



Sergey
PROKOFIEV

Symphony No. 1
'Classical'

Symphony No. 2

Dreams, Op. 6

São Paulo
Symphony Orchestra

Marin Alsop



Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953)

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Sergey Prokofiev was born on 15th April 1891 at Sontsovka. His precocious musical talents were fostered by his mother and his first compositions emerged when he was only five. In 1904, on Glazunov's advice, his parents allowed him to enter St Petersburg Conservatoire, where he continued his studies until 1914 and also quickly left behind the influence of older teachers such as Liadov and Rimsky-Korsakov, arousing enthusiasm and hostility in equal measure. During the First World War he was exempted from military service and after the Russian Revolution he was given permission to travel abroad, first to North America, where he took with him several major scores that were soon to establish his reputation in the West.

Unlike Stravinsky and Rachmaninov, Prokofiev left Russia with the idea of returning home. His stay in the United States was at first successful: he often appeared as concert pianist and fulfilled prestigious commissions for such as the Chicago Opera. By 1920, however, he had begun to find life more difficult and relocated to Paris, renewing contact with Dyaghilev for whom he wrote several ballet scores. He spent much of the next sixteen years in France, though he returned periodically to Russia where his music received qualified approval. By 1936 he had decided to settle permanently in his native country, taking up residence in Moscow in time for the first official onslaught on music that did not accord with the social and political aims of the authorities. Twelve years later his name was included in the notorious 'Zhdanov decree'. Despite partial rehabilitation, his final years were clouded by ill health and his death – on 5th March 1953, barely an hour before that of Stalin – went largely unnoticed at the time.

As with his older peers Myaskovsky and Stravinsky, Scriabin was a brief yet potent influence on Prokofiev: nowhere more than in *Dreams* – the 'symphonic tableau' he wrote in 1910 and whose première, at Moscow's Sokolniki Park in the summer of 1911, was coolly received. Undulating lower strings immediately denote the sombre mood of this piece as a whole, out of which

woodwind then upper strings sound a note of greater warmth before sinking back into the depths. The process is then repeated, while clarinet then oboe emerge with a highly searching melodic line that also draws in trumpet and horn as the expressive range opens-out accordingly. A brief climax ensues, after which the music winds down gently to an expectant pause. From here *cor anglais* – drawing on woodwind writing heard earlier – initiates a more restless activity, unfolding in heady waves of sound towards the main climax with its radiant harmonies across the entire orchestra. This gradually subsides in a return to the initial mood of sombre uncertainty, thereby taking the work back to its starting-point where it concludes.

Prokofiev was no stranger to symphonic composition (writing Symphonies in G and E minor as a student in 1902 and 1908, and the first version of his *Sinfonietta* in 1909) by the time he completed his *First 'Classical' Symphony* in the summer of 1917. He wrote it without the aid of a piano and scored it for an orchestra similar to the later symphonies of Haydn and Mozart, whose spirit it evokes in melodic if not harmonic terms. The composer directed the première in Petrograd on 21st April 1918, thereafter leaving the Soviet Union for almost two decades.

The first movement begins with a lively theme whose opening flourish is complemented by suitably pert woodwind writing, making way for a second theme with graceful strings and artful woodwind in ideal accord. There is no exposition repeat, with the development starting in the minor then focussing on an animated discussion of the first theme before this reaches a bracing climax with the second theme shared excitedly between upper and lower strings. The reprise then deftly curtails the former and makes the latter even more ingratiating: there is no coda, the opening flourish returning as an effervescent close. Halting lower strings open the second movement, over which violins unfold an easeful melody that draws in woodwind as it pursues its tranquil course. Stealthy gestures from lower woodwind and pizzicato

strings now begin a gradual crescendo that opens-out across the whole orchestra before subsiding into equable exchanges between woodwind and strings. The main melody is then obliquely reintroduced as the music delights in some subtle tonal slide-slips before alighting on the home key and reaching its conclusion with those halting lower strings. Instead of a minuet, Prokofiev substitutes a gavotte whose strutting rhythm is as commanding as it is humorous. A capering trio section follows, equably shared between woodwind and strings, then the gavotte returns quietly on woodwind before heading to its teasingly understated close. The finale sets off with an energetic theme on upper strings decked out with excited woodwind comments, the latter coming into their own during the whirling second theme and plaintive codetta. The exposition is repeated in full, then the development excitedly utilizes motifs from all three themes before a reprise which finds additional pathos in the second theme and codetta, though the pervasive hectic gaiety is not to be denied its resounding last word.

