

Chandos

CHAN 8398

© 1985 Chandos Records Ltd. © 1985 Chandos Records Ltd.
Printed and made in West Germany/Imprimé en Allemagne
CHANDOS RECORDS LTD, LONDON, ENGLAND

Chandos

DIGITAL

PROKOFIEV

SONATAS FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

LYDIA MORDKOVITCH VIOLIN



GERHARD OPPITZ PIANO

Homesickness seems to have a particularly strong impact on exiled Russians. In Prokofiev's case his absences from Soviet Russia were less traumatic than more recent cases, since he was allowed to leave in May 1918 at his own wish. At the time he felt that his radicalism had little place in the new Russia, in which he was proved absolutely correct. Nevertheless, he convinced himself, and the authorities, that he would only be gone for a few months.

In the USA the 27-year-old Prokofiev found himself lionized, both as piano virtuoso and composer, but at the same time he was constantly under pressure to live up to other ex-patriot Russians living in the United States, notably Stravinsky and Rachmaninov. He never really settled down into the American life, and even the initial success of *The Love for Three Oranges*, in Chicago in 1921, was not followed up in New York, where the reviews were far from warm.

In the Spring of 1922 Prokofiev's principal supporter, Mary Garden, resigned her directorship of the Chicago Opera, and the season which had opened with such rosy hopes ended in disappointment. Prokofiev decided to move to Paris, where his mother was then living, leaving the USA "with a thousand dollars in my pocket and an aching head". For eighteen months he and his mother settled in a house in the Bavarian Alps, from which he made forays into Europe as a pianist, as well as devoting time to composition. In September 1923 he married the Spanish-born singer Lina Llubera, by which time he had been invited to Leningrad, where *The Love for Three Oranges* was the culmination of a number of his works which had been successful in Soviet Russia. The arrival of children, however, prevented Prokofiev from accepting, but the Russians made it obvious that he was welcome, even as a visitor, and in January 1927 he arrived back home after an absence of nine years, giving a triumphant tour of 21 concerts in three months. He was treated as a celebrity and must have felt absolutely at home. At Odessa he attended a concert in his honour at which a young

18-year old violinist named David Oistrakh played the Scherzo from the composer's First Violin Concerto. Apparently not to Prokofiev's satisfaction, for he suddenly leapt from his front row seat onto the platform, interrupting the performance and shouting "No, that is not the way to play it, young man", then sitting at the piano and playing the work as he wished it to sound, before leaving the violinist to carry on as best he could in the circumstances. A unique meeting between giants, which was eventually to lead to the two Violin and Piano Sonatas.

In October 1929 Prokofiev was back in Russia, but this time an injury to his hands from a motor accident prevented him from playing, while giving him ample opportunity to listen to music by Russian composers and cement friendships with Russian artists. This stimulation was reflected in the music he was writing, adding greatly to his recognition in the Western countries. Although commissioned in Europe many of his works were conceived for the Soviet Union, and some were even premiered there. Prokofiev increasingly felt the need to be a Russian among Russians and from 1932 to 1936 he was slowly brought back into the fold, beginning with commissions from Russia in 1933, the first of which was for film music to *Lieutenant Kijé* with *Romeo and Juliet* the following year. In Spring 1936 Prokofiev and his family took up permanent residence in Moscow, unfortunately at about the same time as critical censorship of the arts was beginning to cut into the freedom of artists to develop their work. However, Prokofiev was full of hope, and feeling at home again.

In 1937 he took part in a public chess tournament at the Central Art Workers' Club in Moscow, chess being almost the Russian national game. His opponent was David Oistrakh, by then recognised as the finest violinist in the country, that year marking the start of his great international career with the winning of the Queen Elisabeth Prize in Brussels. In fact only seven of the ten projected games were completed,

but Oistrakh took the opportunity of reminding Prokofiev of their confrontation in Odessa, doubtless enjoying Prokofiev's understandable embarrassment. Happily their great mutual admiration led to a deep friendship.

