war and revolution, plus a departure for America in 1918, and the busy schedule that followed, delayed completion of the work. It was not until October, 1921, in fact, that the score was ready for performance, and that event took place at a concert of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on the following December 17. Prokofieff was again the soloist, as he is once more his own annotator in the analysis that follows. 35

I. The first movement opens quietly with a short introduction, *Andante*, 4-4. The theme is announced by an unaccompanied clarinet, and is continued by the violins for a few bars. Soon the tempo changes to *Allegro*, the strings having a passage in semiquavers which leads to the statement of the principal subject by the piano. Discussion of this theme is carried on in a lively manner, both the piano and the orchestra having a good deal to say on the matter. A passage in chords for the piano alone leads to the more expressive second subject, heard in the oboe with a *pizzicato* accompaniment. This is taken up by the piano and developed at some length, eventually giving way to a *bravura* passage in triplets. At the climax of this section, the tempo reverts to *Andante*, and the orchestra gives out the first theme, *ff*. The piano joins in, and the theme is subjected to an impressively broad treatment. On resuming the *Allegro*, the chief theme and the second subject are developed with increased brilliance, and the movement ends with an exciting *crescendo*.

II. The second movement consists of a theme with five variations. The theme is announced by the orchestra alone, *Andantino*.

In the first variation, the piano treats the opening of the theme in quasi-sentimental fashion, and resolves into a chain of trills, as the orchestra repeats the closing phrase. The tempo changes to *Allegro* for the second and the third variations, and the piano has brilliant figures, while snatches of the theme are introduced here and there in the orchestra. In variation Four the tempo is once again *Andante*, and the piano and orchestra discourse on the theme in a quiet and meditative fashion. Variation Five is energetic (*Allegro giusto*). It leads without pause into a restatement of the theme by the orchestra, with delicate chordal embroidery in the piano. 36

III. The Finale begins (*Allegro ma non troppo*, 3-4) with a *staccato* theme for bassoons and *pizzicato* strings, which is interrupted by the blustering entry of the piano. The orchestra holds its own with the opening theme, however, and there is a good deal of argument, with frequent differences of opinion as regards key. Eventually the piano takes up the first theme, and develops it to a climax.

IV. With a reduction of tone and slackening of tempo, an alternative theme is introduced in the woodwind. The piano replies with a theme that is more in keeping with the caustic humor of the work. This material is developed and there is a brilliant *coda*.

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It was Prokofieff's Third Piano Concerto that launched a young Greek musician by the name of Dimitri Mitropoulos on a brilliant international career. Mr. Mitropoulos had been invited to Berlin in 1930 to conduct the Berlin Philharmonic. Egon Petri, the celebrated Dutch pianist, was scheduled to appear as soloist in the Prokofieff Third. But Mr. Petri was indisposed and no other pianist was available to replace him in time for the concert. To save the situation Mr. Mitropoulos volunteered to play the concerto himself. The result was a spectacular double debut in Berlin for the young musician as conductor and pianist. Engaged to conduct in Paris soon after, Mr. Mitropoulos again billed Prokofieff's Third Piano Concerto, with himself once more as soloist. This time he was heard by Prokofieff, who stated publicly that the Greek played it better than he himself could ever hope to. Word of Mr. Mitropoulos's European triumphs reached Serge Koussevitzky, who immediately invited him to come to America as guest conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. It is no wonder that Dimitri Mitropoulos often refers to this concerto as "the lucky Prokofieff Third." 37

### ***Concerto No. 5, Opus 55, for Piano and Orchestra***

Before concerning ourselves with Prokofieff's Fifth Piano Concerto, a few words are needed to explain this leap from No. 3 to No. 5. A fourth piano concerto is listed in the catalogue as Opus 53, dating from 1931, consisting of four movements, and still in manuscript. A significant reference to its being "for the left hand" begins to tell us a story. Prokofieff wrote it for a popular Austrian pianist, Paul Wittgenstein, who had lost his right arm in the First World War. Wittgenstein had already been armed with special scores by such versatile worthies as Richard Strauss, Erich Korngold, and Franz Schmidt. Prokofieff responded with alacrity when Wittgenstein approached him too. The Concerto, bristling with titanic difficulties and a complex stylistic scheme that would have baffled two hands if not two brains, was submitted for inspection to the one-armed virtuoso. Wittgenstein disliked it cordially, refused to perform it, and thus consigned it to the silence of a manuscript.

Maurice Ravel, approached in due course for a similar work, was the only composer to emerge with an enduring work from contact with this gifted casualty of the war. However, he too had trouble. When completed, the Concerto was virtually deeded to the pianist. Wittgenstein now proceeded to object to numerous passages and to insist on alterations. Ravel angrily refused, and was anything but mollified to discover that Wittgenstein was taking "unpardonable liberties" in public performances of the concerto.... Perhaps it was just as well that Prokofieff's Fourth Piano Concerto remained in its unperformed innocence—a concerto for no hands.

It was not long before the mood to compose a piano concerto was upon Prokofieff again. This became his Fifth, finished in the summer of 1932 and performed for the first time in Berlin at a Philharmonic Concert conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler. Prokofieff was the soloist. It is interesting to note that the program contained another soloist—the gentleman playing the viola part in Berlioz's "Childe Harold Symphony," a gentleman by the 38

name of Paul Hindemith. There was a performance of the Concerto in Paris two months later.

When the concerto and the composer reached Boston together the following year, Prokofieff gave an interviewer from the "Transcript" both a description of the way he composed and an analysis of the score. About his method Prokofieff had this to say:—

"I am always on the lookout for new melodic themes. These I write in a notebook, as they come to me, for future use. All my work is founded on melodies. When I begin a work of major proportions I usually have accumulated enough themes to make half-a-dozen symphonies. Then the work of selection and arrangement begins. The composition of this Fifth Concerto began with such melodies. I had enough of them to make three concertos."

