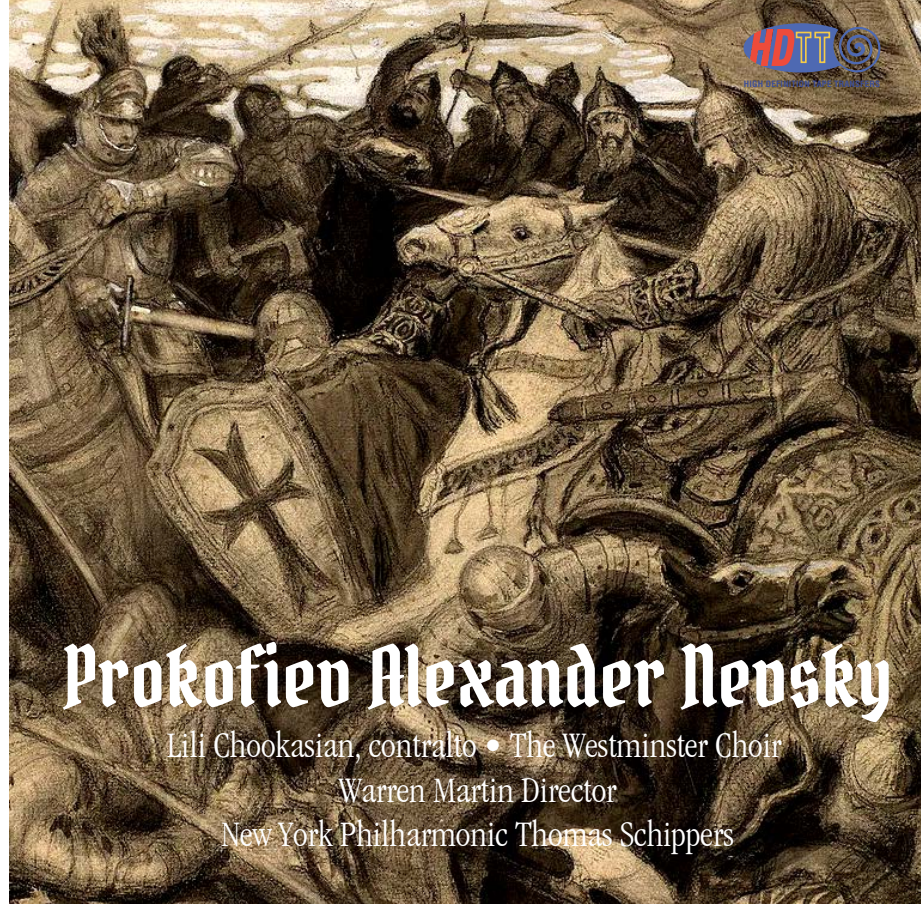


Schippers began conducting Menotti's opera *The Consul* on Broadway shortly after its 1950 premiere. This began a strong association with Menotti and with Samuel Barber, which led to Schippers conducting the premiere performance of Menotti's short Christmas opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, the first opera commissioned especially for television broadcast, on the NBC network on December 24, 1951. On April 9, 1952, he conducted Menotti's *The Old Maid and the Thief* at the New York City Opera and remained on that company's conducting roster into 1954. He made his first appearances with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, at La Scala in Milan, Italy, and at the Metropolitan Opera in 1955. With Menotti, he was instrumental in organizing the Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy, and was its first Music Director. He frequently guest conducted the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and made some classic recordings of music of Samuel Barber with them. When the orchestra made its historic tour of the Soviet Union under Leonard Bernstein in 1959, Schippers also went as its alternate conductor. It was he who was conducting at the Metropolitan Opera on March 4, 1960, when baritone Leonard Warren died on stage. In 1962 he conducted the world premiere of Manuel de Falla's cantata *Atlantida*. In 1964 Schippers made his first appearance conducting at the Bayreuth Festival. The Metropolitan Opera called upon him to lead the world premiere of Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra*, which opened its new house in Lincoln Center in 1966. In 1970, Schippers accepted the position of music director of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, becoming one of the few American-born conductors to hold such a post at a major American orchestra at the time. He also became a faculty member at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music in 1972.

Schippers' wife died of cancer in 1973. He was struck by lung cancer and unable to open the Cincinnati Orchestra's season in 1977. The management gave him the title of conductor laureate. He died before the year was over, bequeathing the orchestra five million dollars.