It was David Oistrakh who inspired the F minor Sonata, and it was Oistrakh, too, who convinced Prokofiev that the D major Sonata, which was originally composed for flute and piano, would be enhanced if rescored for violin and piano. Prokofiev's relatively small quantity of chamber music included very little for violin and piano, although there was an early unpublished sonata composed in 1903, and in 1925 he had made a violin and piano transcription of the *Five Songs* of Opus 35, retitled *Five Melodies* as Opus 35 bis. In 1932 he composed a Sonata for 2 Violins. However, the two Violin and Piano Sonatas are his only major works in the genre.

Work on the F minor Sonata was begun in 1938, following the film music for Eisenstein's film, *Alexander Nevsky*. Sketches were put down at that time, and then laid on one side for the composition of the opera *Semyon Kotko* in 1939. To what extent Prokofiev returned to his sketches during the next seven years is not certain. The Flute and Piano Sonata was composed in 1943 as Opus 94, the Violin and Piano Sonata version being made in 1944 as Opus 94 bis. Prokofiev had already allotted the F minor Sonata the Opus 80, as his First Violin and Piano Sonata, although it was not yet ready for performance, presumably on the basis that it was already fully sketched. It was finally completed and performed for the first time on 23rd October 1946, in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire, the players being David Oistrakh and Lev Oberin. Being the second of the works premiered, while titled No. 1, led to some confusion in numbers.

Prokofiev told his wife that the F minor Sonata owed its shape and musical inspiration to Handel's work in the genre in D major, the slow-fast-slow-fast structure being used for both sonatas. In many ways the F

minor work is more innovative and the D major more immediately attractive, although both works contain passages of great charm and beauty.

Among the audience at the premiere of the F minor Sonata was the famous Hungarian violinist Joseph Szigeti, who wrote that he "was struck by the unfailing impact that sonata has on every type of audience. The hushed absorption with which people listen to those *pizzicato* chords of the violin and to their *réplique* in the piano (an extraordinary feat of 'scoring' by the way!) at the end of the first movement, struck me at every performance. The heroic drive of the *Allegro*, the magical atmosphere of the muted slow movement and that marvellously integrated last one, never failed to communicate itself to the listeners." Prokofiev himself was more straightforward: "In mood it is more serious than the Second. The first movement, *Andante assai*, is severe in character and is a kind of extended introduction to the second movement, a *sonata allegro*, which is vigorous and turbulent, but has a broad second theme. The third movement is slow, gentle and tender. The finale is fast and written in complicated rhythm". To Oistrakh, during early rehearsals, Prokofiev described the passage work for the violinist in the first movement as "like the wind in a graveyard".

The D major Sonata opens in serious mood, which is dispersed by the good humour and charm of the scherzoid second movement, with its highly imaginative little trio, contrasting time, key and tempi. The final movement is full of harmonic surprises and brilliant scoring, amply demonstrating that inventive musicianship and audience appeal can be compatible.

© 1985 Denby Richards

Recording producer: Brian Couzens.

Sound engineer: Ralph Couzens. Assistant engineer: Bill Todd.

Recorded in St. Luke's Church, Chelsea, London on October 9 & 10, 1984.

Front cover photos: Lydia Mordkovich by Clive Barda/London and

Gerhard Oppitz by Gustav Alink/Den Haag.

Sleeve design: Thumb Design Partnership. Art Direction: Janet Osborn

Lydia Mordkovitch was born in Saratov in the USSR and studied the violin from the age of seven. After graduating from the Odessa Conservatory she became a pupil of David Oistrakh at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory and was a prizewinner in the Long/Thibaud Competition in Paris. She emigrated to Israel in 1974, since when she has established her career in the West.