His analysis follows:—

"The emphasis in this concerto is entirely on the melodic. There are five movements, and each movement contains at least four themes or melodies. The development of these themes is exceedingly compact and concise. This will be evident when I tell you that the entire five movements do not take over twenty minutes in performance. Please do not misunderstand me. The themes are not without development. In a work such as Schumann's 'Carnival' there are also many themes, enough to make a considerable number of symphonies or concertos. But they are not developed at all. They are merely stated. In my new Concerto there is actual development of the themes, but this development is as compressed and condensed as possible. Of course there is no program, not a sign or suggestion of a program. But neither is there any movement so expansive as to be a complete sonata-form. 39

I. *Allegro con brio: meno mosso*. "The first movement is an *Allegro con brio*, with a *meno mosso* as middle section. Though not in a sonata-form, it is the main movement of the Concerto, fulfills the functions of a sonata-form and is in the spirit of the usual sonata-form.

II. *Moderato ben accentuato*. "This movement has a march-like rhythm, but we must be cautious in the use of this term. I would not think of calling it a march because it has none of the vulgarity or commonness which is so often associated with the idea of a march and which actually exists in most popular marches.

III. *Allegro con fuoco*. "The third movement is a Toccata. This is a precipitate, displayful movement of much technical brilliance and requiring a large virtuosity—as difficult for orchestra as for the soloist. It is a Toccata for orchestra as much as for piano.

IV. *Larghetto*. "The fourth movement is the lyrical movement of the Concerto. It starts off with a soft, soothing theme: grows more and more intense in the middle portion, develops breadth and tension, then returns to the music of the beginning. German commentators have mistakenly called it a theme and variations.

V. *Vivo: Piu Mosso: Coda*. "The Finale has a decidedly classical flavor. The Coda is based on a new theme which is joined by the other themes of the Finale."

Summing up his own view of the Concerto, Prokofieff concluded:—

"The Concerto is not cyclic in the Franckian sense of developing several movements out of the theme or set of themes. Each movement has its own independent themes. But there is reference to some of the material of the First Movement in the Third; and also reference to the material of the Third Movement in the Finale. The piano part is treated in *concertante* fashion. The piano always has the leading part which is closely interwoven with significant music in the orchestra." 40

After this rather mild and dispassionate self-appraisal, it comes as something of a shock to read the slashing commentary of Prokofieff's Soviet biographer Nestyev:—

"The machine-like Toccata, in the athletic style of the earlier Prokofieff, presents his bold jumps, hand-crossing, and Scarlatti technic in highly exaggerated form. The tendency to wide skips à la Scarlatti is carried to monstrous extremes. Sheer feats of piano acrobatics completely dominate the principal movements of the Concerto. In the precipitate Toccata this dynamic quality degenerates into mere lifeless mechanical movement, with the result that the orchestra itself seems to be transformed into a huge mechanism with fly-wheels, pistons, and transmission belts."

To Nestyev it was further proof of the "brittle, urbanistic" sterility of Prokofieff's "bourgeois" wanderings.

## VIOLIN CONCERTOS

### *Concerto in D major, No. 1, Opus 19, for Violin and Orchestra*

Although composed in Russia between 1913 and 1917, Prokofieff's First Violin Concerto did not see the light of day till October 18, 1923, that is to say, shortly after he had taken up residence in Paris. It was on that date that the work was first performed in the French capital at a concert conducted by Serge Koussevitzky, who entrusted the solo part to his concertmaster Marcel Darrieux. The same violinist was soloist at a subsequent concert in the Colonne concert series, on November 25. It is said that the work was assigned to a concertmaster 41

after Mr. Koussevitzky had been rebuffed by several established artists, among them the celebrated Bronislaw Huberman, who relished neither its idiom nor its technic. This attitude was shared by the Paris critics, who expressed an almost uniform hostility to the concerto. Prokofieff's arrival in Paris had already been prepared by his "Scythian Suite" and Third Piano Concerto. The new work must evidently have struck Parisian ears as rather mild and Mendelssohnian by comparison. In any case, the Violin Concerto did not gain serious recognition till it was performed in Prague on June 1 of the following year at a festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music. The soloist this time was Joseph Szigeti, and it was thanks in large part to his working sponsorship of the Concerto that it began to gather momentum on the international concert circuit. Serge Koussevitzky was again the conductor when the work was given its American premiere by the Boston Symphony Orchestra on April 24, 1925, and once more the soloist was a concertmaster—Richard Burgin.

The D major Violin Concerto shows the period of its composition in its frequent traces of the national school of Rimsky-Korsakoff and Glazounoff. Despite the bustling intricacies of the second movement, it is not a virtuoso's paradise by any means. Bravura of the rampant kind is absent, and of cadenzas there is no sign. Neither is the orchestra an accompaniment in the traditional sense, but rather part of the same integrated scheme of which the solo-violin is merely a prominent feature.

I. *Andantino*. The solo violin chants a gentle theme against which the strings and clarinet weave in equally gentle background. There is a spirited change of mood as the melody is followed by rhythmic passage-work sustained over a marked bass. The first theme returns as the movement draws to a close, more deliberate now. The flute takes it up as the violin embroiders richly around it. 42

II. *Vivacissimo*. This is a swiftly moving scherzo, bristling with accented rhythms, long leaps, double-stop slides and harmonics, and down-bow strokes, "none of which," Robert Bagar shrewdly points out, "may be construed as display music."

III. *Moderato*. More lyrical than the preceding movement, the finale allows the violin frolic to continue to some extent. Scale passages are developed and high-flown trills give the violin some heady moments. The bassoon offers a coy theme before the violin introduces the main subject in a sequence of staccato and legato phrases. There are pointed comments from a restless orchestra as the material is developed. Soon the soft melody of the opening movement is heard again, among the massed violins now. Above it the solo instrument soars in trills on a parallel line of notes an octave above, coming to rest on high D.

