

Sergei
PROKOFIEV

PIANO CONCERTO NO. 3

Opus 26

FOR TWO PIANOS/FOUR HANDS

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SERGEY PROKOFIEV (1891—1953) was one of the greatest composers of our time. His work is daringly novel, offers a wealth and immense variety of themes and subjects, vivid and full-blooded musical images. Prokofiev composed in all the leading musical genres — his legacy consists of several operas ("The Gambler", "Love for Three Oranges", "The Flaming Angel", "Semyon Kotko", "Betrothal in a Nunnery", "War and Peace" and "Story of a Real Man"), ballets, including "Romeo and Juliet", "Cinderella" and "Tale of the Stone Flower", seven symphonies, a number of symphonic poems and works in sonata form, five piano concertos, two violin concertos and a cello concerto, a number of brilliant sonatas and shorter pieces for piano, two string quartets, two violin sonatas and a 'cello sonata and numerous vocal compositions. Prokofiev was active in the sphere of sound film contributing to it music for Eisenstein's "Alexander Nevsky" and "Ivan the Terrible". The composer used his music to the first of these films for his popular cantata "Alexander Nevsky".

The son of an agronomist, Prokofiev was born and spent his childhood on the Sontsovka estate, the Ukraine, where his father was manager. His mother taught him to play the piano; later Prokofiev became the pupil of R. Gliere. In 1904 he entered the St. Petersburg Conservatoire (Rimsky-Korsakov's class of composition); in addition to composition Prokofiev attended the piano class of A. Yesipova and studied conducting under N. Cherepnin. He graduated from the Conservatoire with a Gold Medal in 1914.

The evolution of Prokofiev, the creative artist, was long and intricate. He began his career in pre-revolutionary years characterised by a multitude of conflicting artistic trends. The two poles of contemporary Russian music, academism and modernism, were equally alien to young Prokofiev who started as an iconoclast. To his contemporaries his early works seemed paradoxical; they were shocked by the young composer's poignant harmonic idiom, by his driving and dynamic rhythms and unconventional melodies. Yet even then his music appealed to the listeners with its love of life, optimism and an absence of decadent traits. "What a pleasure — and at the same time what a surprise — it is to come across this bright and sound phenomenon amongst the prevailing moods of sensuousness, flaccidity and languor",

episodes). The present Concerto contains many of the peculiarities just described.

It took the composer a whole of ten years (from 1911 to 1921) to write his Third Piano Concerto in C major, in three movements. The idea to compose a "large virtuoso concerto" came to Prokofiev as far back as 1911 but he did not realise it at the time. In 1913 he composed the theme for variations, and in 1916-17 — the beginning of the concerto (two themes) and two variations on the theme from the second movement. In 1918 Prokofiev contemplated writing a "white, i. e., absolutely diatonic" (to use his own words), quartet. Nothing came of it but two themes of the quartet's finale went into the finale of the Third Concerto. "Thus, when I began working on the latter, I already had the entire thematic material with the exception of the subordinate theme of the first movement and the third theme of the finale".*

Miaskovsky wrote about his music in an article in "Музыка". No. 94, 1912.

Prokofiev's output of the pre-revolutionary period comprises First and Second piano concertos, First Violin Concerto (final version, 1921), the "Scythian Suite", the "Classical Symphony", the opera "The Gambler" after Dostoyevsky, four piano sonatas and short works.

The years between 1918 and 1932 Prokofiev spent abroad. In those years he composed the operas "Love for Three Oranges", and "The Flaming Angel", the ballets "Tale of the Buffoon" and "The Prodigal Son", the Second, Third and Fourth symphonies, the Third, Fourth and Fifth piano concertos, the piano quintet, a sonata for two violins and a number of other works. These compositions were not of equal artistic merit and not all of them won popularity and found a staple place in the repertoire. Even then Prokofiev's optimism did not desert him; his music preserved a great deal of former light-heartedness, joyfulness and humour, but the humour now and again developed into sarcasm and irony, even into grotesquery then in vogue.

Prokofiev's talent reached its zenith upon his homecoming. His musical conceptions of the thirties and forties were truly staggering. He was attracted by Shakespearean subjects and characters ("Romeo and Juliet"), grand epic themes ("Alexander Nevsky") and the vast canvas of Tolstoi's "War and Peace", as well as lofty heroics (the oratorio, "On Guard of Peace", and Fifth Symphony). His best lyrical inspirations, too, belong to this period ("Tale of the Stone Flower"). His truly humanist, exalted and pure art acquired a universal significance.

Piano compositions occupy a very prominent place in Prokofiev's legacy. It was through his works for the piano (particularly in the first period of his activity) that he won world recognition; these works of his have become an integral part of the concert repertoire.

Prokofiev has elaborated an original piano style, a new stage in the development of world music. The distinguishing features of this style are the *toccata* element, lavish use of the *non legato* technique, peculiar passages based on unexpected melodic progressions, and poignant *staccato* chords. Withal his piano writing is distinguished by a fine texture, pure and "limpid" timbres (especially in lyrical and unhurriedly songful

Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto is deservedly considered to be his best work for the piano in this form. It captivates the listener with its joyous and optimistic mood, wealth of imagination and virtuoso concert-stage technique. Exalted and poetic lyricism, often in the Russian style (the introduction theme) is combined in the Concerto with youthfully exuberant and vigorous "motor" sections (first and third movements), typically Prokofievian fairy-tale narrative (second theme of the first movement), fantastic (fourth variation) episodes, and grotesquery (first variation, second movement and certain passages of first and third movements). The piano writing in the Concerto is varied there are virtuoso passages of the classical type (the so-called *jeu perlé*), *toccata* and percussive *staccato* playing, complex chord progressions, as well as lyrical cantilena.

The Concerto quickly gained popularity in all countries of the world and to this day it is one of the most popular of Prokofiev's piano compositions.

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I

Sergei Prokofiev

Andante

Piano I (Solo)

Piano II (Orchestra)

Cl.

P dolce

V-ni e Fl.

1

pp espress.

2 Allegro

V-le

Ob.

p

10

V-ni II

V-ni I

cresc.

Fl.

1

6

Piано I (Фортепьяно)

3

f

p

mf

sp

8