

Chandos

CHAN 8442



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PROKOFIEV

SYMPHONY No.7 in C# minor Op.131

SINFONIETTA Op.5/48

SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

NEEME JÄRVI conductor

Chandos

DIGITAL



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 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. This was followed by this cycle of Prokofiev's Seven Symphonies launched early in 1985, and the first release in the series, Symphony No. 6, won the GRAMOPHONE award for the Best Orchestral Recording that year.

The last of Prokofiev's Symphonies was composed in 1952, just a year before his death at the age of 61. He began it as a work apparently first intended for the children's programmes of the Soviet State Radio Service, but during composition its nature changed somewhat from the simple symphony for children he had planned. It became a work of greater substance, although still of a mainly lyrical and beguiling character, in the direction pointed out by the notorious decree of the Communist Party Central Committee published in 1948.

This censured Prokofiev and other leading Soviet composers, including Shostakovich and Khachaturyan, for anything resembling 'formalist perversions and undemocratic tendencies' in their music, measuring their works against social or political principles of the day rather than by artistic merit. Any composers whose work was thought to show 'contempt for melody' or indulgence in 'neuropathic discords' were condemned, and Prokofiev's opera, *War and Peace*, based on Tolstoy and first performed in 1946, attracted particular censure in this respect.

His Symphony No 6 had been heard only four months before the decree appeared, and the initial enthusiasm aroused by the Symphony's expression of feelings connected with the tragedy of the recent war years as well as the ultimate victory soon dwindled away. Prokofiev's own creativity also suffered as his health began to worsen (he never fully recovered from the concussion caused by a fall soon after he conducted the premiere of his Fifth Symphony in 1945), and the deaths of close friends like his fellow-composers Asaf'yev and Myaskovsky further depressed him.

It was perhaps to rouse himself from this that Prokofiev composed a Symphony which is essentially good-natured in its

expressive character, posing no intellectual argument, symphonic or otherwise, but conveying a succession of moods to which each listener can make individual response. In some respects it looks back to his *Classical Symphony* (No 1) in spirit, though without the biting irony of that work. Other aspects suggest the desire to 'consciously extol human life and lead man to a radiant future' which Prokofiev wrote in 1951 was 'the immutable code of art as I see it'.

The tonal basis of the Seventh Symphony is essentially in C-sharp minor, in which the first movement begins with a melancholy rather than tragic idea, after the manner of many typically Russian songs, and in some respects reminiscent of Prokofiev's music for the *Cinderella* ballet. After the mood is disrupted by some restless undercurrents, a trembling of strings heralds a broad, aspiring melody, first heard on bassoons and horns and warmly expanded by the strings, then followed by more fanciful afterthoughts on woodwind and glockenspiel. These are all briefly developed without any sense of conflict or drama, and are briefly recalled before the movement ends in an echo of the first theme.

For his second movement Prokofiev avoided the often harsh scherzo to be heard in earlier works and had recourse instead to a waltz he composed the year before. This he extended in the Beethoven manner with two trio-sections, varying the tempo and details of phrasing as well as the dynamics each time the themes return. He looked back still further, to 1936 and his unpublished incidental music for a production of Pushkin's *Evgeny Onyegin*, for the main theme of his eloquent slow movement, which is contrasted with a brighter tune introduced by the oboe in a kind of development by variation.

A high-spirited final movement again recalls some of the

spirit of his youthful *Classical Symphony* as well as those of Haydn in its lighthearted and sociable exuberance. There are several themes, including a jaunty march, brightly orchestrated and heard at least twice, in a form of rondo, before the warm, aspiring melody from the first movement is brought grandly back like 'a hymn to happiness', as it has been called. The music then turns to the wistful C-sharp minor key in which the first movement began, and Prokofiev intended to end it in this mood.

During rehearsals, however, he was prevailed on to accept that a more affirmative ending would be preferable. This he provided and is recorded here, although he kept the quieter ending so marked in the score as an alternative if desired. After finishing the short score in March 1952 and the orchestration in July, Prokofiev was able to hear its premiere at Moscow on 11 October 1952, with the All-Union Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Samuil Samosud. It was the last concert he attended and five months later he died, ironically on the same day as Joseph Stalin.

Something of Haydn's sense of formal proportion, as well as of elegance and transparency of thought in general, is behind the *Sinfonietta*, which Prokofiev composed in 1909 as his Op 5, while still at the St Petersburg Conservatory. He twice revised it before publishing it a second time 20 years later as Op 5/48. It is dedicated to Nikolay Cherepnin, Prokofiev's conducting professor at the Conservatory, who gave Prokofiev a taste for classicism at the same time as he encouraged his pupil's interest in new musical trends of the day.

Prokofiev was at his family home in the Ukraine for the Summer when he first composed the *Sinfonietta* as 'an attempt

to create a transparent piece for small orchestra'. 'The attempt was not particularly successful', the composer later wrote, 'and it was only many years later that the *Sinfonietta* was finally whipped into shape'. He conducted its first revision at a St Petersburg concert in 1914, then 'took it apart and put it together again, rewriting some sections but adding no new material' for its final version at Moscow in 1929.

The five short movements provide immediately attractive listening much in the manner of the *Classical Symphony*, to which the *Sinfonietta* has a close relationship of style as well as of instrumentation and harmonic structure. A prominent recurring feature is the sudden characteristic shifts of key, not always in the direction one might expect, while the texture is often noticeably coloured by the woodwind in general and by occasional prominence given to the bassoons, as in the solemn tread that begins the second movement and continues under the woodwind and strings; in leading the embellishment of the Intermezzo's main theme, and in the trio-section of the Scherzo.

A 6/8 time-signature is common to the first, third and last movements, imparting a sprightly, even boisterous rhythmic momentum to contrast with the unfolding Andante and the grittier Scherzo. At the end the music dismisses itself almost nonchalantly in a typically Prokofiev gesture. We might well echo the composer's surprise, in his autobiographical sketch already quoted, that the *Sinfonietta* was so rarely performed whereas the *Classical Symphony* was played everywhere: 'I cannot understand why the fate of these two pieces should be so different'.

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Also available:

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CHAN 8400 Compact Disc

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Chandos**CHAN 8442****SERGEY SERGEYEVICH
PROKOFIEV** (1891-1953)**SYMPHONY NO. 7 in C sharp minor Op. 131 (31:12)**

- ① I – Moderato (8:37)
- ② II – Allegretto (7:51)
- ③ III – Andante espressivo (6:13)
- ④ IV – Vivace (8:12)

SINFONIETTA Op. 5/48 (19:58)

- ⑤ I – Allegro giocoso (5:16)
- ⑥ II – Andante (4:06)
- ⑦ III – Intermezzo: Vivace (2:47)
- ⑧ IV – Scherzo: Allegro risoluto (3:31)
- ⑨ V – Allegro giocoso (3:56)

SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRALeader **Edwin Paling**

conducted by

NEEME JÄRVI

DDD

TT = 51:16