### ***Concerto in G minor, No. 2, Op. 63, for Violin and Orchestra***

Composed during the summer and autumn of 1935, Prokofieff's second violin concerto was premiered in Madrid on December 1 of that year. Enrique Arbos conducted the Madrid Symphony Orchestra, with the Belgian violinist Robert Soetens playing the solo part. Prokofieff himself was present and later directed the same orchestra in his "Classical Symphony." Jascha Heifetz was the soloist when Serge Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony 43 Orchestra first performed the new concerto in America.

Twenty-two years had elapsed since Prokofieff had composed his first violin concerto in D, so comparisons were promptly made between the styles and idioms manifested by the two scores. Apart from the normal development and change expected over so long a period, another factor was emphasized by many. The G minor concerto marked Prokofieff's return to his homeland after a long Odyssey abroad. He was now a Soviet citizen and once more a participant in the social and cultural life of his country.

The new concerto revealed a warmth and lyricism, even a romantic spirit, that contrasted with the witty glitter and grotesquerie of the early concerto. The old terseness, rigorous logic, and clear-cut form were still observable, though less pronounced. There were even flashes of the "familiar Prokofieffian naughtiness," as Gerald Abraham pointed out. But the new mood was inescapable. "So far as the violin concerto form is concerned," wrote the English musicologist, "Prokofieff's formula for turning himself into a Soviet composer has been to emphasize the lyrical side of his nature at the expense of the witty and grotesque and brilliant sides."

The daring thrusts, the crisp waggishness, the fiendish cleverness and steely glitter seemed now to be giving way to warmer, deeper preoccupations, at least in the first two movements. "The renascence of lyricism, warm melody, and simple emotionality is the essence of the second violin concerto," writes Abraham Veinus. The earlier spirit of mockery and tart irreverence was almost lost in the new surge of romantic melody.

I. *Allegro moderato, G minor, 4/4*. The solo instrument, unaccompanied, gives out a readily remembered first theme which forms the basis of the subsequent development and the coda. The appealing second theme is also announced by the violin, this time against soft rhythmic figures in the string section. Abraham finds a 44 "distant affinity" between this second theme and the Gavotte of Prokofieff's "Classical Symphony."

II. *Andante assai, E-flat major, 12/8*. The shift to frank melodic appeal is especially noticeable in the slow movement. Here the mood is almost steadily lyrical and romantic from the moment the violin sings the theme which forms the basic material of the movement. There is varied treatment and some shifting in tonality before the chief melody returns to the key of E-flat.

III. *Allegro ben marcato, G minor, 3/4*. In the finale the old Prokofieff is back in a brilliant Rondo of incisive rhythms and flashing melodic fragments. There are bold staccato effects, tricky shifts in rhythm, and brisk repartee between violin and orchestra. If there is any obvious link with the earlier concerto in D it is here in this virtuoso's playground.

# SUITES

## *"Ala and Lolly", Scythian Suite for Large Orchestra, Opus 20*

It has been supposed that, consciously or not, Prokofieff was influenced by Stravinsky's "Sacre de Printemps" in his choice and treatment of material for the "Scythian Suite." Both scores have an earthy, barbaric quality, a stark rhythmic pulsation and an atmosphere of remote pagan ritualism that establish a strong kinship, whether direct or not. In each instance, moreover, the subject matter allowed the composer ample scope for exploiting fresh devices of harmony and color. Another point of contact between the two scores was the figure of Serge Diaghileff, that fabulous patron and gadfly of modern art. Stravinsky had already been brought into the camp of Russian ballet by this most persuasive of all ballet impresarios. Soon it was Prokofieff's turn. Diaghileff's commission was a ballet "on Russian fairy-tale or prehistoric themes." The "Scythian" music was Prokofieff's answer. The encounter with Diaghileff had occurred in June, 1914. With the outbreak of war later that year, an unavoidable delay set in, and it was evidently not till early the next year that Prokofieff submitted what was ready to Diaghileff, who liked neither the plot nor the music. To compensate him for his pains Diaghileff did two things: The first was to arrange for Prokofieff to play his Second Piano Concerto in Rome, an experience that proved profitable in every sense. The second was to commission another ballet, with the injunction to "write music that will be truly Russian." To which the candid Diaghileff added:—"They've forgotten how to write music in that rotten St. Petersburg of yours." The result was "The Buffoon," a ballet which proved more palatable to Diaghileff and led to a mutually fruitful association of many years. 45

What was to have been the "Scythian" ballet became instead, an orchestral suite, the premiere of which took place in St. Petersburg on January 29, 1916, Prokofieff himself conducting. More than any other score of Prokofieff's, the "Scythian Suite" was responsible for the acrimonious note that long remained in the reaction of the press to his music. "Cacophony" became a frequent word in the vocabulary of invective favored by hostile critics. Prokofieff was accused of breaking every musical law and violating every tenet of good taste. His music was "noisy," "rowdy," "barbarous," an expression of irresponsible hooliganism in symphonic form. Glazounoff, friend and teacher and guide, walked out on the first performance of "The Scythian Suite." But there were those among the critics and public who recognized the confident power and proclamative freedom of this music, and so a merry war of words, written and spoken, brewed over a score that Diaghileff, in a moment of singular insensitivity, had dismissed as "dull." Whatever else this music was—and it was almost everything from a signal for angry stampedes from the concert hall to an open declaration of war—it was emphatically not dull! Even the word "Bolshevism" was hurled at the score when it reached these placid shores late in 1918. In Chicago, one critic wrote: "The red flag of anarchy waved tempestuously over old Orchestra Hall yesterday as Bolshevik melodies floated over the waves of a sea of sound in breath-taking cacophony." Dull, indeed! 46

Of the original Scythians whose strange customs were the subject of Prokofieff's controversial suite, Robert Bagar tells us succinctly:

"First believed to have been mentioned by the poet Hesiod (800 B.C.), the Scythians were a nomadic people dwelling along the north shore of the Black Sea. Probably of Mongol blood, this race vanished about 100 B.C. Herodotus tells us that they were rather an evil lot, given to very primitive customs, fat and flabby in appearance, and living under a despotic rule whose laws, such as they may have been, were enforced through the ever-present threat of assassination.

