

Sergei Prokofiev

(1891-1953)

The Nine Sonatas for Piano & Sarcasms, Op. 17

Anne-Marie McDermott, piano

DISC A (55:30)

Sarcasms, Op. 17 (11:30)

1. Tempestoso 2:22
2. Allegro rubato 1:27
3. Allegro precipitato 1:50
4. Smanioso 2:50
5. Precipitosissimo 2:45

Piano Sonata No. 5 in C Major, Op. 38/135 (14:56)

6. I. Allegro tranquillo 5:44
7. II. Andantino 4:07
8. III. Un poco Allegretto 4:56

Piano Sonata No. 6 in A Major, Op. 82 (28:57)

9. I. Allegro moderato 8:11
10. II. Allegretto 4:13
11. III. Tempo di Valzer Lentissimo 8:54
12. IV. Vivace 7:19

DISC B (71:11)

Piano Sonata No. 8 in B-flat major, Op. 84 (31:38)

1. I. Andante dolce 15:57
2. II. Andante sognando 5:25
3. III. Vivace 10:05

Piano Sonata No. 3 in A Minor, Op. 28 ('from Old Notebooks')

4. Allegro tempestoso 8:09

Piano Sonata No. 1 in F Minor, Op. 1

5. Allegro 7:20

Piano Sonata No. 9 in C Major, Op. 103 (23:37)

6. I. Allegretto 7:02
7. II. Allegro strepitoso 2:59
8. III. Andante tranquillo 7:38
9. IV. Allegro con brio, ma non troppo presto 5:42

DISC C (56:59)

Piano Sonata No. 2 in D Minor, Op. 14 (18:47)

1. I. Allegro, ma non troppo 6:03
2. II. Scherzo, Allegro marcato 2:00
3. III. Andante 5:44
4. IV. Vivace 4:45

Piano Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major, Op. 83 (20:15)

5. I. Allegro molto inquieto 9:13
6. II. Andante caloroso 7:09
7. III. Precipitato 3:39

Piano Sonata No. 4 in C Minor, Op. 29 ('from Old Notebooks') (17:39)

8. I. Allegro molto sostenuto 5:25
9. II. Andante assai 8:11
10. III. Allegro con brio, ma non leggiere 3:38



Sergei Prokofiev's contribution to the piano repertoire is astounding. I have long been attracted to his pianistic and musical language and greatly challenged by it. His nine piano sonatas, written over a forty year span in his life, give us a profound look inside of this brilliant and innovative composer's soul. The potent emotional content in these sonatas creates a highly visceral and stimulating musical experience. He maximizes the full potential of the piano as an intense and dramatic musical voice. As a pianist, having the opportunity to deeply immerse myself in this monumental body of work has been a thrilling and challenging journey.

—Anne-Marie McDermott

"Prokofiev has made an immense, priceless contribution to the musical culture of Russia. A composer of genius, he has expanded the artistic heritage left to us by the great classical masters of Russian music—Glinka, Mussorgsky, Tchaikovsky, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Rachmaninov."

—Dmitri Shostakovich from *Prokofiev: His Life and Times*

"While Stravinsky is much more tied to the Gods, Prokofiev is friendly with the Devils."

—Sergei Diaghilev



Born and raised in Tsarist Russia, Sergei Prokofiev, a precocious child, showed remarkable musical talent at a young age. He came from a financially comfortable and cultured family. His mother, well educated with a special feeling for the arts, had a great influence on his early development (piano lessons began at age 4; his earliest compositions date from this period as well). His father supervised his general education, along with various French and German governesses. As an only child (his two older sisters died in infancy), he was indulged and pampered, growing up expecting unconditional attention and with the misconception that he could behave in any way he wanted, resulting in a lack of regard and understanding for those less fortunate or less interesting—seemingly immune to criticism. Compassion and empathy were not always a strong part of his character. At age thirteen Prokofiev was enrolled at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. His outstanding gift for music was contrasted with an arrogant and abrasive personality (which alienated him from others throughout his life), a lack of respect for teachers and other students, often misunderstood. He completed his studies in composition (1909) and graduated with the usual Russian degree as free artist. After this, Prokofiev trained as a concert pianist and as a conductor. During his time at the Conservatory, he composed numerous small-scale piano works and six early piano sonatas, some of which he utilized later. The early *f minor*, for example, was revised and appeared as his official Op.1. Prokofiev retained the habit of reworking his musical ideas, either because they pleased him or for financial reasons.

