



PROKOFIEV

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 1 in D major, Op. 19

Sergei Sergeyevich Prokofiev (23 April 1891 – 5 March 1953) was a Russian composer, pianist and conductor who mastered numerous musical genres and is regarded as one of the major composers of the 20th century. Prokofiev began his musical education upon the suggestion of Sergei Taneyev, the director of the Moscow Conservatory. However, his formal training would be undertaken not in Moscow but at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory, where he established himself as a musical rebel. According to one account, the audience left the hall during one concert with exclamations of "The cats on the roof make better music!". Like his close contemporary Igor Stravinsky, Prokofiev worked alongside the impresario Sergei Diaghilev and his *Ballets Russes*. He left Russia (by then the Soviet Union) in 1917 after the Russian Revolution, but would later return during the Great Depression. During his time abroad, Prokofiev stayed briefly in the United States before leaving for Paris due to financial difficulties. His earlier connection with Diaghilev proved useful, and Prokofiev found both fame and fortune in the 1920s. Upon Prokofiev's return to the Soviet Union he found restrictions placed upon artists, and was forced to adopt a "socialist" style of writing using guidelines set by the Party. Though these restrictions were relaxed somewhat during World War II, they were tightened again after the war and Prokofiev was soon condemned as a formalist. The condemnation left Prokofiev in severe financial circumstances, a situation not helped by his declining health, and Prokofiev died several years after. Interestingly, Prokofiev and Joseph Stalin both died on the same day; unfortunately it meant that Prokofiev's death was overlooked and he never lived to see himself rehabilitated.

Prokofiev began his **Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 1 in D major, Op. 19**, as a concertino in 1915 but soon abandoned it to work on his opera *The Gambler*. He returned to the concerto in the summer of 1917. Notable for being the year of the Communist revolution in Russia amid the horror of World War I, 1917 was nevertheless a productive year for Prokofiev: he also wrote his first symphony (the *Classical*), two piano sonatas, and the *Visions Fugitives* for piano. The concerto opens ethereally, gains momentum and becalms; this describes both the opening movement and the piece taken as a whole. The three movements begin in D major, E minor, and G minor respectively, and the work closes in a manner similar to that of the opening movement, seeming to climb peacefully. Its premiere, in Paris in 1923, was a relative failure, partly due to the work being overshadowed by Stravinsky's more modish Octet, which was also being premiered. However, one member of the audience, violinist Joseph Szigeti, was so impressed with the work that he took the Concerto into his repertory. The following year Szigeti achieved success when he played the Concerto in Prague with Fritz Reiner as conductor, then toured it around Europe and the United States.