"There were gods, of course, each in charge of some aspect or other of spiritual or human or moral conduct—a sun god, a health god, a heaven god, an evil god and quite a few others. Veles, the god of the sun, was their supreme deity. His daughter was Ala, and Lolli was one of their great heroes."

Prokofieff's Suite is based on the story of Ala, her suffering in the toils of the Evil God, and her deliverance by Lolli. The suite is divided into four movements, brief outlines of which are furnished in the score.

I. "*Invocation to Veles and Ala.*" (*Allegro feroce*, 4/4.) The music describes an invocation to the sun, worshipped by the Scythians as their highest deity, named Veles. This invocation is followed by the sacrifice to the beloved idol, Ala, the daughter of Veles. 47

II. "*The Evil-God and dance of the pagan monsters.*" (*Allegro sostenuto*, 4-4.) The Evil-God summons the seven pagan monsters from their subterranean realms and, surrounded by them, dances a delirious dance.

III. "*Night.*" (*Andantino*, 4-4.) The Evil-God comes to Ala in the darkness. Great harm befalls her. The moon rays fall upon Ala, and the moon-maidens descend to bring her consolation.

IV. "*Lolli's pursuit of the Evil-God and the sunrise.*" (*Tempestuoso*, 4-4.) Lolli, a Scythian hero, went forth to save Ala. He fights the Evil-God. In the uneven battle with the latter, Lolli would have perished, but the sun-god rises with the passing of night and smites the evil deity. With the description of the sunrise the Suite comes to an end.

## *Orchestral Suite from the Film, "Lieutenant Kije," Opus 60*

The Soviet film, "Lieutenant Kije", was produced by the Belgoskino Studios of Leningrad in 1933, after a story by Y. Tynyanov that had become a classic of the new literature. The director was A. Feinzimmer. For Prokofieff, who supplied the music, it represented the first important work of his return to Russia. The music belongs with that for "Alexander Nevsky" and "Ivan the Terrible" as the most effective and characteristic Prokofieff composed for



the Soviet screen. From that score Prokofieff assembled an orchestral suite which was published early in 1934 and performed later that year in Moscow. Prokofieff himself conducted its Parisian premiere at a Lamoureux concert on February 20, 1937, when, according to an English correspondent, it “made a stunning impression.” Serge Koussevitzky introduced it to America at a concert of the Boston Symphony Orchestra on October 15 of the same year.

The film tells an ironic and amusing story of a Russian officer, who because of a clerical error, existed only on paper. The setting is that of St. Petersburg during the reign of Czar Paul. The Czar misreads the report of one of his military aides, and without meaning to, evolves the name of a non-existent lieutenant. He does this by inadvertently linking the “ki” at the end of another officer’s name to the Russian expletive “je.” The result is the birth—on paper—of a new officer in the Russian Army, “Lieutenant Kije.” Since no one dares to tell the Czar of his absurd blunder, his courtiers are obliged to invent a “Lieutenant Kije” to go with the name. Such being the situation, the film is an enlargement on the expedients and subterfuges arising from it. There are five sections:—

48

I. *Birth of Kije. (Allegro.)* A combination of off-stage cornet fanfare, military drum-roll, and squealings from a fife proclaim that Lieutenant Kije is born—in the brain of blundering Czar. The solemn announcement is taken up by other instruments, followed by a short *Andante* section, and presently the military clatter of the opening is back.

II. *Romance. (Andante.)* This section contains a song, assigned optionally to baritone voice or tenor saxophone. The text of the song, in translation, reads:—

“Heart be calm, do not flutter;  
Don’t keep flying like a butterfly.  
Well, what has my heart decided?  
Where will we in summer rest?  
But my heart could answer nothing,  
Beating fast in my poor breast.  
My grey dove is full of sorrow—  
Moaning is she day and night.  
For her dear companion left her,  
Having vanished out of sight,  
Sad and dull has gotten my grey dove.”

III. *Kije’s Wedding. (Allegro.)* This section reminds us that although our hero is truly a soldier, like so many of his calling he is also susceptible to the claims of the heart. In fact, he is quite a dashing lover, not without a touch of sentimentality.

49

IV. *Troika. (Moderato.)* The Russian word “Troika” means a set of three, then, by extension, a team of three horses abreast, finally, a three-horse sleigh. This section is so named because the orchestra pictures such a vehicle as accompaniment to a second song, in this case a Russian tavern song. Its words, as rendered from the Russian, go:

“A woman’s heart is like an inn:  
All those who wish go in,  
And they who roam about  
Day and night go in and out.  
Come here, I say; come here, I say,  
And have no fear with me.  
Be you bachelor or not,  
Be you shy or be you bold,  
I call you all to come here.  
So all those who are about,  
Keep going in and coming out,  
Night and day they roam about.”

V. *Burial of Kije. (Andante assai.)* Thus ends the paper career of our valiant hero. The music recalls his birth to a flourish of military sounds, his romance, his wedding. And now the cornet that had blithely announced his coming in an off-stage fanfare is muted to his going, as Lieutenant Kije dwindles to his final silence.

### ***Music for the Ballet, “Romeo and Juliet,” Opus 64-A and 64-B***

As a ballet in four acts and nine tableaux, Prokofieff’s “Romeo and Juliet” was first produced by the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow in 1935. Like many standard Russian ballets, the performance took a whole evening. Prokofieff assembled two Suites from the music, the first premiered in Moscow on November 24, 1936, under the direction of Nicolas Semjonowitsch Golowanow. The premiere of the second suite followed less than a month later.