Prokofiev was one of the three iconoclastic figures who dominated the World War I period, along with Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) and Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). After the Russian revolution, which totally disrupted his life, Prokofiev went into self-imposed exile in New York and Paris. He spent many years abroad

as a composer and as a pianist. He gained acceptance as a composer in Europe, but was less popular in the United States, reflected in his conflicted relationship to the West and Russia. Prokofiev's life was greatly affected by political turmoil. Unlike Stravinsky, Koussevitsky, Nabokov and others, Prokofiev decided to return to Stalin's Soviet Union after years of indecision and conflict. Prokofiev spent the last seventeen years of his life in Russia. He was both stimulated and restricted by the cultural policies of the Stalin regime. Prokofiev's loyalty no doubt stemmed from his blind love for his country, his life complicated and enriched by the political and social transformation of his homeland following the Russian Revolution. Prokofiev enriched the musical repertoire in many different forms, at a consistently high level of quality. His works are distinctly Russian and for study purposes, fit well into four characteristic periods: 1. 1891–1917, early student and war years; 2. 1918–1922, the American years; 3. 1922–1936, the Parisian years and 4. 1936–1953, the Soviet years. Prokofiev had an ongoing forty-year relationship with the piano sonata. Sonatas Nos.1–4 were written during the first period (1907–1917), Sonata No.5—two versions: Op.38 (1923) and the revision, Op.135 (1952–1953), Sonatas Nos. 6–9 were composed after his return to Russia (1939–1947). Prokofiev's first four sonatas, composed before he left Russia (1918), are all in minor keys, providing more opportunities for chromatic explorations important in his early music. His last five sonatas are all in major keys.

Prokofiev described his music as embracing four basic lines: the "lyrical," the "classical," the "innovating," and "the motor or toccata" lines. The "lyrical"—angular and often melancholic, also includes the grotesque, which Prokofiev preferred to describe of as scherzoishness, encompassing laughter and mockery. The "classical" reflects traditional patterns found in instrumental forms—of both earlier

and later composers. The “innovating” line reveals Prokofiev’s search for diverse expression through harmonic structure. The “motor/toccatà” line is manifested in his music with characteristic precision and speed. A basic component of Prokofiev’s style is exhibited in his compositional craftsmanship and piano technique, notable for, according to Heinrich Neuhaus’s *Memoirs*: “virility, self-assurance, unshakable will, iron rhythm and immense volume (which was often difficult to tolerate in a relatively small space).” An exaggeration of performance indications was common, as was an almost complete avoidance of *rubato* (a free alteration of rhythm). Only a few recordings of Prokofiev himself have survived.

Prokofiev was happily married (1923–1940) to Lina Llubera, a Spanish-born singer he met in France. They had two sons (Svyatoslav, 1924 and Oleg, 1928). In 1940 Prokofiev, then almost 50, met the writer Mira Mendelson, a 25-year-old graduate from the Moscow Literary Institute. Their friendship, according to McAllister, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, “led to the break-up of his marriage.” The details of the matter are complicated, and it has been suggested that political dealings were involved. Two facts are certain—Lina was financially dependent on Prokofiev and as a foreigner, she would be without protection from Soviet scrutiny if divorced from Prokofiev. She was certainly by that time *persona non grata* in Moscow. Years later Lina was arrested on charges of espionage and committed to 20 years in a labor camp—no doubt tormenting Prokofiev for it was possible that he contributed to the situation. Mira Mendelson had strong party ties and, as Victor Seroff (*Sergei Prokofiev: A Soviet Tragedy*) has aptly put it, “the years 1939–41 were less conducive to romance than they were to survival.” This would strongly suggest that something was going on in the composer’s life politically at

the time and was probably the main reason he ended his marriage. Seroff questions further: “Can anyone be expected to believe that a mere matrimonial disagreement between Prokofiev and his wife could have endangered the state to such a degree that Lina had to be classified as almost a ‘security risk.’ Certainly neither Lina’s nor Mira’s *Memoirs* about Prokofiev indicate the slightest evidence of matrimonial troubles.” It might also be pointed out that Mendelson is a Jewish name and there is no doubt another story there. In failing health, plagued by attacks on his compositions, torn between his love for Mira and his feelings of responsibility for Lina and their sons, Prokofiev was in an impossible situation. After thirty years of trying to live this double life, he was forced to make a decision between Russia and the West. Prokofiev (almost 57) married Mira Mendelson on January 13, 1948 (after living together as husband and wife for almost seven years). For many years it was unclear if and when the marriage had taken place. Neither the composer nor Mira mention it in their memoirs and close friends expressed confusion and uncertainty about the date and circumstances of the wedding. One can only speculate regarding the no doubt complicated reasons for being so secretive. One obvious question remains: “how could Prokofiev legally marry Mira if he had never been officially divorced?” In 1944, under the reform of Soviet law, all marriages, old and new, had to be registered with the Census Bureau to be valid and only registered marriages would be legal. Prokofiev and Lina were married in Ettal, Germany, and the union was never registered in Russia. Prokofiev never abandoned Lina and his sons financially. In view of the unpredictable Soviet system, it is difficult to accurately determine if there is any connection to linking Prokofiev’s public humiliation, his marriage to Mira Mendelson and the arrest of Lina Prokofiev. Lina spent eight years in labor camps and was released in 1956. She died in London on January 3, 1989.

