

Chan 8450



PROKOFIEV

SYMPHONY NO. 5 in B flat Op. 100
THREE WALTZES Op. 110

SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA
NEEME JÄRVI conductor

CHANDOS



Sergey Sergeyevich Prokofiev
(1891–1953)

Symphony No. 5 in B flat, Op. 100

1	I	Andante	12:23
2	II	Allegro marcato	8:32
3	III	Adagio	11:54
4	IV	Allegro giocoso	9:48

Waltz Suite, Op. 110

5	No. 1	'Since we Met' from <i>War and Peace</i>	5:58
6	No. 3	'Mephisto Waltz' from <i>Lermontov</i>	3:38
7	No. 4	'End of the Fairy Tale' from <i>Cinderella</i>	4:31

TT 57:10

Scottish National Orchestra

Edwin Paling leader

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Sergey Sergeyevich Prokofiev

After living in Paris since 1922, Prokofiev took the momentous decision to return home to the USSR in the mid-1930s, but it was some years before his thoughts turned again to composing a symphony. His first four works in this form were already written and played, all but the early *Classical Symphony* (Op. 25) premiered during his Paris years, and once back in his native land he did his duty as a Soviet composer with a cantata for the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution, an Ode in praise of Stalin (*Zdravitsa*), and a film score and cantata on the popular hero Alexander Nevsky.

He also wrote three of his finest piano sonatas, nos 6, 7 and 8, and was active in the theatre, composing the operas *Semyon Kotko*, *Betrothal in a Monastery* (on Sheridan's 'The Duenna') and the first version of his Tolstoy epic, *War and Peace*, as well as his two most popular ballet scores, *Romeo and Juliet* (1936) and *Cinderella* (1943). The Fifth Symphony, a wartime composition, followed immediately after the second of these ballets. Its first performance at Moscow on 13 January 1945 coincided with news of a Soviet Army success

on the Vistula river, and according to Israel Nestyev, the composer's biographer, 'the opening bars of the Symphony were heard against the thunderous background of an artillery salute'.

Prokofiev himself conducted the premiere, and wrote in an article: 'I regard the Fifth Symphony as the culmination of a long period in my creative life. I conceived it as a symphony of the grandeur of the human spirit'. In an interview at this time, however, he also disclosed that it had been germinating for some time. 'Many of the themes are two or three years old: I put them down in my theme book and put them aside. When the time came, I was ready to work very fast on the Symphony – I wrote the whole thing in a month on a three- or four-line score. Then I stopped for a month or two and took it up again, and in another month I finished it.'

The notebook method of storing up ideas for possible future use was a longstanding device of Prokofiev's who earlier described how he was 'always on the lookout for new melodic themes', which he considered 'by far the most important element in music'. At the

same time he never forgot, as he put it, that 'one must be particularly vigilant to make a melody simply, without allowing it to become cheap, sickly or imitative rubbish.' How well he succeeded is evident throughout the Fifth Symphony, as in his other works generally. The symphony calls for a moderately large orchestra weighted with extra clarinets and brass as well as having a prominent piano part.

At this distance in time it chiefly conveys a romantic and vivid expression of hopes and aspirations, with more regard to dramatic and emotional impact than to symphonic principles in the intellectual sense. In Prokofiev's two previous symphonies the nature and subject-matter was consciously derived from music already composed (*The Fiery Angel* opera for No. 3 and *The Prodigal Son* ballet for No. 4), but from both sources he wrought music of unmistakably symphonic character. The Fifth Symphony was composed from original material, but influenced nevertheless by the spirit of *War and Peace* and the *Cinderella* ballet which preceded it.

Its opening movement (*Andante*) is neither slow nor fast in pace, but unfolds with a sense of measured purpose through repetition and variation of the two main themes. The first is heard in the opening bars as a broad-spanned

melody which is presented in several different instrumental guises before the second subject arrives. This is introduced on flute and oboe, then repeated on violins, eventually being succeeded by a scurrying phrase which becomes more prominent during a quite lengthy section that does not develop the ideas so much as play about with them in various ways. An extended coda inflates the opening theme to nobler proportions, ending the movement with that grandeur of spirit of which Prokofiev wrote.

The second movement (*Allegro marcato*) is an excitable slightly sardonic scherzo in D minor, enclosing a more relaxed trio section. It is propelled from the outset by insistent quaver figures, and the tune is begun by a clarinet before being taken up by the piano and other instruments in turn. The comedy of *Cinderella's* stepsisters seems not far away as it continues, but once a bassoon takes it over in slower note-values it gradually gives way to the dance-like trio section. The brass then accelerates to a repeat of the scherzo with the tune slightly changes, and part of it is insistently hammered home to an abrupt finish.

Cinderella herself could be envisaged in the lyrical beauty of the first theme in the slow movement (*Adagio*), especially when it is taken

over from the woodwind by the strings and carried soaring into the higher register. However, the mood is not all sweetness and ecstasy. A more emphatic version of the rhythmic figure that began the movement heralds a very slow waltz, at first for woodwind and brass alone before the strings are added, and a dramatic central section builds to a threatening, bitter climax before the previous mood is resumed. The lyrical theme eventually unwinds with decorative embellishment and finishes tenderly.

An otherwise festive finale (*Allegro giocoso*) is prefaced by a reference to the main theme of the first movement, at first briefly, then sonorously scored for cellos and basses in five-part harmony. The rest is basically a rondo, begun by the clarinet with a hectic, skirting tune that slips into and out of alien keys before finding its way home again. A broad, flowing melody recalls the slow movement for one episode, but it is quickly submerged in the prevailing gaiety, sustained with unflagging energy and exuberant high spirits all the way to a coda that ends the Symphony in boisterous jubilation.

Soon after conducting the Fifth Symphony's premiere, Prokofiev suffered a serious concussion from a fall, and the effects were felt throughout the remaining eight years of

his life. On medical advice he moved in 1946 to a new home in the village of Nikorina Goya, west of Moscow, and although he had to limit his creative work to two short periods each day, he immersed himself in new projects. He finished his Ninth and last Piano Sonata and, with his customary liking for working on more than one thing at a time, he put together a **Waltz Suite**, Op. 110, taken from other works. Three of the six waltzes were from the *Cinderella* ballet, two from *War and Peace*, and the remaining 'Mephisto Waltz' (the second of the three recorded here, from his music for the film, *Lermontov*). The other two are titled 'Since we Met', from Scene 4 of *War and Peace* (its origins were even earlier in the incidental music written for *Yevgeny Onyegin* as a play in 1936 but never performed then), and the self-explanatory 'End of the Fairy Tale' from *Cinderella*. The full Suite was first performed at Moscow on 13 May 1947 with Prokofiev conducting.

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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 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.

Producer Brian Couzens

Sound engineer Ralph Couzens

Assistant engineer Philip Couzens

Recording venue SNO Centre, Glasgow in April and May 1985

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Sergey Sergeyevich Prokofiev
(1891–1953)

Symphony No. 5, Op. 100

in B flat major · B-Dur · si bémol majeur

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