



Sergei PROKOFIEV

Symphony No. 4

Sergei Sergeyevich Prokofiev (27 April 1891 – 5 March 1953) was a Soviet composer, pianist and conductor. As the creator of acknowledged masterpieces across numerous musical genres, he is regarded as one of the major composers of the 20th century. His works include such widely heard works as the March from *The Love for Three Oranges*, the suite *Lieutenant Kijé*, the ballet *Romeo and Juliet* – from which "Dance of the Knights" is taken – and *Peter and the Wolf*. Of the established forms and genres in which he worked, he created – excluding juvenilia – seven completed operas, seven symphonies, eight ballets, five piano concertos, two violin concertos, a cello concerto, a *Symphony-Concerto* for cello and orchestra, and nine completed piano sonatas. A graduate of the St Petersburg Conservatory, Prokofiev initially made his name as an iconoclastic composer-pianist, achieving notoriety with a series of ferociously dissonant and virtuosic works for his instrument, including his first two piano concertos. In 1915 Prokofiev made a decisive break from the standard composer-pianist category with his orchestral *Scythian Suite*, compiled from music originally composed for a ballet commissioned by Sergei Diaghilev of the Ballets Russes. Diaghilev commissioned three further ballets from Prokofiev – *Chout*, *Le pas d'acier* and *The Prodigal Son* – which at the time of their original production all caused a sensation among both critics and colleagues. Prokofiev's greatest interest, however, was opera, and he composed several works in that genre, including *The Gambler* and *The Fiery Angel*. Prokofiev's one operatic success during his lifetime was *The Love for Three Oranges*, composed for the Chicago Opera and subsequently performed over the following decade in Europe and Russia. After the Revolution, Prokofiev left Russia with the official blessing of the Soviet minister Anatoly Lunacharsky, and resided in the United States, then Germany, then Paris, making his living as a composer, pianist and conductor. During that time he married a Spanish singer, Carolina Codina, with whom he had two sons. In the early 1930s, the Great Depression diminished opportunities for Prokofiev's ballets and operas to be staged in America and western Europe. Prokofiev, who regarded himself as composer foremost, resented the time taken by touring as a pianist, and increasingly turned to Soviet Russia for commissions of new music; in 1936 he finally returned to his homeland with his family. He enjoyed some success there – notably with *Lieutenant Kijé*, *Peter and the Wolf*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and perhaps above all with *Alexander Nevsky*. The Nazi invasion of the USSR spurred him to compose his most ambitious work, an operatic version of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. In 1948 Prokofiev was attacked for producing "anti-democratic formalism." Nevertheless, he enjoyed personal and artistic support from a new generation of Russian performers, notably Sviatoslav Richter and Mstislav Rostropovich: he wrote his ninth piano sonata for the former and his *Symphony-Concerto* for the latter.

Prokofiev's ***Symphony No. 4***, is actually a single work, but is two separate pieces which were combined into a single symphony. Lasting approximately 22 minutes, the first piece, Op. 47, was written in 1929 and premiered in 1930. The second, Op. 112, is a large-scale revision from 1947 and it lasts approximately 37 minutes. Both use musical material originally written for Prokofiev's ballet *The Prodigal Son*. As Prokofiev was composing the ballet in early 1929, he found that many of the themes he was creating would work better in a more developmental symphonic context, rather than the more episodic layout of a ballet. So, he began composing a new symphony, alongside the ballet. The two works share much of the same material, although one does not specifically borrow from the other: they were composed mostly concurrently.

In 1932, Joseph Stalin created the Union of Soviet Composers, and laid out a doctrine of "socialist realism" in art. This meant that for art to be supported by the regime, it had to be relevant to everyday people, and it needed to glorify the best of socialism. In reality, this led to bans of material disliked, or deemed "formalist", by the regime. Starting in 1946, there was an even more extreme crackdown on Soviet musicians, led by Andrei Zhdanov. Many works and composers were banned and warned, including Prokofiev himself, although he had been relatively successful and popular in the Soviet Union up until that time. In the winter of 1946-1947, he finished work on *Symphony No. 6* in E-flat minor. Prokofiev was also working on his opera *War and Peace*, the second part of which would be subject to cancellation in the summer of 1947 by the authorities, due to the composer's refusal to cut certain controversial scenes.

In early 1947, Prokofiev was presented with the idea of revising his *Symphony No. 4* Op. 47. The idea appealed to him for several reasons. First, the original version had never had much success, but Prokofiev believed that the material had great potential. Second, he had just had great success with his *Symphony No. 5* in B-flat major, and he hoped to reshape No. 4 in its image. The revision altered the original so thoroughly that Prokofiev felt that it was a new work; thus the new opus number, 112. In early 1948, shortly after the revisions of Opus 112 were completed, the Union of Soviet Composers issued commands that Prokofiev's music (among others) be banned from concert halls, amid accusations of "formalism." The revised *Symphony No. 4* was thus not performed in the Soviet Union until 1957, after the composer's death.