Prokofiev authority Harlow Robinson suggests that the political stress that Prokofiev faced not only affected his personal life, but his health as well: "It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the extraordinary personal and political pressure under which Prokofiev had been living since 1936 was at least a contributing, if not determining, cause of his illness." Prokofiev's decision to repatriate to Stalinist Russia continues to disturb scholars. Why didn't he stay in France where his music was a great success and where he and Lina met and had their children? Shostakovich's explanation in *Testimony* is "that Prokofiev knew that Soviet culture was becoming fashionable in the West and that the USSR would not long tolerate him as a "weekend guest" who traveled by invitation to the Soviet Union for concerts, leaving his wife and sons in Paris. A permanent move to Moscow would improve his image." Nabokov recalls the composer in Paris: "he continuously repeated that the Revolution for him was an inescapable, positive event of Russia's national history, and that he did not see in it, as so many of his compatriots did at the time, a desperate and fatal calamity. On the contrary, he believed that the Russian Revolution was teaching a lesson to the West and would ultimately lead to a regeneration of European society." Prokofiev dismissed Rachmaninoff and Stravinsky—who put Mother Russia behind them—as "rootless and declining talents." Stalin's 1932 decree fostered a "unionization of art, but really entailed total control of creativity in the service of the state, the objectionable work of coercion to be visited by the artists upon each other—allowing the talentless to avenge themselves on the talented by means of bureaucratic scheming and anonymous denunciations." Prokofiev and others, including Shostakovich, were deceived by this decree. In contrast to his public pronouncements and his agreement with it in principle, according to his diary (no doubt meant for his eyes only), Prokofiev

regarded the political system distrustfully. It interested him only in relation to how useful or injurious it would be to his career and about any compromises he might have to make. Art in the Soviet Union was subject to political and social ideals that would decide between success and failure, rather than criteria related to the level of creativity. Prokofiev's comments to the press between 1932 and 1936 revealed his accord that "a simpler musical language could be combined with the official Soviet concept." Upon examining all of the contradictions and mysteries in Prokofiev's life, it remains impossible to say for sure whether or not his reaction to Soviet influence was sincere or whether he was merely telling everyone what they wanted to hear. Perhaps Prokofiev's return to Russia could simply have been a strong desire to be home. "I must see the real winter again and hear the Russian language in my ears," the composer told French friends. The confusion remains far from certain and is unresolved.

For the last eight years of his life, Prokofiev, suffering from ill health and with one eye on mortality, dealt with rejections, disappointments, a reduced income and the deaths of close friends. He continued to work until the end—"I work everywhere, always, and I have no need for meditation or privacy." It troubled him that many of his works had not received performances and remained unpublished in the Soviet Union, though offers from foreign publishers were declined. "I don't think it is acceptable that my compositions should appear somewhere abroad and not here." [Prokofiev] Considering the governmental persecution he endured, this is another example of Prokofiev's ambiguous loyalty. Ironically, Stalin and Prokofiev died a few hours apart on the same day, March 5, 1953. Stalin was seventy-three and Prokofiev was almost sixty-two.



Sergei Prokofiev circa 1918

Thoughts on the Prokofiev Sonatas
by Anne-Marie McDermott with Lynne Mazza

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Born: April 23, 1891, in Sontsovka, Ukraine

Died: March 5, 1953, in Moscow

Prokofiev, himself a formidable pianist, completed nine piano sonatas out of a projected eleven. He died shortly after beginning the Tenth Sonata.

“[Prokofiev] played on a level with the keyboard, with an extraordinary sureness of wrist, a marvelous staccato. He rarely attacked from on high; he wasn't at all the sort of pianist who throws himself from the fifth floor to produce the sound. He had a nervous power like steel, so that on a level with the keys he was capable of producing sonority of fantastic strength and intensity, and in addition, the tempo never, never varied.”

—Francis Poulenc, (1978) from *My Friends and Myself*

“The concert was a resounding success...The impression made on me, not so much by the music, which by that time I had learned to understand and appreciate, as by the performance, was unlike anything I had ever experienced. What struck me about Prokofiev's playing was its striking simplicity. Not a single superfluous gesture, not a single exaggerated expression of emotion, no striving for effect.”

—David Oistrakh, on a recital Prokofiev gave in Odessa in 1927

Sonata No.1 in F Minor, Opus 1

Composed in 1907–1909. Premiere on February 21 (revision on March 6), 1910 in Moscow, with Prokofiev at the keyboard (his first Moscow appearance, establishing his credibility and talent as a pianist). Published by the Moscow firm Jurgenson in 1911 (this company grew wealthy on Tchaikovsky's music).

The honor of his first opus number was one which Prokofiev, like Brahms, reserved for a piano sonata, although in neither case was it the composer's first contribution to the genre. Prokofiev's Sonata, Op.1 started out as Sonata No.2 in *f minor*, a three-movement sonata written during the summer of 1906 by the 15-year-old composer. He later "discarded" the second and third movements, then reworked the first and made it into Sonata No.1, Op.1. The composer noted: "the First Sonata, a naïve and simple little piece, marked the end of my early period." This was Prokofiev's first published work.

