

Kirill Petrovich Kondrashin was internationally the best-known conductor of the Soviet Union and also the most prominent one to emigrate from that country. He was known for vigorous and solid performances of a wide repertory, particularly the Russian masters.

He was brought up with music, as his family included several orchestral musicians. He took piano lessons, and the family got him lessons in musical theory at the Musical Teknikum with Nikolai Zhilyayev, who had a strong influence on him. While still a student, he made his conducting debut in 1931 at the Children's Theater. He entered the Moscow Conservatory in 1934, where he studied conducting with Boris Khaikin. He graduated in 1936, but by then had obtained a job as assistant conductor at the Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Theater in 1934, debuting with the operetta *Les cloches de Corneville* by Planquette.

In 1936 he was conductor at the Maly Opera Theater in Leningrad, retaining that post until 1943. Along with other artists who were deemed important to the war effort, he was evacuated from besieged Leningrad after the German invasion of Russia. In 1943, he became a member of the conducting staff of the Moscow Bolshoi Theater, which was also in a wartime home outside the capital. He remained with the Bolshoi until 1956, making marked improvement in his interpretation that he attributed to working with the experienced conductors of the Bolshoi and to his being entrusted with several important new productions.

Meanwhile, a demand was building for him as a concert conductor. He received Stalin Prizes in 1948 and 1949. When he left the Bolshoi, it was with the intention of centering his career on the podium rather than in the pit. His fame grew greatly in 1958, when he led the orchestra in the prizewinning appearances of American pianist Van Cliburn at the Tchaikovsky International Competition. Cliburn charmed both his home country and his Russian hosts, and the resulting LP record of the Tchaikovsky First Piano Concerto, conducted by Kondrashin, was a long-time best seller. This led to his American and British debuts, making Kondrashin the first Soviet conductor to appear in the U.S.

In 1960 he was named artistic director of the Moscow Philharmonic, and as such participated in another piano concerto blockbuster recording with a U.S. piano star, the great Prokofiev Third Concerto recording for Mercury with Byron Janis, still considered by many the greatest interpretation of that brilliant work on disc. Kondrashin's performances were bright and dramatic, tending to programmatic interpretations that commentators saw as the legacy of his theater career. He was the U.S.S.R.'s finest interpreter of Mahler, leading all the symphonies with unusual restraint and with the expressive and dramatic qualities of the music seemingly enhanced by understatement.

He left the Moscow Philharmonic in 1975, turning to guest conducting. As a result of high demand outside the U.S.S.R., he decided to emigrate in 1978. He was named permanent conductor of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw in 1979, and immediately began making a notable series of recordings with them, but died in that city only two years later.

# **PROKOFIEV**

## **CANTATA FOR THE**

### **TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY**

#### **OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION**

# **SHOSTAKOVICH**

## **THE SUN SHINES OVER OUR MOTHERLAND**

The two WORKS recorded here are examples of a Soviet musical genre that has no counterpart in contemporary Western music: the patriotic cantata. As with the more recent instances by Prokofiev and Shostakovich, which celebrate the October, 1917, Revolution, the Soviet cantata often commemorates a national historic event, and its chief characteristic is the use of patriotic subject matter of a dramatic, specially uplifting nature. Frequently, too, the composer employs monumental vocal and instrumental forces — here again the case — not only to lend grandeur to the occasion but to make possible as well massive participation in what is, after all, a celebration of the masses. For the same reason, he may include among the instruments of the orchestra some of the most popular ensembles — military bands, balalaika orchestras, accordion bands — as well as symphony orchestra. And in addition to professional choruses and soloists he may use amateur and children's choral groups. The writing, generally distinct and simple in style, is often based on Russian popular, folk, or folk-like musical material, or it may use those elements interspersed with art music of a more "serious" nature.