Now resident in England, Lydia Mordkovitch made her British début in 1979 with the Halle Orchestra and she has since appeared with the Philharmonia, Scottish National, Royal Philharmonic, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Bournemouth Symphony and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestras and all the regional BBC orchestras.

She made her US début in 1982 with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Sir George Solti and other overseas engagements have included concerts with the Rotterdam Philharmonic, the Residentie Orchestra in The Hague and the Amsterdam Philharmonic, as well as several appearances in Scandinavia.

She has recorded the Brahms Concerto with Kurt Sanderling, solo Sonatas by Bartok, Honegger and Prokofiev and recordings for Chandos with Gerhard Oppitz include Sonatas by Fauré, Schumann and Richard Strauss.

Gerhard Oppitz was born eight years after the end of World War 2 in Frauenau in Southern Germany and gave his first public concert in 1964 at the age of 11. In 1973 he undertook a course of study in the interpretation of Beethoven with Wilhelm Kempff and Claudio Arrau.

In 1977 he caught the attention of the musical world by winning first prize in the Artur Schnabel Competition in Israel and, having greatly impressed some of the toughest judges in the world he was launched on an international career. He received invitations from the

important music centres of Europe, America and Japan, appearing at the Salzburg, Vienna and Bonn Beethoven Festivals and playing with the Berlin, Vienna, London and Israel Philharmonic Orchestras.

In addition to his Chandos recordings with Lydia Mordkovitch, he has recorded music by Bach, Beethoven and Brahms.

The Compact Disc Digital Audio System offers the best possible sound reproduction – on a small, convenient sound-carrier unit. The Compact Disc's superior performance is the result of laser-optical scanning combined with digital playback, and is independent of the technology used in making the original recording. This recording technology is identified on the back cover by a three-letter code.

DDD : digital tape recorder used during session recording, mixing and/or editing, and mastering (transcription).

ADD : analogue tape recorder used during session recording; digital tape recorder used during subsequent mixing and/or editing and during mastering (transcription).

AAD : analogue tape recorder used during session recording and subsequent mixing and/or editing; digital tape recorder used during mastering (transcription).

In storing and handling the Compact Disc you should apply the same care as with conventional records. No further cleaning will be necessary if the Compact Disc is always held by the edges and is replaced in its case directly after playing. Should the Compact Disc become soiled by fingerprints, dust or dirt, it can be wiped (always in a straight line, from centre to edge) with a clean and lint-free, soft, dry cloth. No solvent or abrasive cleaner should ever be used on the disc.

If you follow these suggestions, the Compact Disc will provide a lifetime of pure listening enjoyment.

WARNING: Copyright subsists in all recordings issued under this label. Any unauthorized broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording thereof in any manner whatsoever will constitute an infringement of such copyright. In the United Kingdom, licences for the use of recordings for public performance may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd., Ganton House, 14-22 Ganton Street, London W1V 1LB.

Chandos CHAN 8398

PROKOFIEV: VIOLIN SONATAS – Mordkovich & Oppitz.

Chandos

CHAN 8398

PROKOFIEV

SONATAS FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

Sonata No. 1 in F minor Op. 80 (29:31)

- ❑ I Andante assai (7:01)
- ❑ II Allegro brusco (7:02)
- ❑ III Andante (7:58)
- ❑ IV Allegrissimo (7:23)

Sonata No. 2 in D major Op. 94a (23:53)

- ❑ I Moderato (8:11)
- ❑ II Presto (4:40)
- ❑ III Andante (3:50)
- ❑ IV Allegro con brio (7:00)

LYDIA MORDKOVITCH violin

GERHARD OPPITZ piano

TT = 53:38 DDD

© 1985 Chandos Records Ltd. © 1985 Chandos Records Ltd.
Printed and made in West Germany/Imprimé en Allemagne
CHANDOS RECORDS LTD, LONDON, ENGLAND

PROKOFIEV: VIOLIN SONATAS – Mordkovich & Oppitz.

Chandos CHAN 8398