

A PORTRAIT  
Sergey Prokofiev



1891–1953

## **Preface**

Modish confidence and malignant conformity – two extremes that reflect the mores of western liberalism on the one hand and Soviet totalitarianism on the other – are the contradictory social and political poles that shaped the artistic and personal world of Prokofiev. While enjoying the former, and enduring the latter, he displayed an outstandingly original and fertile creativity that places him among the most distinctive and attractive musical voices of the twentieth century. Both his popularity and his status as one of the great composers of recent times are assured, for his music is devoid of intellectual posturing. Rarely does he sacrifice rigorous authenticity for artifice, or exchange well-wrought organic structure for glamour and superficiality. Prokofiev's orchestral sonorities can be percussively steely and ironic one minute and poignantly romantic and witty the next, but they are always governed by a personal sincerity and fundamental musical honesty. The twentieth century witnessed many trends in music, some of which were self-conscious and indulgent, while others were simply blind alleys. Prokofiev, however, remained largely unaffected by strict artistic creeds (whether self-imposed or compulsorily enforced), and managed to maintain a distinctly independent musical voice that listeners continue to find refreshing.

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## Track List

### CD I

- |      |   |             |
|------|---|-------------|
| 1    | <b>Dreams, Op. 6</b>  | 11:15       |
|      | Ukraine National Symphony Orchestra / Theodore Kuchar                       | 8.553053    |
| <br> |   |             |
|      | <b>Piano Concerto No. 1 in D flat major, Op. 10</b>                         |             |
| 2    | Movement 1: Allegro brioso  | 6:45        |
|      | Kun Woo Paik, piano / Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra / Antoni Wit | 8.550566    |
| <br> |   |             |
|      | <b>Scythian Suite, Op. 20</b>   |             |
| 3    | Movement 1: Invocation to Veles and Ala                                     | 5:53        |
|      | Ukrainian State Symphony Orchestra / Theodore Kuchar                        | 8.550968–69 |
| <br> |   |             |
|      | <b>Classical Symphony (Symphony No. 1 in D major), Op. 25</b>               |             |
| 4    | Movement 4: Finale: Molto vivace  | 4:21        |
|      | Ukraine National Symphony Orchestra / Theodore Kuchar                       | 8.554058    |
| <br> |   |             |
|      | <b>The Love for Three Oranges Suite, Op. 33b</b>                            |             |
| 5    | Movement 3: March   | 1:32        |
|      | Slovak State Philharmonic Orchestra, Košice / Andrew Mogrelia               | 8.550381    |
| <br> |   |             |
|      | <b>Piano Concerto No. 3 in C major, Op. 26</b>                              |             |
| 6    | Movement 1: Andante – Allegro   | 9:26        |
|      | Kun Woo Paik, piano / Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra / Antoni Wit | 8.550566    |

**Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major, Op. 19**

- |   |  |          |
|---|--|----------|
| 7 | Movement 2: Scherzo: Vivacissimo   | 3:49     |
|   | Tedi Papavrami, violin / Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra / Antoni Wit | 8.553494 |

**Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Op. 44**

- |   |   |          |
|---|---|----------|
| 8 | Movement 3: Allegro agitato – Allegretto              | 7:46     |
|   | Ukraine National Symphony Orchestra / Theodore Kuchar | 8.553054 |

**Symphony No. 4 in C major, Op. 112**

- |   |   |          |
|---|---|----------|
| 9 | Movement 3: Moderato quasi allegretto                 | 5:57     |
|   | Ukraine National Symphony Orchestra / Theodore Kuchar | 8.553055 |

**String Quartet No. 1 in B minor, Op. 50**

- |    |                       |          |
|----|-----------------------|----------|
| 10 | Movement 3: Andante   | 9:29     |
|    | Aurora String Quartet | 8.553136 |

**Violin Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 63**

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|----|--|----------|
| 11 | Movement 2: Andante assai – Allegretto – Andante assai                         | 10:07    |
|    | Tedi Papavrami, violin / Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra / Antoni Wit | 8.553494 |

**TT 77:05**

## CD 2

### **Lieutenant Kijé Suite, Op. 60**

- [1] Movement 1: The Birth of Kijé 4:11  
Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra / Andrew Mogrelia 8.554057

### **Romeo and Juliet, Op. 64**

- [2] Act I: Dance of the Knights 5:50  
[3] Act I: Love Dance 5:44  
Ukraine National Symphony Orchestra / Andrew Mogrelia 8.553184-85

### **Peter and the Wolf, Op. 67**

- [4] Movement 9: The Procession 4:30  
Dame Edna Everage, narrator / Melbourne Symphony Orchestra / John Lanchbery 8.554170

### **Alexander Nevsky, Op. 78**

- [5] Movement 5: Battle on the Ice 12:13  
Stanislavsky Chorus / Russian State Symphony Orchestra / Dmitry Yablonsky 8.555710

### **Piano Sonata No. 7 in B flat major, Op. 83**

- [6] Movement 3: Precipitato 3:17  
Bernd Glemser, piano 8.553021

### **Symphony No. 5 in B flat major, Op. 100**

- [7] Movement 2: Allegro marcato 8:33  
Ukraine National Symphony Orchestra / Theodore Kuchar 8.553056

**Cinderella Suite No. 2, Op. 108**

- |   |  |             |
|---|--|-------------|
| 8 | Movement 5: Cinderella at the Palace – Movement 6: Grand Waltz | 8:17        |
|   | Ukrainian State Symphony Orchestra / Theodore Kuchar           | 8.550968–69 |

