



Sergei PROKOFIEV

Symphony No. 7 in C-sharp minor, Op. 131

Sergei Sergeyevich Prokofiev (27 April 1891 – 5 March 1953) was a Russian composer, pianist, and conductor who later worked in the Soviet Union. As the creator of acknowledged masterpieces across numerous music genres, he is regarded as one of the major composers of the 20th century. His works include such widely heard pieces 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 Saint 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 of 1917, Prokofiev left Russia with the official blessing of the Soviet People's Commissar 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 (Lina) Codina, with whom he had two sons; they divorced in 1947. 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 the Soviet Union for commissions of new music; in 1936, he finally returned to his homeland with his family. His greatest Soviet successes included *Lieutenant Kijé*, *Peter and the Wolf*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Alexander Nevsky*, the *Fifth Symphony*, and the *Piano Sonatas Nos. 6–8*. The Nazi invasion of the USSR spurred Prokofiev to compose his most ambitious work, an operatic version of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*; he co-wrote the libretto with Mira Mendelson, his longtime companion and later second wife. 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. 7 in C-sharp minor, Op. 131*, was completed in 1952, the year before his death. It is his last symphony. Most of the symphony is emotionally restrained, nostalgic and melancholy in mood, including the ending of the *Vivace* final movement. However, Prokofiev was later convinced to add an energetic and optimistic coda, so as to win the Stalin Prize of 100,000 rubles. Before he died, Prokofiev indicated that the original quiet ending was to be preferred. The premiere was well-received, and in 1957, four years after Prokofiev's death, the symphony was awarded the Lenin Prize. The symphony is in four movements, lasting 30–35 minutes: 1. *Moderato* 2. *Allegretto* 3. *Andante espressivo* and 4. *Vivace*. The first movement, in sonata form, opens with a melancholic first theme on violins, which contrasts with the warm and lyrical second theme on winds. After a brief development section, the recapitulation of the two themes follows, and the movement ends in a reflective mood with the clock-ticking sounds on glockenspiel and xylophone. The second movement is an autumnal waltz, reminiscent of Prokofiev's ballet *Cinderella*, while the third movement is an expressive and singing slow movement. The finale, in D-flat major (C-sharp major enharmonic), contains an innocent cheerfulness. There is a slowing of pace and the return of the warm wind theme from the first movement, and the symphony ends with the same tinkling sounds from the tuned percussion as the first movement.