The first works of this kind were written not long after the Revolution by a professor of choral singing at the Moscow Conservatory, Aleksander Kastalsky (1856-1926), whose choral compositions include *Lenin, To the Proletariat* and *The Year 1903*. Other composers soon followed Kastalsky's example. Notable among them were his pupil Dmitri Vassily-Bugala (1888-1956), composer of the choral suite *Stenka Razin*, and Aleksander Davidenko (1899-1934), whose choral efforts include participation, with eight other composers, in a collective oratorio, *The October Path* (1927).

Few of the composers immediately following Kastalsky achieved that composer's popular success, but the pathos did not cease. For one thing, performances were made difficult and infrequent by the size and scope of the forces required. For another, the writing sometimes lacked distinction, being, as is often the case with patriotic art, a result of much fervor but little artistic skill. Prokofiev tried his hand at this kind of writing in 1936, when, in preparation for the festivities of the following year, he began his *Cantata for the Twentieth Anniversary of the October Revolution*, which was completed during the summer of the following year. The Cantata had been commissioned by the All-Union Radio Committee, but its genesis dated back to 1933-34, when, after a study of the works of Lenin, Prokofiev became interested in writing a large-scale work based on Revolutionary texts. Lenin's language was so graphic, colorful and stirring that he did not want to use any verified exposition of his ideas; the composer later declared, "I wanted to go right to the source and use the leader's actual words."

The period of its composition was a remarkable period, one for Prokofiev. From about this same time come the scores of the ballet *Romeo and Juliet*, the Second Violin

Concerto, *Peter and the Wolf* and the *Leariana Kije Suite*. The composer once cited the last named as an example of "serious light music" — music that would be understandable to the masses coming into contact with art for the first time — and although it isn't known how he would have categorized the Cantata, it seems unlikely he would have thought of it as posing problems to the listener.

For reasons that are not clear the Cantata was not performed as part of the twentieth anniversary celebrations. It remained unplayed in fact until May 5, 1966, when the first performance took place in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory. Perhaps one of the problems was the huge number of performers for which the work was intended — with two choruses—professional and amateur — and four orchestras — symphony, brass, percussion and accordion — the Cantata required a total of almost 500 musicians. Whatever the reasons for its rejection, Prokofiev was not one to waste material and he later used themes from the Cantata in his 1945 *Ode to the End of the War*.

The idea of setting Marxist documents to music has appealed to numerous communist composers. Czech composer Erwin Schulhoff, for example, wrote a work using the *Communist Manifesto* as its libretto, and most intriguing of all, Soviet composer Aleksander Krein's U.S.S.R., *Shock Brigade of the World* utilizes parts of a speech by Stalin entitled "On the Tasks of Managerial Workers." Thus, it was not without precedent that Prokofiev elected to set, in a montage of his own creation, a text based on the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.

The resulting libretto is not simply a tribute to the Revolutionary theories Prokofiev admired. It is the composer's attempt to make history live through the words of the spiritual and actual participants of the October Revolution. The Cantata moves from the philosophical seeds of the event to the tensions, passions, tactics and fears of the moment, and on to a celebration of victory tempered by the call for necessary continued struggle. The Cantata was initially cast into ten sections, though current Soviet performances (as on this recording) omit the original eighth, a choral section entitled *Stalin's View*.

## THE PROKOFIEV CANTATA

I. INTRODUCTION (*Moderato*) — an orchestral movement whose epigraph — "A speech is bearing Europe — the specter of Communism" — is the opening sentence of Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*.

II. PHILOSOPHERS (*Andante assai*) — this choral setting of a text from Marx's thesis on Ludwig Feuerbach is a masterly depiction of those who are content merely to analyze the world and those who are willing to set about to change it.

Philosophers explained the world in many ways,  
But the problem is to change it.

III. INTERLUDE (*Allegro — Andante — Adagio*) — an orchestral movement whose restless character may be thought to ask the question, which is the title of Lenin's book *What is to be Done?*, from which the text of the succeeding section is taken.

