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SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Symphonies nos. 6 and 7

Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra

James Gaffigan



SUPER AUDIO CD

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

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SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)

Symphony no. 6 in E-flat minor op. 111 (1947)

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|----------------------|--------------|
| [1] Allegro moderato | 15:04 |
| [2] Largo | 14:03 |
| [3] Vivace | 11:40 |

Symphony no. 7 in C-sharp minor op. 131 (1952)

| | |
|------------------------|-------------|
| [4] Moderato | 9:39 |
| [5] Allegretto | 8:05 |
| [6] Andante espressivo | 5:36 |
| [7] Vivace | 8:45 |

total time 72:53

Symphony no. 6 in E-flat minor op. 111 (1947)

Prokofiev wrote his *Sixth Symphony* almost straight after the *Fifth*. The *Sixth* is quite different from the *Fifth*, despite the success of the latter at its premiere, which the composer himself conducted in January 1945. Where the mood of the *Fifth* is triumphant and heroic (the Nazis had almost succumbed to defeat by this stage), the *Sixth* is more elegiac, less compact and more diffuse.

Opinions differ widely on the work's form; the Russian musicologist Nestiev, one of Prokofiev's first biographers and of course toeing the Party line as he wrote, argued that the composer had swapped over the exposition and development in the first movement. If this is true, it may explain why the opening seems like a bombardment of motifs tumbling over each other, so that the surfeit of themes only gradually gives way to a semblance of order as the movement progresses.

The second movement, at a much slower tempo and more sombre in character, has a similar layout. Prokofiev's compositional touch only appears to lighten somewhat in the third movement, which at certain points puts the listener in mind of the composer's poker-faced appearance from the period 1910-1930, a period when he constantly rejected the fame that greeted him in the West. He was to distance himself from this celebrity status as he contemplated a return to the country of his birth.

The change in the composer's style, evident in the early 1930s, is often ascribed to his move to the West (America, then Germany and Paris), where he had no way

of avoiding the aesthetic impact of social realism. The new style could, however, be perceived in his music well before this; and conversely the old style did not disappear entirely when he returned to the motherland in 1936.

The harmony in this *Sixth Symphony* is fundamentally tonal, replete with omens and dissonances that sometimes resolve but sometimes testify to his predilection for abrupt shifts of mood, derived from film music, or for unpredictable gear changes from lyrical to more restless melodies. The composer's choice of instrumentation confirms his feeling for élan and transparency. Prokofiev said virtually nothing of the meaning behind the work. He associated the shadowy sound world with the impact of injuries caused by the War. Prokofiev's friend, the composer Myaskovsky, confessed that he only began to understand the work properly at the third hearing. Prokofiev was a modernist and a classicist at the same time, and this dichotomy was completely personal and at the same time far from clear. Indeed, it remains a mystery to many people to this day.

Responses to the work's premiere, given by the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra under Yevgeni Mravinsky on Christmas Day 1947, were positive. They included comments such as *'This major work displays yet again the immeasurable superiority of Soviet music over that of the capitalist West, where the symphonic tradition has long ceased to be an art of praiseworthy ideas and elevated emotionalism, but rather has descended into a state of profound decadence and degeneration.'*

Despite an encomium of such grandiloquence, it was to be less than a year until the composer was publicly denounced for 'formalism' and paying insufficient heed to the tastes of the public (i.e. the proletariat). The composer displayed appropriate humility in the face of these charges, but to little avail. A number of his works, which were now regarded as problematic, including the Sixth symphony, disappeared from the music stands. Their reputations were only restored after the death of Stalin (coincidentally on the same day as Prokofiev – 5 March 1953).

Translation: Bruce Gordon / Muse Translations

Symphony no. 7 in C-sharp minor op. 131 (1952)

This is one of the last works completed by Prokofiev before his death. The composer was seriously ill in his final years and continued to compose only with the greatest difficulty. It is difficult to imagine this background when listening to the piece, which the composer himself regarded as a 'children's symphony', written at the behest of the children's division of Russian Radio. Written for children it may have been, but it contains absolutely nothing childish or childlike. The harmony and melody appear to delight in meandering down strange pathways and a comparison with Haydn's *Toy Symphony* makes it patently obvious that this music is far from innocent (the historian Von der Dunk once described Haydn's music as 'music from before the Fall of Man'). One childlike aspect may be that the phrasing and form still hold on to the

remnants of classicism, as testified by the clear syntax and traces of sonata form, indicated in part at least by the juxtaposition of key tonalities.

The opening movement, particularly in its melodies and rhythms, gives an impression of proceeding calmly and in balance, although the harmony is dark from the very outset. The lyricism that dominates many of the passages often has tragic undertones. The second movement's waltz is derived from one of Prokofiev's earlier works (the incidental music to a staged version of *Eugene Onegin*), and its beauty and momentum suggest a depth of meaning. Prokofiev once described Tchaikovsky's setting of *Eugene Onegin* as the most intrinsically *Russian* music, and he pays tribute to his predecessor's love of elegance and clear instrumentation in this symphony. Prokofiev explores the limits of tonality; the music never becomes completely atonal, but reliable, traditional tonality can only be perceived occasionally. The full resources of the orchestra are almost never deployed at the same time, either in this movement or elsewhere in the symphony. Large tracts of the music sound as if they were written for chamber orchestra, combining dance and elegance while indulging in a broad palette of tonal colours. In the third movement, Prokofiev combines simple, unambiguous rhythms with complex and ambiguous harmonies: the children in the audience are suddenly faced with the worldly wisdom of adults, and the movement's form is more of a refined montage than any conventional structure. It is only when we reach the finale that carefree joyfulness appears to prevail. Here, too, the movement is in dance form, albeit based on two dances – a waltz and a polka – and Prokofiev's old love of irony yet again takes on some grotesque shapes until near the end of the work, when the mood of tragedy and complexity resurfaces with considerable intensity.