50

Prokofieff himself directed the American premieres of both Suites, of Suite No. 1 as guest of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on January 21, 1937, and of Suite No. 2 as guest of the Boston Symphony Orchestra on March 25, 1938. Serge Koussevitzky and the Boston unit introduced the Suite to New York on March 31 following.

After a trial performance of the ballet in Moscow V. V. Konin reported to the “Musical Courier” that Soviet critics present were “left in dismay at the awkward incongruity between the realistic idiom of the musical language, a language which successfully characterizes the individualism of the Shakespearean images, and the blind

submission to the worst traditions of the old form, as revealed in the libretto.”

Fault was also found because “the social atmosphere of the period and the natural evolution of its tragic elements had been robbed of their logical culmination and brought to the ridiculously dissonant ‘happy end’ of the conventional ballet. This inconsistency in the development of the libretto has had an unfortunate effect, not only upon the general structure, but even upon the otherwise excellent musical score.”

Critical reaction to both Suites has varied, some reviewers finding the music dry and insipid for such a romantic theme; others hailing its pungency and color. Prokofieff’s classicism was compared with his romanticism. If we are prepared to accept the “Classical” Symphony as truly classical, said one critic, then we must accept the “Romeo and Juliet” music as truly romantic. The cold, cheerless, dreary music “is certainly not love music,” read one verdict. Prokofieff was taken to task for describing a love story “as if it were an algebraic problem.” 51

Said Olin Downes of “The New York Times” in his review of the Boston Symphony concert of March 31, 1938:—“The music is predominantly satirical.... There is the partial suggestion of that which is poignant and tragic, but there is little of the sensuous or emotional, and in the main the music could bear almost any title and still serve the ballet evolutions and have nothing to do with Romeo and Juliet.”

Others extolled Prokofieff for the “fundamental simplicity and buoyancy” of the music, finding it typically rooted in the “plane, tangible realities of tone, design, and color.” Prokofieff himself answered the repeated charge that his score lacked feeling and melody:—

“Every now and then somebody or other starts urging me to put more feeling, more emotion, more melody in my music. My own conviction is that there is plenty of all that in it. I have never shunned the expression of feeling and have always been intent on creating melody—but new melody, which perhaps certain listeners do not recognize as such simply because it does not resemble closely enough the kind of melody to which they are accustomed.

“In ‘Romeo and Juliet’ I have taken special pains to achieve a simplicity which will, I hope, reach the hearts of all listeners. If people find no melody and no emotion in this work, I shall be very sorry. But I feel sure that sooner or later they will.”

In the First Suite which Prokofieff prepared for concert purposes, there are seven numbers, outlined as follows:—  
1) “Folk Dance”; 2) “Scene”; 3) “Madrigal”; 4) “Minuet”; 5) “Masques”; 6) “Romeo and Juliet”; and 7) “The Death of Tybalt”. Perhaps the most significant and absorbing of these is “Masques”, an *Andante marciale* of majestic sweep and power, which accompanies the action at the Capulet ball, leading to the unobserved entrance 52  
into the palace of Romeo and two friends, wearing masks. One senses a brooding, sinister prophecy in the measured stateliness of the music. Searing and incisive in its pitiless evocation is “The Death of Tybalt”, marked *Precipitato* in the score. Both street duels are depicted in this section, the first in which Tybalt slays Mercutio, the other in which Romeo, in revenge, slays Tybalt. Capulet’s denunciation follows. This First Suite is listed as Opus 64-A in the catalogue of Prokofieff’s works.

The Second Suite, Opus 64-B, also consists of seven numbers:—

1) “*Montagues and Capulets*”. (*Allegro pesante*). This is intended to portray satirically the proud, haughty characters of the noblemen. There is a *Trio* in which Juliet and Paris are pictured as dancing.

2) “*Juliet, the Maiden*”. (*Vivace*). The main theme portrays the innocent and lighthearted Juliet, tender and free of suspicion. As the section develops we sense a gradual deepening of her feelings.

3) “*Friar Laurence*”. (*Andante espressivo*). Two themes are used to identify the Friar—bassoons, tuba, and harps announce the first; ‘cellos, the second.

4) “*Dance*”. (*Vivo*).

5) “*The Parting of Romeo and Juliet*”. (*Lento. Poco piu animato*). An elaborately worked out fabric woven mainly from the theme of Romeo’s love for Juliet.

6) “*Dance of the West Indian Slave Girls*”. (*Andante con eleganza*). The section accompanies both the action of Paris presenting pearls to Juliet and slave girls dancing with the pearls.

7) “*Romeo at Juliet’s Grave*”. (*Adagio funebre*). Prokofieff captures the anguish and pathos of the heartbreaking blunder that is the ultimate in tragedy: Juliet is not really dead, and her tomb is only that in appearance— 53  
but for Romeo the illusion is reality and his grief is unbounded.

Prokofieff’s original plan was to give “Romeo and Juliet” a happy ending, its first since the time of Shakespeare. Juliet was to be awakened in time to prevent Romeo’s suicide, and the ballet would end with a dance of jubilation by the reunited lovers. Criticism was widespread and sharp when this modification of Shakespeare’s drama was exhibited at a trial showing. All thought of a happy ending was promptly abandoned, and Prokofieff put the tragic seal of death on the finale of his ballet.

***“Peter and the Wolf,” An Orchestral Fairy Tale for Children, Opus 67***

As early in his career as 1914 Prokofieff made his first venture in the enchanted world of children’s entertainment. This was a cycle for voice and piano (or orchestra) grouped under the general title of “The Ugly Duckling,” after Andersen’s fairy-tale. It was not till twenty-two years later that he returned to this vein and achieved a masterpiece for the young of all ages, all times, and all countries, the so-called “orchestral fairy tale for children”—“Peter and the Wolf”.