IV. WE MARCH CLOSELY TOGETHER (*Allegretto*) — a movement of mounting resolution and determination.

We march close together, holding hands tightly,  
Along a dangerous and difficult road.  
We are surrounded and besieged, and we must march  
Always march under their fire.  
We are advised, a decision taken freely,  
And our purpose is to fight the enemy,  
Rather than stop sideways.  
The people admire as because we have chosen to fight,  
As a special group, and not seek appeasement.

V. INTERLUDE (*Tempetativo*) — an orchestral depiction of the commencement of revolutionary activity.

VI. THE REVOLUTION (*Andante ma non troppo*) — the journalistic nature of the text, gathered from Lenin's writings of September-October, 1917, makes this section the most problematical of the entire work. Beginning with a nervous ostinato, the movement builds up to a climax of the full choral and instrumental forces.  
The crisis has come. We will meet certainly.  
The crisis has come. We cannot wait.  
We may lose everything. We must take power in Moscow  
And Petersburg, whatever may happen after.

The losses of the Bolshevik party is now at stake.  
The comrades are arguing that everything now hangs by a thread.  
The moment is such, that to delay the uprising can only lead to death.  
The very fate of the revolution is laid before us.  
Everything is against us. We are too weak to gain power.  
Yet, if we do not gain power now, the revolution will surely perish.  
There is bread enough in Petersburg for two or three days.  
Can we wait in the suburbs?  
We shall take bread and shoes from the capitalists.  
We shall leave them crumbs and dress them in rags.

We do not have the support of the people.  
Without their support, our uprising is doomed.

The relationship between classes has changed.  
The main point is that different classes face each other across the barricades.

The uprising must succeed. We must, without waiting a minute,  
Organize our ranks. We must distribute our forces,  
And more reliable troops to all strategic points of the capital.  
We must mobilize and arm the workers.  
We must summon them to the final battle.

We must execute the Tsarists, occupy Petrograd,  
Arrange the high command and the government.  
We must send each troops against the cadets.  
That are capable of fighting to the death, but will not allow  
The enemy near the center of town.

We must occupy the telephone exchange and the telegraph center.  
We must install our headquarters at the telephone exchange,  
And link up with all the factories, all the troops,  
All the centers of armed insurrection.

The success of the revolution depends on two or three days.  
It would be better for all to perish rather than let the enemy through.  
The Nary, Kronstadt, Vyborg and Revel must come to our aid.

## THE PROKOFIEV CANTATA

(Conclusion)

VII. VICTORY (*Andante*) — again using words of Lenin, this movement celebrates a victory that has been won despite formidable obstacles. Though somewhat relaxed in mood, the music reflects great strength and optimism.

Comrades, spring is coming, we have triumphed through a difficult winter.  
Through cold, hunger and disorder.  
Today we may celebrate our victory.  
In spite of formidable difficulties, and great efforts by our enemies,  
We have won. The ice is broken in all corners of the earth.  
The essential is that the weighty machine is moving.  
We now need the help of the iron battalions of the proletariat.

VIII. SYMPHONY (*Allegro energico*) — an orchestral symphonic picturing the exultation of the victorious revolutionaries. The writing is reminiscent of Prokofiev's symphonic scherzos.

IX. PHILOSOPHERS (*Andante assai*) — a repeat of II, demonstrating that the desired change has now been achieved. The movement ends on a note of confidence and affirmation.

## The Shostakovich Cantata

THE THEME OF REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE has often found expression in Shostakovich's works, among which the present cantata, *The Sun shines over our Motherland*, is one such example. First performed in November, 1952, when the Soviet people were celebrating the 35th anniversary of the October Revolution, the Cantata is scored for the following orchestra: piccolo, two flutes, three oboes, three clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, harp, percussion and strings. To this are added a wind band of three trumpets and three trombones, a boys' chorus and mixed choir.

