

Chandos

CHAN 8401



Photo: Eric Thorburn

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PROKOFIEV

SYMPHONY No. 3 in C minor Op. 44
SYMPHONY No. 4, Op. 47
(Original 1930 version)

SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA
NEEME JÄRVI conductor

Chandos
DIGITAL



For most of the 1920s Sergey Prokofiev was based in Paris, before making up his mind to return to the USSR as he did in the next decade. As a pianist he was highly regarded, but as a composer his works had variable success. They included the Symphony No. 2 in 1925, 'made of iron and steel', as he described it, in response to what he felt was prevailing Parisian taste; three ballets for Sergey Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes (*The Buffoon*, *The Steel Dance*, *The Prodigal Son*), and the Symphonies here recorded, both derived from existing music for the theatre: *The Fiery Angel* opera for No. 3 and *The Prodigal Son* ballet for No. 4.

The Fiery Angel occupied him over more than 10 years. He twice revised it on the promise of productions which then never took place, and it remained unperformed until after his death. Quite why he picked on a novel by Valery Bryusov which is both historical and somewhat hysterical is unclear, only that he seems to have been attracted by its elements of black magic, mystical visitation, frustrated love and visionary possession during the 16th century Inquisition, as a contrast to his comedy fantasy, *The Love for Three Oranges*, which he finished in 1919.

At any rate, he was thinking of making a concert suite from the music (as he had done with some of his previous stage works) when, according to his autobiographical sketch, 'I remembered that for one of the entr'actes I had used the development of themes in the preceding scene, and it occurred to me that this might serve as the kernel for a symphony. I examined the themes and found that they would make a good exposition for a sonata allegro. I found the same themes in other parts of the opera differently expressed and quite suitable for the recapitulation. In this way the plan for the first movement of the Symphony worked out quite simply'.

If this is indeed how he approached the symphonic project it must be the only occasion in musical history when a symphonic development has been composed before the themes used in it had been reworked to make the exposition. One of these, in fact, has an even earlier conception, for the broad melody on horns and violins soon after the start of the movement, which in the opera expresses the heroine's longing for her visionary angel, was originally composed, Prokofiev has noted, for an unfinished string quartet. Obviously he was concerned not to allow good music to be wasted.

For all the unconventional aspects of Prokofiev's method, the fact is that the Third Symphony, while conditioned throughout in its character by the operatic context, is no less rewarding in its musical effect without knowing the opera in detail. As a symphonist, the composer set less store by intellectual argument than by the expression of his particular and deep-seated musical personality, contradictory as that was in its frequent contrasts of warmth of feeling and sardonic mockery, of energetic high spirits and an undercurrent of melancholy.

The slow movement here is based on music from the opera's last Act, after the heroine has sought the peace of a convent: an austere and mysterious opening leading to a magical sense of fantasy expressed through the delicacy of orchestration. Divided strings are a feature of the scherzo movement, helping to impart a sense of daemonic wildness from the scenes of witchcraft and poltergeists in the opera, and the finale is powerfully developed from more of the opera's music associated with the black arts. The Third Symphony was first performed at Paris on 17 May 1929, conducted by Pierre Monteux; its symphonic merits were disputed though the effect was generally approved.

About this time Prokofiev was approached (as were Stravinsky, Hindemith, Honegger and others) for a work to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1930, and he responded with the Fourth Symphony. This time, 'I thought of making a symphony out of *The Prodigal Son*', he wrote, 'but people began to twit me for turning theatre music into symphonies too often . . . Now, however, music that had been written for but not included in *The Prodigal Son* proved perfectly suitable for the first movement of the Fourth Symphony (I composed a new introduction). The music of the Son's homecoming was used for the second movement, that of the Beautiful Maiden for the third . . .'