Completed in Moscow on April 24, 1936, the score was performed for the first time anywhere at a children’s concert of the Moscow Philharmonic the following month. Two years later, on March 25, 1938, the Boston Symphony Orchestra gave the music its first performance outside of Russia. On January 13, 1940, the work was produced by the Ballet Theatre at the Center Theatre, New York, with choreography by Adolph Bolm, and Eugene Loring starring in the role of Peter. Its success as a ballet was long and emphatic, particularly with the younger matinee element. Prominent in the general effectiveness of Prokofieff’s work is the role of the Narrator, for whom Prokofieff supplied a simple and deliciously child-like text, with flashes of delicate humor, very much in the animal story tradition of Grimm and Andersen. 54

By way of introduction, Prokofieff has himself identified the “characters” of his “orchestral fairy tale” on the first page of the score:—

“Each character of this Tale is represented by a corresponding instrument in the orchestra: the bird by the flute, the duck by an oboe, the cat by a clarinet in the low register, the grandfather by a bassoon, the wolf by three horns, Peter by the string quartet, the shooting of the hunters by the kettle-drums and the bass drum. Before an orchestral performance it is desirable to show these instruments to the children and to play on them the corresponding leitmotives. Thereby the children learn to distinguish the sonorities of the instruments during the performance of this Tale.”

The characters having been duly tagged and labelled, the Narrator, in a tone that is by turns casual, confiding and awesome, begins to tell of the adventures of Peter....

“Early one morning Peter opened the gate and went out into the big green meadow. On a branch of a big tree sat a little Bird, Peter’s friend. ‘All is quiet,’ chirped the Bird gaily.

“Just then a Duck came waddling round. She was glad that Peter had not closed the gate, and decided to take a nice swim in the deep pond in the meadow.

“Seeing the Duck, the little Bird flew down upon the grass, settled next to her, and shrugged his shoulders: ‘What kind of a bird are you, if you can’t fly?’ said he. To this the Duck replied: ‘What kind of a bird are you, if you can’t swim?’ and dived into the pond. They argued and argued, the Duck swimming in the pond, the little Bird hopping along the shore.

“Suddenly, something caught Peter’s attention. He noticed a Cat crawling through the grass. The Cat thought: ‘The Bird is busy arguing, I will just grab him.’ Stealthily she crept toward him on her velvet paws. ‘Look out!’ shouted Peter, and the Bird immediately flew up into the tree while the Duck quacked angrily at the Cat from the middle of the pond. The Cat walked around the tree and thought: ‘Is it worth climbing up so high? By the time I get there the Bird will have flown away.’ 55

“Grandfather came out. He was angry because Peter had gone into the meadow. ‘It is a dangerous place. If a Wolf should come out of the forest, then what would you do?’ Peter paid no attention to Grandfather’s words. Boys like him are not afraid of Wolves, but Grandfather took Peter by the hand, locked the gate, and led him home.

“No sooner had Peter gone than a big gray Wolf came out of the forest. In a twinkling the Cat climbed up the tree. The Duck quacked, and in her excitement jumped out of the pond. But no matter how hard the Duck tried to run, she couldn’t escape the Wolf. He was getting nearer ... nearer ... catching up with her ... and then he got her and, with one gulp, swallowed her.

“And now, this is how things stand: the Cat was sitting on one branch, the Bird on another—not too close to the Cat—and the Wolf walked round and round the tree looking at them with greedy eyes.

“In the meantime, Peter, without the slightest fear, stood behind the closed gate watching all that was going on. He ran home, got a strong rope, and climbed up the high stone wall. One of the branches of the tree, round which the Wolf was walking, stretched out over the wall. Grabbing hold of the branch, Peter lightly climbed over onto the tree.

“Peter said to the Bird: ‘Fly down and circle round the Wolf’s head; only take care that he doesn’t catch you.’ The Bird almost touched the Wolf’s head with his wings while the Wolf snapped angrily at him from this side and that. How the Bird did worry the wolf! How he wanted to catch him! But the Bird was cleverer, and the Wolf simply couldn’t do anything about it. 56

“Meanwhile, Peter made a lasso and, carefully letting it down, caught the Wolf by the tail and pulled with all his might. Feeling himself caught, the Wolf began to jump wildly, trying to get loose. But Peter tied the other end of the rope to the tree, and the Wolf’s jumping only made the rope around his tail tighter.

“Just then, the hunters came out of the woods following the Wolf’s trail and shooting as they went. But Peter, sitting in the tree, said: ‘Don’t shoot! Birdie and I have caught the Wolf. Now help us to take him to the zoo.’

“And there ... imagine the procession: Peter at the head; after him the hunters leading the Wolf; and winding up

the procession, Grandfather and the Cat. Grandfather tossed his head discontentedly! 'Well, and if Peter hadn't caught the Wolf? What then?'

"Above them flew Birdie chirping merrily: 'My, what brave fellows we are, Peter and I! Look what we have caught!' And if one would listen very carefully he could hear the Duck quacking inside the Wolf; because the Wolf in his hurry had swallowed her alive."

To Prokofieff's biographer Nestyev "Peter and the Wolf" represents a "gallery of clever and amusing animal portraits as vividly depicted as though painted from nature by an animal artist." Certainly, this ingenious assortment of chirping and purring and clucking and howling, translated into terms of a masterly orchestral speech, is the tender and loving work of a story-teller patient and tolerant of the claims of children, and awed by their infinite imaginative capacity.

57

### ***"Summer Day," Children's Suite for Little Symphony, Opus 65-B***

Five years after completing "Peter and the Wolf" Prokofieff returned once again to the children's corner. This time it was a suite for little symphony called "Summer Day." Actually the suite had begun as a series of piano pieces, entitled "Children's Music," that Prokofieff had written and published shortly before he turned his thoughts to "Peter and the Wolf." The chances are that it was this very "Children's Music" that precipitated him into the child's world of wonder and fantasy from which were to emerge Peter's adventures in the animal kingdom. It was not till 1941, however, that he assembled an assortment of these piano pieces and arranged them for orchestra. Credit for their first performance in America belongs to the New York Philharmonic-Symphony, which included them on its program of October 25, 1945. Artur Rodzinski conducted. At that time Robert Bagar and I were the society's program annotators, and the analysis given below was written by him for our program-book of that date.