This romantic sonata is very exuberant and exploratory in nature—Prokofiev experimenting with his musical voice. It has elements reminiscent of early Scriabin (1872–1915), Rachmaninoff (1873–1943), Brahms (1833–1897), and French Impressionism.

The first sonata has beautiful, innocent and pure themes, unlike the later sonatas where such themes can have ironic, dissonant, and complex undercurrents. The second theme in this one movement sonata, for example, in *A-flat Major* is—just straightforward and simply luscious. The Sonata starts out energetically in *Allegro* with a double forte outburst, but quickly recedes into a more tranquil mode. The use of chromatic scales and octaves abounds throughout.

Prokofiev takes us on an inventive and explosive harmonic journey throughout the development. He challenges the traditional progression by arriving at an anticlimactic statement of the theme before further building tension to reach the triple forte triumphant climax, culminating in an extended diminished chord flourish. The next six bars are a more intimate reflection on the first theme, continuing to explore in a harmonically chromatic manner. The Sonata then gracefully eases back into the *Allegro*, however this time the thematic material is more subdued, providing an air of veiled mystery. The movement builds very slowly, *sempre animando*, to a dramatically feisty coda marked *più mosso*. It ends definitively with a final five bar statement of the opening theme.

Prokofiev wrote about his First Sonata: "But alongside my serious numbered works, that sonata (Sonata No.1) seemed too youthful, somehow. It turned out that, although it was a solid opus when I was fifteen, it could not hold its own among my more mature compositions." Although he reworked this Sonata for later publication (originally dedicated to a local veterinarian he befriended, Vasily Morolev), Prokofiev seemed to have conflicting feelings about this Sonata No.1: "whereas the Morolev Sonata remained rather childish even after revision, and many people have reproached me—not without good grounds—for having published it." No doubt the conventional Morolev, who found Prokofiev's more rebellious music upsetting, loved it.

Although it is youthful musically and may be immature when compared to later works, it is brilliantly written and highly communicative.

Sonata No. 2 in D Minor, Opus 14

Composed in 1912. Premiere on February 5, 1914 with Prokofiev at the keyboard.

Following performances of his First Piano Concerto, Prokofiev completed the Second Sonata. In November he sent the manuscript to his publisher Jurgenson and demanded, and received, a fee of 200 rubles. The piece is dedicated to his friend and conservatory colleague, pianist Maximilian Schmidhof, who was perhaps the closest friend in Prokofiev's life. Tragically, Max killed himself in the spring of 1913.

Prokofiev performed this Sonata at his first important performance in the United States, at Aeolian Hall on November 20, 1918. (His debut at the Brooklyn Museum on October 29, 1918 was in celebration of an exhibit by the Russian painter Boris Anisfeld.)

The Second Sonata is the first of the nine that truly demonstrates the classic elements of Prokofiev's style: percussiveness, counterpoint, and chromaticism. It has a youthful innocence and enthusiasm. The four-movement sonata is written in classical ternary ABA style.

The first movement is marked *non legato*, demanding a great clarity and an almost motoric character. The second theme is coaxing and gentle and is rudely interrupted by a character change which jolts the listener back into the mood of the opening. The development opens tenderly with the return of the second theme and ensues through a brief *scherzando* to the beginning of the *serioso* climax of the movement. A brief and chromatic seven bars leads us back to the exposition. The movement ends with the same youthful exuberance with which it started.

The second movement is marked *Scherzo: Allegro marcato* and it exemplifies Prokofiev's brilliance in writing in this march-like style. It is a very brief, eighty-three bar movement and requires tremendous rhythmic impulse, clarity and spirit. The middle section is gracefully playful, but also a bit twisted and perverse.

The third movement is an *Andante* in the dark and barren key of *G sharp minor*—a rather unusual choice given the prevailing *d minor* key signature of the surrounding movements. The movement is highly chromatic and creates an air of somber melancholy. It is a tremendous contrast to the rest of the sonata, retaining none of that innocent outlook. With the *con tristezza* marking, it evokes a potent and evocative character.

The fourth movement is a brilliantly written *Vivace* toccata. With markings of *scherzando* and *giocoso*, it has a frolicking and playful energy. Prokofiev quotes the second theme of the first movement, before embarking on a relentless development, punctuated by the repetition—fifteen times—of an insistent *C sharp*, which propels it towards the recapitulation. The movement ends resolutely.

Sonata No. 3 in A Minor, Opus 28

*Composed in 1907–1917 (a reworking of the childhood Sonata No.3).
Premiere on April 15, 1918, Petrograd, Sergei Prokofiev, piano.*

This one movement sonata, taken from Prokofiev's sketchings in his old notebooks, is marked *Allegro tempestoso*. The brief seven-minute Sonata begins in the dominant key of *E Major* and only achieves its resolution of *a minor* in the recapitulation. It has a rambunctious and tumultuous nature and does not follow traditional sonata

form. It is a hugely virtuosic tour de force.