The Prodigal Son, Prokofiev's Op. 46, was the last new production presented by Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes at Paris in 1929 before Diaghilev's sudden death later that year brought the disbandment of the company. It was based on the Biblical parable in St Luke's Gospel, but without the character of the envious elder son and with an alluring woman, the Beautiful Maiden, newly introduced as a further element in the Prodigal's downfall. With choreography by George Balanchine and designs by Georges Rouault, the ballet has continued in the classic repertory, including that of the Royal Ballet in Britain.

The opening movement begins with the slow introduction newly composed, as Prokofiev said, based on a warmly reflective theme from the woodwind. It leads to the main *Allegro eroico*, where the vigorous, hard-edged theme is related to that of the unscrupulous and false 'friends' in the ballet who fleece the Prodigal of his worldly goods. Their rowdy ostinato is contrasted with a gentler second theme and developed in a concise sonata-type movement.

All the second movement originated in the ballet as the

scene of the Prodigal's return home, utterly destitute, and his Father's welcome and forgiveness, characterised by the lambent flute melody. This benediction is worked to a climax near the end of the movement, which then dies away quietly. Then follows the Beautiful Maiden music as the substance of a graceful and spirited third movement, taken over almost unchanged from the ballet and notable for the charm of the orchestration.

'The finale was the most difficult part', Prokofiev wrote, and he based it on the agitated music which first served to represent the Prodigal's eagerness to get away from home and family, with a more lilting central section expressing his youth and vitality, ending with a return to the opening ideas and a bold coda. 'First performed at Boston on 14 November 1930', wrote Prokofiev, 'it was not a success, but I have always liked it for its subdued tone and the wealth of material it contains' – so much so that in 1947 he revised and extended it as his Op. 112, which can be heard on another recording in this series.

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NEEME JÄRVI took up his appointment as Musical Director and Principal Conductor of the Scottish National Orchestra on August 1, 1984.

He was born in Tallinn, Estonia in 1937 and graduated from the Tallinn Music School with degrees in percussion and choral conducting before continuing his studies at the Leningrad State Conservatory. In 1963 he became Director of the Estonian Radio and Television Orchestra and began his 13-year tenure as Chief Conductor of the Opera Theatre Estonia. In 1971 he won first prize in the Conductors' Competition at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia

in Rome. Before his departure from the Soviet Union, he had held almost every conducting post his home state could offer and was regularly conducting the great orchestras of Moscow and Leningrad, both at home and abroad.

In January 1980 he emigrated to America with his family, and the next month made his début with the New York Philharmonic. He now regularly conducts the San Francisco, Toronto and Montreal Symphony Orchestras and has appeared with the Philadelphia and Boston Symphony Orchestras and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. His début at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, was conducting Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*.

He is Principal Conductor of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra with which he toured America in 1983, and with which he has recently won a Swedish Grammy Award. His first recording with the Scottish National Orchestra was a highly-acclaimed 3-disc/cassette set of 6 Operatic Suites by Rimsky-Korsakov, released on Chandos in the Winter of 1984.

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ABRD & ABTD 1134 LP & Cassette
CHAN 8368 Compact Disc

Symphony No. 6 plus Waltz Suite, Nos. 2, 5 & 6
ABRD & ABTD 1122 LP & Cassette
CHAN 8359 Compact Disc

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Sound Engineer: Ralph Couzens. Assistant Engineer: Philip Couzens.
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CHAN 8401

**SERGEY SERGEYEVICH
PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)**

SYMPHONY NO. 3 in C minor Op. 44 (35:51)

- ① I – Moderato (14:30)
- ② II – Andante (7:03)
- ③ III – Allegro agitato (7:58)
- ④ IV – Andante mosso – Allegro agitato (6:12)

SYMPHONY NO. 4 in C major Op. 47 (23:08)
(Original 1930 Version)

- ⑤ I – Andante assai – Allegro eroico (6:27)
- ⑥ II – Andante tranquillo (5:52)
- ⑦ III – Moderato, quasi allegretto (4:10)
- ⑧ IV – Allegro risoluto (6:32)

SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

Leader, **Edwin Paling**

conducted by

NEEME JÄRVI

DDD

TT = 59:08

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