I. "*Morning*" (*Andante tranquillo, C major, 4-4*). An odd little phrase is played by the first flute with occasional reinforcement from the second, while the other woodwinds engage in a mild counterpoint and the strings and bass drum supply the rhythmic anchorage. In a middle part the bassoons, horns, 'cellos and (later) the violas and bass sing a rather serious melody, as violins and flutes offer accompanying figures.

II. "*Tag*" (*Vivo, F major, 6-8*). A bright, tripping melody begins in the violins and flutes and is soon shared by bassoons. It is repeated, this time leading to the key of E-flat where the oboes play it in a modified form. There follows a short intermediary passage in the same tripping spirit, although the rhythm is stressed more. After some additional modulations the section ends with the opening strain.

58

III. "*Waltz*" (*Allegretto, A major, 3-4*). A tart and tangy waltz theme, introduced by the violins, has an unusual "feel" about it because of the unexpected intervals in the melody. In a more subdued manner the violins usher in a second theme, which, however, is given a Prokofieffian touch by the interspersed woodwind chords in octave skips. As before, the opening idea serves as the section's close.

IV. "*Regrets*" (*Moderato, F major, 4-4*). An expressive, straightforward melody starts in the 'cellos. Oboes pick it up in a slightly revised form and they and the first violins conclude it. Next the violins and clarinets give it a simple variation. In the meantime, there are some subsidiary figures in the other instruments. All ends in just the slightest kind of finale.

V. "*March*" (*Tempo di marcia, C major, 4-4*). Clarinets and oboes each take half of the chief melody. The horns then play it and, following a brief middle sequence with unusual leaps, the tune ends in a harmonic combination of flutes, oboes, horns and trumpets.

VI. "*Evening*" (*Andante teneroso, F major, 3-8*). Prokofieff's knack of making unusual melodic intervals sound perfectly natural is here well illustrated. A solo flute intones the opening bars of a pleasant song-like tune, the rest of which is given to the solo clarinet. Still in the same reflective mood, the music continues with a passage of orchestral arpeggios, while the first violins take their turn with the melody. A middle portion in A-flat major presents some measures of syncopation. With a change of key to C major and again to F major, the section ends tranquilly with a snatch of the opening tune.

VII. "*Moonlit Meadows*" (*Andantino, D major, 2-4*). The solo flute opens this section with a smooth-flowing melody which rather makes the rounds, though in more or less altered form. The section ends quite simply with three chords.

59

This transcription departs but slightly from the piano originals, and when it does so it is because the composer has obviously felt the need of a stronger accent here or some figure there, unimportant in themselves, which might serve to bolster up the Suite.

### ***March from the Opera, "The Love of Three Oranges", Opus 33-A***

It was Cleofonte Campanini, leading conductor of the Chicago Opera Company, who approached Prokofieff early in 1919 for an opera. Prokofieff first offered "The Gambler", of which he possessed only the piano part, having left the orchestral score behind in the library of the Maryinsky Theatre of Leningrad. The offer was put aside for a second proposal—a project Prokofieff had already been toying with in Russia. This was an opera inspired in part by a device prominent in the Italian tradition of Commedia dell'Arte and based, as a story, on an Italian classic. The idea excited Campanini, and a contract was speedily signed. The piano score was completed by the following June, and in October the orchestral score was ready for submission. Preparations were made for a production in

Chicago, when Campanini suddenly died. An entire season went by before its world premiere was finally achieved under the directorship of Mary Garden. This occurred on December 30, 1921, at the Chicago Auditorium, with Prokofieff conducting and Nina Koshetz making her American debut as the Fata Morgana. A French version was used, prepared by Prokofieff and Vera Janacoupoulos from the original Russian text of the composer. Press and public were friendly, if not over-enthusiastic.

Less than two months later, on February 14, 1922, the Chicago Opera Company presented the opera for the first time in New York, at the Manhattan Opera House, with Prokofieff himself again conducting. This time the critics were far from friendly. One of them remarked waspishly: "The cost of the production is \$130,000, which is \$43,000 for each orange. The opera fell so flat that its repetition would spell financial ruin." There were no further performances that season. Indeed it was not till November 1, 1949, that "The Love of Three Oranges" returned to American currency. It was on that night that Laszlo Halasz introduced the work into the repertory of the New York City Opera Company at the City Center of Music and Drama. The opera was presented in a skilful English version made by Victor Seroff. The production was "an almost startling success," in the words of Olin Downes. "The opera became overnight the talk of the town and took a permanent place in the repertory of the company. This was due in large part to the character of the production itself, which so well became the fantasy and satire of the libretto, and the dynamic power of Prokofieff's score. An additional factor in the success was, without doubt, the development of taste and receptivity to modern music on the part of the public which had taken place in the intervening odd quarter of a century since the opera first saw the light." 60

Prokofieff based his libretto on Carlo Gozzi's "Fiaba dell'amore delle tre melarancie" (The Tale of the Love of the Three Oranges). Gozzi, an eighteenth-century dramatist and story-teller, had a genius for giving fresh form to old tales and legends and for devising new ones. The tales were called *fiabe*, or fables. Later dramatists found them a fertile source of suggestions for plot, and opera composers have been no less indebted to this gifted teller of tales. Puccini's "Turandot" is only one of at least six operas founded on Gozzi's masterly little *fiaba* of legendary China. The vein of satire running through Gozzi's *fiabe* has also attracted subsequent writers and composers. It is not surprising that Prokofieff, no mean satirist himself, found inspiration for an opera in one of these delicious *fiabe*. 61

In view of the great popularity which "The Love of Three Oranges" has won in recent seasons in America, it may be of some practical use and interest to the readers of this monograph to provide them with an outline of the plot. I originally wrote the synopsis that follows for "The Victor Book of Operas" in the 1949 issue revised and edited for Simon & Schuster by myself and Robert Bagar. "The Love of Three Oranges" is divided into a Prologue and Four Acts.