- |   |   |          |
|---|---|----------|
| 9 | <b>Pushkin Waltz in C sharp minor, Op. 120 No. 2</b>  | 4:07     |
|   | Ukraine National Symphony Orchestra / Theodore Kuchar | 8.553624 |

**Symphony No. 7 in C sharp minor, Op. 131**

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|----|---|----------|
| 10 | Movement 4: Vivace                                    | 8:41     |
|    | Ukraine National Symphony Orchestra / Theodore Kuchar | 8.553054 |

**Symphony-Concerto in E minor, Op. 125**

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|----|--|----------|
| 11 | Movement 3: Andante con moto – Allegretto – Allegro marcato                    | 11:04    |
|    | Alexander Rudin, cello / Ukraine National Symphony Orchestra / Theodore Kuchar | 8.553624 |

**TT 77:11**





# **Sergey Prokofiev: A Portrait**

by

Gregory Hart

## Chapter I – A Provincial Boyhood

Sergey Sergeyevich Prokofiev was, in his own words, 'born on Wednesday 11 April [23 April 1891, new style] at five in the afternoon. It was the one hundredth day of the year.' His father, Sergey Alekseyevich, was an agricultural engineer who had been tempted to leave Moscow to manage the sizeable estate of Sontsovka in the Ukrainian steppe. His skill in making scientifically sound economic decisions ensured that his family was well off, allowing his wife, Maria Grigoryevna, ample time to devote herself to her great passion of music.

The young Sergey, known affectionately as Seryozha, was a sickly child, adored by his mother, who had earlier lost two daughters in infancy. According to the composer Reinhold Glière, Maria Grigoryevna was 'a tall woman with magnificent, intelligent eyes'. She was a proficient pianist and quickly recognised her son's native musicality, which she nurtured by introducing him to the piano works of Chopin, Anton Rubinstein and Beethoven. These composers all became important influences on his early musical life. As well as being an only child, Sergey was also a precocious one: he wrote a piano piece at the age of five. Many years later, in an article for *Sovetskaya Muzyka*, he touchingly recalled:

When I was five-and-a-half years old I improvised a little piece and played it several times. It was in F major, minus the B flat, which should not, however, be interpreted as a predilection for the Lydian mode,

but should rather be ascribed to the fear of touching a black key! It is difficult to imagine a more preposterous title than the one I assigned to this creation: *The Hindu Galop*. At that time there was a famine in India, and my parents read about it in the papers and discussed it while I listened.

By the time he was nine, Prokofiev was playing the less difficult Beethoven piano sonatas, and had even tried his hand at writing operas: *The Giant* and *Desert Islands*. His official music lessons began in 1902 with the arrival of his private tutor, Glière, who also believed in taking a wider interest in Sergey's intellectual development. Prokofiev later recalled:

In his free time, Glière was glad to play croquet or chess, or even take up a challenge to a dual with dart pistols – which won me over even more. He always came to see our plays [comedy sketches with friends], considering them to be something more serious than a game and seeing in them the embryo of future works for the stage by a composer.

For his part, Glière remembered his time with the Prokofievs in the fondest terms: 'From the very first moment, I felt at home.'

Apart from music, Sergey was encouraged to pursue his interest in chess.

The game's idealistic perfectionism exercised a powerful intellectual hold over the budding composer, who remained an ardent chess devotee for the rest of his life. Throughout his career he frequently shared his passion with other prominent musicians such as Maurice Ravel and Frederick Delius. On one notable occasion Prokofiev and the great Soviet violinist David Oistrakh entered a public contest with bizarre conditions attached: the winner of the match would join the audience, while the loser was obliged to give a concert. It ended in stalemate! He also took on challenges from some of the world's finest chess players, and in 1914 even managed to beat José Raúl Capablanca, the Cuban master and future world champion.

Sontsovka was musically and geographically isolated, but that did not deter Glière from subtly introducing Seryozha to some of the latest musical trends emanating from Moscow and St Petersburg. Prokofiev supplemented Glière's monthly composition assignments with many additional pieces, which (in no pejorative sense) he termed 'ditties'. Some of these compositions evince clear hints of the depth and breadth of his future musical personality. Alongside these little 'ditties', which included numerous songs and piano pieces, was a four-movement symphony (with which Glière helped him). By 1903 he was taken seriously enough to have this work played through on the piano by the respected composer and professor Sergey Taneyev (who, incidentally, gave the Moscow premiere of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto). Although the sensitive young Prokofiev was stung by what he perceived to be Taneyev's mocking tone,

he later claimed that the seeds of his subsequent love for experimentation and innovation were sown during this memorable meeting. It was becoming obvious that Prokofiev needed continuous formal musical education. His parents seriously deliberated the matter, heatedly at times, but eventually they decided that Seryozha should enter a conservatoire.

The composer Alexander Glazunov recommended that the young boy should apply to the St Petersburg Conservatoire: 'It's at the Conservatoire that his talent will be fully developed, and there's a good chance of his becoming a real artist.' In later years, Prokofiev wrote of his interview at St Petersburg in September 1904:

I came in, bending under the weight of two huge folders containing four operas, two sonatas, a symphony and a good many piano pieces. 'Here is a pupil after my own heart!' observed Rimsky-Korsakov, who headed the examining board.

This is the introductory chapter of Sergey Prokofiev: A Portrait.  
The full biographical essay, illustrated with photographs, is available to buy.  
For more details, please visit [www.naxos.com](http://www.naxos.com).