The Sonata is constructed in four sections and is explicitly marked throughout. The opening is highly mechanical and alternates between *secco* and *legato* writing. It transitions to a *Moderato* development, that evokes an air of tranquility, before exploding back into an *Allegro Tempestoso*, culminating in an explosive *feroce* climax characterized by emphatic repeated notes. After a short fermata, Prokofiev teasingly and mysteriously brings us back to the opening thematic material, this time in the tonic key of *a minor*. It then begins its inevitable whirlwind towards conclusion.

Sonata No. 4 in C Minor, Opus 29

Composed in 1908–1917 (a reworking of the childhood Sonata No. 4). Premiere April 17, 1918, in Petrograd, Sergei Prokofiev, piano.

Written in 1917, this is the last of Prokofiev's sonatas written in a minor key. The contrast between the Third and Fourth Sonatas is quite dramatic: the Third being explosive, physical and uplifting and the Fourth being a precursor to the Eighth with its harmonic exploration. This is Prokofiev's first three movement piano sonata. The first movement, marked *Allegro molto sostenuto*, has almost an impressionistic quality. It is written in a traditional ternary form and invokes a distant, somber and sustained sound. Prokofiev employs inventive use of grace notes in the movement, which is rather uncommon to his style. Most of the movement is somewhat constrained and understated compared to his other sonatas. There is neither humor nor irony in this movement, more of an interplay between light and dark.

The second movement, marked *Andante Assai*, is the emotional soul of the Fourth Sonata. The opening of the movement foretells an epic unfolding of the journey to ensue. The first statement of the theme is scored in a very low, ominous register and introduces a theme that slowly rises chromatically note by note. Prokofiev's extraordinary craftsmanship is clearly evident in this movement. The second theme of the movement is scored in the upper register of the piano and is marked *dolce e tranquillo*, creating an almost sickening sweetness, in contrast to the darkness of the opening theme. The final section of the movement incorporates both the first and second themes moving simultaneously in both hands in an ethereal, moody and magical way. The final eight bars remain in *a minor*, taking a long time to unwind, with a final positive flourish in *A Major*, only to devolve into the darkness of an *a minor* triad.

The third *Allegro con brio* movement is an exhilarating toccata filled with humor and irony. It opens with a burst of notes that propels it forward in a classic sonata form. The second theme captures an innocent quality, but with a hint of Prokofiev's perversity. The triumphant return to the opening theme in triple forte occurs after an imaginative pianissimo journey. The movement concludes with crashing cluster chords. Both the Third and Fourth Sonatas date from the revolutionary year of 1917.

Sonata No. 5 in C Major, Opus 38/135

Composed in 1923. Premiere on March 9, 1924, in Paris (to unfavorable reviews), Sergei Prokofiev, piano. Second version composed in 1952–1953. Premiere on February 2, 1954, in Alma-Ata, Anatoli Vedernikov, piano.

The Fifth Sonata is a gentle, melodic and emotionally direct work. The harmonic style is typically very chromatic. The first movement, marked *Allegro tranquillo*, has a refined innocence and intimacy and is narrative in character. In the development, Prokofiev uses the opening thematic material in a much more spunky and playful way, building to a frenzied climax, concluding by restating the opening theme in a triumphant manner. This restatement, marked double forte and *sonoramente*, has the hands crossed, with the theme below the accompaniment. The movement takes a short four bars to wind down to the gentle recapitulation. The *più mosso* coda has a somewhat flippant and ironic quality, zipping along to the end in *C Major*.

The second movement pursues this ironic quality—a quality that Prokofiev so uniquely translated into his musical language. This *Andantino* mocks rather gently in keeping with the prevailing innocence which envelopes the sonata. There is no great profundity in this movement—in fact it is unique for its simplicity, given the complexities usually associated with Prokofiev's slow movements.

The final movement has the rather vague tempo marking—*Un poco allegretto*. The movement combines simplicity with rich melodic and harmonic development. It has a transparent, non-bombastic character. The opening theme of the movement is presented in a vicious and biting way, incorporating clusters of notes, followed by a *più mosso* which makes use of broken octaves that drive the music towards the declamatory final statement.

Sonata No. 6 in A Major, Opus 82

Composed in 1939–1940. Premiere on April 8, 1940, Composer's Union, Moscow, Sergei Prokofiev, piano (radio broadcast). Prokofiev worked simultaneously on the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Sonatas, known as "The War Sonatas."

The Sixth Sonata is a seriously forceful and massive work. It has a pessimistic determination and drive, reflecting the composer's personal life at the time of composition. Prokofiev makes maximal use of the full potential of the piano as both a percussive and melodic instrument and he challenges the interpreter to stretch the palette beyond a normal range. It is dense, packed with ideas and is highly caustic and rhythmically intense.

The first movement is marked *Allegro moderato* and it is tumultuous and almost violent in its essence. It is very muscular and strongly punctuated, hammering out the juxtaposition between *A Major* and *a minor* in an obsessively repeated figure of descending thirds. The first statement of the second theme is simple and distant with an underlying feeling of impending doom. Prokofiev continues to use this second theme to start the development, marked *più mosso*, and proceeds by augmenting it rhythmically. The development is explicitly marked with repetitive accents over a pedal tone of *B natural* and is intensely fiery. It reaches its climax with a series of glissandi and then agonizingly deflates downward to an *Andante* before returning to the opening material. The movement ends with a brief recapitulation concluding with a chord that invokes tension and inconclusiveness.