## PROLOGUE

SCENE: *Stage, with Lowered Curtain and Grand Proscenium, on Each Side of Which are Little Balconies and Balustrades.* An artistic discussion is under way among four sets of personages on which kind of play should be enacted on the present occasion. The Glooms, clad in appropriately somber roles, argue for tragedy. The Joys, in costumes befitting their temperament, hold out for romantic comedy. The Empty-heads disagree with both and call for frank farce. At last, the Jesters (also called the Cynics) enter, and succeed in silencing the squabbling groups. Presently a Herald enters to announce that the King of Clubs is grieving because his son never smiles. The various personages now take refuge in balconies at the sides of the stage, and from there make comments on the play that is enacted. But for their lack of poise and dignity, they would remind one of the chorus in Greek drama.

## ACT I

SCENE: *The King's Palace.* The King of Clubs, in despair over his son's hopeless defection, has summoned physicians to diagnose the ailment. After elaborate consultation, the doctors inform the King that to be cured the Prince must learn to laugh. The Prince, alas, like most hypochondriacs, has no sense of humor. The King resolves to try the prescribed remedy. Truffaldino, one of the comic figures, is now assigned the task of preparing a gay festival and masquerade to bring cheer into the Prince's smileless life. All signify approval of the plan except the Prime Minister Leander, who is plotting with the King's niece Clarisse to seize the throne after slaying the Prince. In a sudden evocation of fire and smoke, the wicked witch, Fata Morgana, appears, followed by a swarm of little devils. As a fiendish game of cards ensues between the witch, who is aiding Leander's plot, and Tchelio, the court magician, attendant demons burst into a wild dance. The Fata Morgana wins and, with a peal of diabolical laughter, vanishes. The jester vainly tries to make the lugubrious Prince laugh, and as festival music comes from afar, the two go off in that direction. 62

## ACT II

SCENE: *The Main Courtroom of the Royal Palace.* In the grand court of the palace, merrymakers are busy trying to make the Prince laugh, but their efforts are unavailing for two reasons: the Prince's nature is adamant to gaiety and the evil Fata Morgana is among them, spoiling the fun. Recognizing her, guards seize the sorceress and attempt to eject her. In the struggle that ensues she turns an awkward somersault, a sight so ridiculous that even the Prince is forced to laugh out loud. All rejoice, for the Prince, at long last, is cured! In revenge, the Fata Morgana now pronounces a dire curse on the recovered Prince: he shall again be miserable until he has won the "love of the three oranges."

## ACT III

SCENE: *A Desert.* In the desert the magician Tchelio meets the Prince and pronounces an incantation against the cook who guards the three oranges in the near-by castle. As the Prince and his companion, the jester Truffaldino, head for the castle, the orchestra plays a scherzo, fascinating in its ingeniously woven web of 63

fantasy. Arriving at the castle, the Prince and Truffaldino obtain the coveted oranges after overcoming many hazards. Fatigued, the Prince now goes to sleep. A few moments later Truffaldino is seized by thirst and, as he cuts open one of the oranges, a beautiful Princess steps out, begging for water. Since it is decreed that the oranges must be opened at the water's edge, the helpless Princess promptly dies of thirst. Startled, Truffaldino at length works up courage enough to open a second orange, and, lo! another Princess steps out, only to meet the same fate. Truffaldino rushes out. The spectators in the balconies at the sides of the stage argue excitedly over the fate of the Princess in the third orange. When the Prince awakens, he takes the third orange and cautiously proceeds to open it. The Princess Ninette emerges this time, begs for water, and is about to succumb to a deadly thirst, when the Jesters rush to her rescue with a bucket of water.

#### ACT IV

SCENE: *The Throne Room of the Royal Palace.* The Prince and the Princess Ninette are forced to endure many more trials through the evil power of the Fata Morgana. At one juncture the Princess is even changed into a mouse. The couple finally overcome all the hardships the witch has devised, and in the end are happily married. Thus foiled in her wicked sorcery, the Fata Morgana is captured and led away, leaving traitorous Leander 64 and Clarisse to face the King's ire without the aid of her magic powers.

\* \* \*

Typical in this "burlesque opera" is Prokofieff's penchant for witty, sardonic writing. This cleverly evoked world of satiric sorcery is perhaps far removed from Prokofieff's main areas of operatic interest, which were Russian history and literature. The pungent note of modernism is readily heard in this music, though compared with the more dissonant writing of Prokofieff's piano and violin concertos, it is a kind of modified modernism, diverting in its sophisticated discourse on the child's world of fairyland wonder. If, as Nestyev says, the work is "a subtle parody of the old romantic opera with its false pathos and sham fantasy," it is primarily what it purports to be—a fairy tale, as gay and sparkling and wondrous as any in the whole realm of opera.

\* \* \*

The brilliant and bizarre "March" from this opera has become one of the best known and most widely exploited symphonic themes of our time. It comes as an exhilarating orchestral interlude in the first act at the point where the straight-faced Prince and his Jester wander off in the direction of the festival music. The "March" is built around a swaying theme of irresistible appeal that mounts in power as it is repeated and comes to a sudden and forceful halt, as if at the crack of a whip.

## Footnotes

<sup>[1]</sup>I quote from Nestyev's biography, translated by Rose Prokofieva and published in this country by Alfred A. Knopf (1946).

65

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## Transcriber's Notes

- A few palpable typos were silently corrected.
- Retained transliteration of foreign names, including “Prokofieff” rather than the currently-more-common “Prokofiev”
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