The text is by the poet Yevgeny Dolmanovskiy, winner of a Stalin Prize in 1949, the year in which he wrote the Cantata poem. From the title Dolmanovskiy gave to his poem, one might expect a celebration of all the bounties nature has bestowed on the Russian land. In fact, however, the sun is a metaphor throughout the poem for the spirit and achievement of the Soviet people under the leadership of the Communist party. The October Revolution represents the initial victory of the people and the beginning of their tangible accomplishments. Thus, it is not the plains, rivers and fields that the poet celebrates but the roads, factories and power stations — the work of the people.

In character and style the Cantata is similar to Shostakovich's oratorio *The Songs of the Forest*. It tells of Russia's eternal youth and bright future in musical language that shows the influence of Soviet popular songs. A dramatic focal point throughout the work is the dynamic call "Forward, Communists!" The opening section is in a key in nature with the boys' chorus, lightly accompanied by strings and woodwinds, describing the beauties of the mother country. This is followed by an energetic section, sung mainly by the men, in which we hear of the past, of the battles for a "splendid life," of the Party and of the great Lenin. The image is one of a country building a new brotherhood through a hard-won victory. The finale is a majestic hymn-like tribute to a confident, triumphant people. It concludes with a vow that all the visionary aspirations of their leaders will be fulfilled.

The sun shines over our great country.  
It lights up the great buildings and monuments.  
We have become wealthy and strong beneath the sun of freedom.  
But our greatest treasure is our brotherhood.  
All our roads are clear and bright;  
Our hearts are filled with courage.  
We are led by Communists, Communists are always ahead.  
The banner of Lenin will lead our generation.

Our country is blessed with our courage.  
The great party will lead us to Communism.  
We will fly like an eagle.  
The hollow fields, the gardens and the factories belong to the people.  
We have become wealthy and strong beneath the sun of freedom.  
But our greatest wealth is our brotherhood.

Our glorious fate has been won through every atom we go forward, it was a heavy fight.  
The proletarian fought for the workers' freedom, a final, decisive battle.  
The brave Bolshevik party led the masses of the people.

Our country was brought under the banner of the Soviet By mighty Lenin,  
Lenin was always with and for the people,  
His great name will remain in our hearts.  
The Soviet people fought a fierce battle for their freedom, one by one.  
And many times, during attacks, the following cry could be heard:  
Communists, forward!  
It was in the face of the enemy's fire that the friendship of the people was seen.

Nature was conquered for the people,  
So forward and forward we go!  
Communists, forward!  
We are not afraid of the clouds of war,  
Peace is in good hands.  
Our great party teaches us to build longlasting peace and happiness.  
Gigantic buildings will decorate our land based on the widest plan.  
Power stations grow along our Kazian rivers, like the beacons of a great achievement.  
May my Soviet land shine through all corners of the world.  
Thunder clouds must not darken this brightness.

Our way is sunny and bright.  
We shall conquer with the empty plains, and we shall harness the power of the rivers.  
May my Soviet land shine through all corners of the world.  
We shall fulfill all Lenin's wishes, We go forward with the party.  
Our generation will see Communism, Our people will build Communism.  
We pledge our oath to the Communist party of our country.  
Children of the Soviet spring, we shall enrich our land with our work.  
We sing the glory of our party, the party of Lenin!  
Forward, Communists! Glory! Glory! Glory! Glory!

# **PROKOFIEV CANTATA FOR THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION**

*Running Time 31:13*

# **SHOSTAKOVICH THE SUNE SHINES OVER OUR MOTHERLAND**

*Running Time 12:17*

*Kirill Kondrashin/Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra • RSFSR Russian Chorus  
Boys Choir of Moscow Choir School*

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For more info e-mail us:  
[admin@highdeftapetransfers.com](mailto:admin@highdeftapetransfers.com)  
or visit our website:  
[www.highdeftapetransfers.com](http://www.highdeftapetransfers.com)