The second movement is a perfectly constructed march incorporating Prokofiev's unique capacity for ironic humor, sarcasm and drive. He inventively

makes use of broken arpeggios and cluster chords and he marks an unusual 2/2 meter, which provides a restrained and ominous undercurrent. The few accents in the movement provide for momentary humorous relief. Prokofiev briefly retreats to an *espressivo* interlude before returning to a final statement of the opening theme. The movement ends on a positive note with a simple *E Major* chord, scored high in the treble.

The third movement, marked *Tempo di valzer lentissimo*, is a tantalizing, melancholic, and emotionally-wrought waltz. It is richly harmonized, with each voice seen to fruition. Prokofiev creates an underlying vein of profundity and an aching-ly dark sense of resignation. The development, *poco piu animato*, is much thinner in texture and harmonic construction. The climax has an almost ecstatic quality, only to dissipate ten bars later into the opening material. The final moments of the movement seem to deconstruct with no understanding of where they are headed.

The fourth movement is marked *Vivace* and is a powerfully driven and ingeniously conceived toccata. The opening has a biting and dissonant character whereas the second theme has a more playful quality. The movement comes to a standstill and Prokofiev incorporates motivic elements from the first movement, creating an eerie and foreboding atmosphere. The development returns us to the *Vivace* marking and continues to generate internal tumult. The movement then transports us back to material from the first movement, marked *più tranquillo* and *dolcissimo*. The coda is indicated by the return of the insistent descending triads from the opening of the work and Prokofiev proceeds to build the frenzy towards its gripping conclusion.

Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major, Opus 83

Composed in 1939–1942. Premiere on January 18, 1943, in Moscow, Sviatoslav Richter, piano.

The Seventh Sonata differs from Prokofiev's other two "War Sonatas" (the sixth and eighth), which were conceived contemporaneously, in length and scope—it is shorter and less complex.

The concisely written first movement is marked *Allegro inquieto*, and interestingly, does not have the *B Flat Major* key signature indicated. In fact, the *B flat* tonality is reserved for the final chord of the movement. The movement is angular, muscular, and somewhat militaristic in character. The 6/8 meter creates a march-like quality, which is nervous and unsettled—it feels as if we are immersed in the midst of conflict. By juxtaposition, the second theme is expressive and reflective. From the first *Andantino*, Prokofiev gradually, brilliantly, and chromatically brings us back to the main theme of the movement in a barbaric restatement of the opening. The development of the first movement remains defiant and lacking in lyricism. Prokofiev returns us to a brief reprise of the *Andantino* again before the final *Allegro inquieto* section. The movement closes without any grand flourish or statement, clearly indicating that it is a first movement with more to come.

The second movement, marked *Andante caloroso* is a sensuous and somewhat romantic waltz in the distant key of *E Major*, considering the context of a *B Flat Major* Sonata. Prokofiev provides a stark contrast to the surrounding movements; it opens lovingly and coaxingly, and creates a tapestry of warm sound. The development, marked *poco più animato—più largamente* seems to lose its grip with the real-

ity that appears in the beginning of the movement. It explodes in *E Major* with the potent sound of bells powerfully tolling—conveying a defiant arrival. The mood slowly disintegrates into the sounds of bells tolling in the distance, creating an eerie memory. The brief final statement of the opening theme has an unresolved, haunting sense.

The final movement is marked *Precipitato* in a 7/8 meter over an ostinato bass figure. This is one of Prokofiev's most driven and savage toccatas, with a relentless demand for tremendous muscular endurance. The final statement of the theme at the onset of the coda drives the ostinato bass and the dense chords above to a fierce extreme, whipping the movement into a frenzy before inevitably striking the conclusive *B flat* octaves. This movement is the shortest final movement of any of his piano sonatas.

Sonata No. 8 in B-flat Major, Opus 84

Composed in 1939–1944. Premiere on December 30, 1944, in Moscow, Emil Gilels, piano.

The Eighth Sonata is the most architecturally massive and complex of the nine sonatas. Prokofiev projects his most profound side and takes us through a saga of turbulence and volatility. As the great, late pianist Sviatoslav Richter (a pianist who premiered a number of Prokofiev's works) said: "The sonata is somewhat heavy to grasp, but happy with richness—like a tree heavy with fruit."