# Prokofiev Alexander Nevsky

Lili Chookasian, contralto • The Westminster Choir

Warren Martin Director

New York Philharmonic Thomas Schippers

Prokofiev and the celebrated film director, Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948), managed to survive the purges that decimated Russian intellectual life under Stalin. Together, they made two historically significant films: *Alexander Nevsky* in 1938, and *Ivan the Terrible*, Parts 1 and 2 (No. 3 never got beyond preproduction). Worsening relations between Nazi Germany and the U.S.S.R. decided Stalin to sponsor a film about Alexander Nevsky, a thirteenth century prince of Novgorod, who routed Swedish invaders in 1240 at the river Neva (hence his name) and two years later defeated a horde of Teutonic Knights at Lake Chud (aka Peipus), on what is today the Estonian border. Eisenstein offered to direct and persuaded Prokofiev to score the film. Ironically, because Stalin and Hitler signed a nonaggression treaty before Nevsky was ready for release, it was deep-sixed in the Soviet Union, although not elsewhere. Only after Hitler attacked the U.S.S.R. was the film repatriated as a propaganda tool, by which time Prokofiev had reworked sections of his soundtrack score into a "dramatic cantata" with texts by himself and V. Lugovskoy. Prokofiev conducted the Moscow premiere on May 17, 1939.

In "Russia under the Mongolian yoke," high and low registers of the orchestra accompanied Eisenstein's stark panoramas of bones, skulls, discarded weapons, wasted fields, and sacked villages in the wake of marauding tartars; music at once eerie, archaic and despairing.

The "Song about Alexander Nevsky" is an uncomplicated telling of Prince Alexander's defeat of invading Swedes "on the wide waters of the River Neva" in 1240, abetted by local peasants armed with axes and improvised weapons. A quicker middle section (Più mosso) effectively recreates the sounds of battle.

In "The Crusaders in Psko" swaggering, scornful Teuton invaders sing Latin words not easy to translate, perhaps because Prokofiev intended them to be onomatopoeic rather than narrative. An A minor middle section for legato strings, which are asked to play

"expressively and sadly," hardens before the Crusaders quell a spirit of insurrection. "Arise, Russian people" exhorts them to defend, in the populist style mastered by Prokofiev, plainly tuneful but nonetheless perfervid, with a new melody in the middle section that returns triumphantly in the fifth and seventh movements.

"The battle on the ice" is the longest of the movements and stunningly graphic without needing film to be effective. The Crusaders, shouting their Latin battle cry, ride wildly against Nevsky's force, who sing "In our great native Russia no foe shall live...." The breakup of the ice is a terrifying sound, far surpassing a small studio orchestra and constricted mono sound on the original soundtrack.

In "The field of the dead" the mezzo-soprano soloist becomes a Russian girl, looking for the body of her lover slain in battle. She vows to kiss the eyelids of all who died, and to wed a "brave" survivor rather than a "handsome man."

A recapitulation of Russian themes celebrates "Alexander's entry into Pskov" and rejoices in Nevsky's victory, as appropriate in World War II and after as Stalin meant the film to be in 1937.

Thomas Schippers was a talented American conductor and a particular champion of the music of Samuel Barber. He played at a public piano recital at the age of six and was a church organist when he was 14. He continued his piano studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia (1944-1945). He also studied privately with Olga Samaroff (1946-1947). He went on to Yale University, where he had some lessons in composition with Paul Hindemith.

In 1948 he took second prize in the Philadelphia Orchestra's young conductor's contest. He took a job as organist of the Greenwich Village Presbyterian Church in New York. He and group of other young musicians formed a group called the Lemonade Opera Company, which he conducted for several years.

# Prokofiev Alexander Nevsky

Lili Chookasian, contralto • The Westminster Choir

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**1 Russia Under The Mongolian Yoke 3:25**

**2 Song About Alexander Nevsky 3:15**

**3 The Crusaders In Pskov 7:20**

**4 Arise, Ye Russian People 2:20**

**5 The Battle On Ice 12:50**

**6 Field Of The Dead 6:45**

**7 Alexander's Entry Into Pskov 4:35**

Recorded by Columbia Records 1962    Producer – John McClure

Prokofiev Alexander Nevsky - New York Philharmonic - Schippers



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Prokofiev Alexander Nevsky - New York Philharmonic - Schippers