When the work received a pre-performance (piano reduction) premiere, before an audience made up entirely of fellow composers, as was fairly standard practice at the time in the Soviet Union, the composer was criticised for the music's 'excessive simplicity'. Prokofiev refused to make any changes, however. There was a warm reaction to the work's premiere in Moscow in October 1952 and the composer qualified for an award of the Lenin Prize. However, in order to win this prize, the jury wanted Prokofiev to add an energetic and cheerful coda to the end of the finale, which was considered to be too ambiguous as it stood. Prokofiev gave in to these entreaties, being sorely in need of the cash prize, but told the premiere's conductor, Samosud, that he never wanted this add-on ending to be performed. Since this tale came to light (after the outbreak of *glasnost*), it is in fact seldom if ever played nowadays (a practice observed in this performance), even though it can still be seen in the score and heard in performances recorded before the Gorbachev era. Prokofiev was awarded the Lenin Prize posthumously.

Translation: Bruce Gordon / Muse Translations

James Gaffigan

Hailed for the natural ease of his conducting and the compelling insight of his musicianship, James Gaffigan continues to attract international attention and is one of the most outstanding American conductors working today. James Gaffigan is currently the Chief Conductor of the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, and Principal Guest Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra. He was also appointed the Principal Guest Conductor of the Gürzenich Orchestra, Cologne in September 2013, a position that was created for him.

In addition to these titled positions, James Gaffigan is in high demand working with leading orchestras and opera houses throughout Europe, the United States and Asia. In recent seasons, James Gaffigan's guest engagements have included the Munich, London, Dresden and Rotterdam Philharmonics, Vienna Symphony Orchestra, Staatskapelle Dresden, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester (Berlin), Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Radio Symphony Orchestra Berlin, BBC Symphony Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Czech Philharmonic, Tonhalle Orchester, Zurich, Bournemouth Symphony, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Leipzig and Stuttgart Radio Orchestras, Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony and Sydney Symphony. In the States, he has worked with the Philadelphia and Cleveland Orchestras, San Francisco and Los Angeles Philharmonic, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Minnesota, Dallas, Detroit, Houston, Baltimore and National Symphony Orchestras and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra among others.

Born in New York City in 1979, Mr. Gaffigan has degrees from both the New England Conservatory of Music and the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University in Houston. He also studied at the American Academy of Conducting at the Aspen Music Festival, and was a conducting fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center.

In 2009, Mr. Gaffigan completed a three-year tenure as Associate Conductor of the San Francisco Symphony in a position specially created for him. Prior to that appointment, he was the Assistant Conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra where he worked under Music Director Franz Welser-Möst from 2003 through 2006. James Gaffigan's international career was launched when he was named a first prize winner at the 2004 Sir Georg Solti International Conducting Competition.

The Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra

The Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra (RFO), founded in 1945, is an essential link in the Dutch music life. The RFO performs symphonic concerts and operas in concert, as well as many world- and Netherlands premieres. Most concerts take place in the context of concert series NTR ZaterdagMatinee (the Royal Concertgebouw in Amsterdam), the AVROTROS Vrijdagconcert series (TivoliVredenburg in Utrecht), broadcasted live on NPO Radio 4 and regularly televised.

Markus Stenz was appointed chiefconductor in 2012, after predecessors as Bernard Haitink, Jean Fournet, Willem van Otterloo, Hans Vonk, Edo de Waart and Jaap van Zweden. The RFO has worked with internationally highly regarded conductors such as Leopold Stokowski, Kirill Kondrashin, Antal Doráti, Charles Dutoit, Michael Tilson Thomas, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Mariss Jansons, Peter Eötvös, Vladimir Jurowski and Valery Gergiev. The American conductor James Gaffigan is principal guest conductor since the season 2011-2012. Bernard Haitink has connected his name to the RFO as patron.

The RFO has build an extensive CD catalogue, with works by contemporary composers such as Jonathan Harvey, Klas Torstensson, James MacMillan and Jan van Vlijmen, the registration of Wagner's Parsifal, Lohengrin, die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. Complete symphonies of Bruckner, Rachmaninov, Shostakovich and Hartmann have been released in recent years. The release of Simplicius Simplicissimus (K.A. Hartmann) has especially received the highest



international critical acclaim. The RFO has been awarded the Edison Classical Oeuvre Award 2014 for its longstanding essential contribution to Dutch musical life.

www.radiofilharmonischorkest.nl

This High Definition Surround Recording was Produced, Engineered and Edited by Bert van der Wolf of NorthStar Recording Services, using the 'High Quality Musical Surround Mastering' principle. The basis of this recording principle is a realistic and holographic 3 dimensional representation of the musical instruments, voices and recording venue, according to traditional concert practice. For most older music this means a frontal representation of the musical performance, but such that width and depth of the ensemble and acoustic characteristics of the hall do resemble 'real life' as much as possible. Some older compositions, and many contemporary works do specifically ask for placement of musical instruments and voices over the full 360 degrees sound scape, and in these cases the recording is as realistic as possible, within the limits of the 5.1 Surround Sound standard. This requires a very innovative use of all 6 loudspeakers and the use of completely matched, full frequency range loudspeakers for all 5 discrete channels. A complementary sub-woofer, for the ultra low frequencies under 40Hz, is highly recommended to maximally benefit from the sound quality of this recording.

This recording was produced with the use of Sonodore microphones, Avalon Acoustic monitoring, Siltech Mono-Crystal cabling and dCS - & Merging Technologies converters.



www.northstarconsult.nl

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Recording Assistant, location photography & cinematography: Brendon Heinst
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