The opening of the first movement is marked *Andante dolce* and is very reflective and probing. Prokofiev seems in no hurry to get anywhere and luxuriates in the

serene mood of the opening. The listener is challenged to be patient and trust what will inevitably come—an epic tale. We are given a hint early in the movement, in a *poco piu animato* section, of what will create the development: a storm brewing far in the distance. The *Andante* then returns, before beginning the development. The development, marked *Allegro moderato*, builds gradually before frighteningly exploding in a militaristic and chaotic outburst. Over the next twenty-three bars, the movement deconstructs into a very fragile and profound restatement of the opening theme, but here it is far more resigned and is filled with sadness, emptiness, starkness and recollection. The movement concludes with a brief *Allegro* coda that bursts with energy only to return to the barren prevailing mood. The final chord of the movement is scored an octave higher than one would expect, projecting a lack of resolution.

The second movement, *Andante sognando*, is quite simple in the context of the embattled first and third movements. It has a prevailing air of sweetness, but contains Prokofiev's unique and sometimes perverse harmonic voice—a quality that is entwined throughout the movement. It exemplifies Prokofiev's own comment that he strangled the throat of every melody he wrote. This brief and dream-like movement contains a final statement of the theme that has an eerie and foreboding quality, dissipating without a feeling of finality.

The final movement, *Vivace*, is a fiery and spirited toccata and has an uplifting and transcendent quality. It demands great clarity, muscularity and internal propulsion. The development section, *Allegro ben marcato*, is a grotesque, ominous and highly rhythmic march that goes haywire before spiraling out of control obsessively over a half-note ostinato bass. Prokofiev proceeds to bring us to a brief *andantino irresoluto* section that struggles to find its way before returning to the

final *Vivace*. The coda of this movement insists emphatically on the *B flat* pedal tone and concludes with an irresolute feeling—one of experiencing war without explanation.

Sonata No. 9 in C Major, Opus 103

Composed in 1947. Premiere on April 21, 1951, Composers' Union, Moscow, Sviatoslav Richter, piano. Dedicated to Richter. The performance was in celebration of Prokofiev's 60th birthday.

"The Sonata [No. 9] is radiant, simple, and even intimate. It's a domestic Sonata—the more you hear it, the more you come to love it and feel its magnetism."

—Richter

The Ninth Sonata is a post-war sonata reflecting a very mature and resigned Prokofiev. The composer turns away from the violence of his frenetic Sixth and Seventh Sonatas, from the morbidity of his anguished Eighth, and from the complexity permeating this wartime trilogy. This Sonata presents a much more intimate side of Prokofiev. It is written in four distinct movements, each formally foretelling the next, with the fourth movement conclusion bringing us back to the opening of the Sonata. This Sonata contains a very transparent writing style not seen previously in Prokofiev's piano sonatas.

The first movement is marked *Allegretto dolce ed espressivo* and its meter of 3/2 affords an air of spaciousness. The writing is gentle and singing, with no hint of the drama or percussiveness of the previous sonatas—there is no explosive climax

in this movement. The beginning of the development is marked *con una dolcezza espressiva*, implying an almost unreal dream of a saccharine sweet world. The texture is far less chromatic than in previous sonatas. The return of the opening theme is presented in *B Major*, unusually a half step below the opening theme in *C Major*, conveying an abnormal mirror to the opening. The end of the movement abruptly explodes in a six bar passage that will become the thematic material for the second movement, and then retreats into a *tranquillo C Major* ending.

The very short and concise second movement, marked *Allegro strepitoso*, is the only movement in this sonata indicative of Prokofiev's more conventional percussive, feisty nature. There is a fleeting *meno mosso* section that brings us to a gentle *andantino*. The movement concludes with a nine bar phrase indicating the thematic undercurrent for the third movement.

In the third movement, marked *Andante tranquillo*, Prokofiev writes a melody that he didn't strangle—very beautiful and sensuous. It is purely luscious writing with no hint of perversity. This movement alternates between an *andante* and an *allegro* three times, with the *allegro* sections creating a briefly triumphant mood before retreating to the simplicity of the opening. It feels like a final attempt at concluding the emotional chaos of living through the times and travails of Prokofiev's life and era. The final statement of the theme is child-like and fragile and emulates the sound of a music box. During the final *Allegro* of the movement, Prokofiev introduces the uplifting theme of the final movement.

The fourth movement, marked *Allegro con brio ma non troppo presto*, is mockingly playful but constrained and understated. The writing has a naïve and innocent transparency. There is an eerie *andantino* section which brings us back to a nebulous and hazy world, but is abruptly cut off by an *allegretto*, as if he were

uncomfortable by the insecurity of the *andantino*. After a brief return to the opening *allegro*, Prokofiev brings back the opening material from the first movement in a surreal and ethereal manner before coming to a standstill in the final bars of this last sonata: seemingly not knowing how to conclude or knowing where to go, analogous to a human being struggling to explain a lifetime of experience.

Prokofiev's energy invested in his struggle for survival and recognition was beyond measure. Sadly, there was very little left for celebration. So much had been sacrificed for art.

"A stone that strikes the surface of the water sends out a widening circle of ripples, and then sinks down into the depths where it finally disappears. I have gone down into the deeper realms of music."—Sergei Prokofiev, 1936

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Note on *Sarcasms*, Op. 17 by Frank Cooper
University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida

The *Sarcasms*, Op.17, constitute a small suite of five pieces written between 1912 and 1914 by a brilliant young man with tremendous command of the keyboard and a grotesque style in which rough accents and jagged rhythms oppose lyrical themes. The witty promise we find in these pieces today eluded most listeners when the composer played them for the first time in St. Petersburg in 1916. The music—like Prokofiev's earlier *Suggestion Diabolique*, and *Toccata* (premiered together with the *Sarcasms*)—alarmed the audience and the critics by its wild brutality. Even the terminology in the score was rife with exaggeration: *tempestoso* (stormily), *ironico* (ironically), *con gran effetto* (with grand effect), *singhiozzando* (sobbingly), *smansioso* (maniacally), *precipitosissimo* (very precipitously)—probably under the influence of Scriabin, with whom Prokofiev was "somewhat infatuated" and whose scores were endowed with not dissimilar verbiage. The twenty-three year old composer's originality was revealed startlingly through then strange, even repugnant harmonies, rhythms and melodies—while the forms remained simple, as befits works as short as a minute-and-a-half or as long as two-and-a-half minutes.

Here is the eyewitness account by pianist Heinrich Neuhaus of a private performance of this music by the composer (in the year before the premiere):

*Prokofiev was invited to play. He went over to the piano at once, placed a sheet of music on the stand—it was the manuscript of *Sarcasms* he had just finished—and played a few chords.... We all gathered around to look at the music. My uncle, Felix Mikhailovich Blumenfeld, who happened to be stand-*

ing just behind him put on his pince-nez and peered at the manuscript. Sergei Sergejevich, about to begin playing, suddenly turned to him and said, "Felix Mikhailovich, you had better move away or I am afraid you may want to hit me over the head." Everyone laughed. My uncle smiled.....but moved away nevertheless. Sergei Sergejevich played the Sarcasms. The effect was astounding. Some people were delighted, others indignant. Clearly music which was meant to create astonishment!



photograph: Matteo Trisolini

A luminous, boldly emotive pianist, **Anne-Marie McDermott** is widely celebrated for her performances on the world's most illustrious stages. Ms. McDermott made her debut with the New York Philharmonic in 1997 under Christian Thielemann and has since appeared with the orchestras of Atlanta, Baltimore, Dallas, Hong Kong, Houston, Minnesota, Pittsburgh, Seattle, St. Louis, Tucson, the LA Chamber Orchestra, the Mostly Mozart Orchestra, and the National Symphony, and has toured extensively with the Australian Chamber Orchestra and the Moscow Virtuosi. Recital engagements have included New York's 92nd Street Y, Town Hall and Alice Tully Hall, the Kennedy Center and San Francisco's Herbst

Theatre and the Schubert Club. She has participated in such festivals as Mostly Mozart, Ravinia, Aspen, Bravo Vail Valley, Santa Fe, Spoleto, Chamber Music Northwest, Newport, the Dubrovnik Festival, and the Festival Casals in Puerto Rico. A passionate champion of the music of Prokofiev, Anne-Marie McDermott has performed the complete cycle of sonatas to great acclaim at the Lincoln Center Festival, the University of Arizona, Chamber Music Northwest in Portland, and at UCLA's Schoenberg Hall. Since 1998, Ms. McDermott and violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg have performed together as a duo, and in the same year, Ms. McDermott, Ida Kavafian, Steven Tenenbom and Peter Wiley formed the piano quartet, Opus One. Ms. McDermott is the Artistic Director of the Ocean Reef Chamber Music Festival in Key Largo, Florida, and The Avila Chamber Music Festival in Curaçao. Ms. McDermott has been an Artist Member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center since 1995.

Anne-Marie McDermott was the winner of the Young Concert Artists Auditions, and has been the recipient of the Avery Fisher Career Development Award, the Andrew Wolf Memorial Chamber Music Award, the Joseph Kalichstein Piano Prize, the Paul A. Fish Memorial Prize, the Bruce Hungerford Memorial Prize, and the Mortimer Levitt Career Development Award for Women Artists. Ms. McDermott began playing the piano at age 5. By 12 she had performed the Mendelssohn Concerto in G minor with the National Orchestral Association at Carnegie Hall. She studied at the Manhattan School of Music as a scholarship student with Dalmo Carra, Constance Keene and John Browning, and participated in master classes with Leon Fleisher, Menahem Pressler, Abbey Simon, Rosalyn Tureck, Michael Tilson Thomas and Mstislav Rostropovich.

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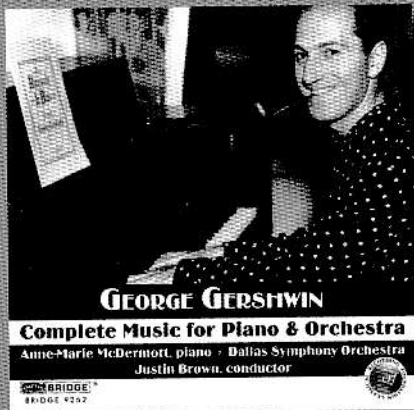
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