By the time of his *Second Symphony* Prokofiev was settled in Paris and intent on writing a piece in the vanguard of musical modernism. While consciously modelled on the format of Beethoven's final (Op. 111) piano sonata, the present work is hardly a summation – being the result of nine months' concerted effort to create music made (in the composer's words) "of iron and steel". The première, given in Paris on 6th June 1925 and conducted by Serge Koussevitzky, was a failure – the composer admitting he was left none the wiser than the audience by its dense textures and assaultive manner. Many years later he contemplated a revision in three movements, but his death put paid to any such intention and the work was left to find its way out of obscurity to the modest number of performances it enjoys today.

The first movement (its sonata design audible behind the onslaught) commences with strident trumpet fanfares and charging strings that have the first theme – its hectic progress forcefully abetted by brass and percussion. A syncopated transition on strings, with dextrous activity on piano and woodwind, builds remorselessly to the second theme – a tumultuous processional whose vehement

progress rapidly dies down in lower strings towards glowering brass chords. What amounts to a development opens with sepulchral activity in double basses, their martial rhythm soon spreading upwards through the strings before taking in the whole orchestra for a veritable riot of activity that culminates in the return of the first main theme. The reprise as such follows a similar course to that of the exposition, with incessant activity on strings and woodwind underscored by ominous anticipations of the 'processional' theme on lower brass. This duly assumes the foreground, though this time its progress is curtailed by the return of the first theme in a frantic coda which itself climaxes in a sequence of baleful brass chords.

The second movement – twice as long as its predecessor – is a set of variations on a theme written in Japan almost a decade before. Over restlessly undulating lower strings, this theme unfolds pensively on woodwind before moving to strings as the texture becomes denser and more luminous – a climactic discord on piano leaving matters unresolved. The first variation ㉔ continues this subdued mood, with the outlines of the theme often obscured by accumulating activity on woodwind and strings, before the second variation ㉕ brings a greater animation with its ricocheting gestures on woodwind and strings – these latter building to a forceful climax on brass then dissolving in fugitive activity at the end. The third variation ㉖ is a scherzo whose aggressive exchanges between the sections of the orchestra frequently conceal the theme's steady unfolding in the depths, while the fourth variation ㉗ brings an abrupt change of mood: this 'slow movement' of the sequence opens with alluring string harmonies before woodwind enter to intensify its often mysterious and withdrawn manner – the music exuding a mood of subdued anguish before reaching a calmly restive close. The fifth variation ㉘ centres on driving rhythmic ostinatos such as propel matters towards a violent confrontation between the strings and brass, which latter recall the manner of the opening movement and thus endow the work as a whole with a degree of unity. This is further underlined by the sixth variation ㉙, whose unyielding march rhythm is itself redolent of the earlier 'processional' and with much of the ensuing detail

related to what had gone before: gradually and inexorably, these disjunctive layers of activity coalesce into a pile-driving march which gains all the while in power and intensity before this culminates in a series of hammered chords on full orchestra. These are summarily

dispersed at the close, thereby preparing for the return of the theme much as it first appeared – and with any resolution left in abeyance by the spectral final bars.

Richard Whitehouse

São Paulo Symphony Orchestra



Since its first concert in 1954, the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra – OSEP – has developed into an institution recognized for its excellence. Having released more than 60 albums, the orchestra has become an inseparable part of São Paulo and Brazilian culture, promoting deep cultural and social transformation. Besides touring through Latin America, the United States, Europe and Brazil, the group has toured widely throughout the São Paulo countryside, promoting concerts, workshops, and courses in music appreciation for over 170,000 people. In 2012 the American Marin Alsop took the post of Principal Conductor, and in 2013 Alsop was appointed Musical Director of the orchestra.

OSEP Foundation

Marin Alsop, Music Director
Arthur Nestrovski, Artistic Director
Marcelo Lopes, Executive Director

Marin Alsop

Photo: Claudio Lehmann



Marin Alsop is an inspiring and powerful voice on the international music scene, a Music Director of vision and distinction who passionately believes that music has the power to change lives. She is recognised across the world for her innovative approach to programming, and for her deep commitment to education and to the development of audiences of all ages. Her outstanding success as Music Director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra since 2007 has been recognised by two extensions in her tenure, now confirmed until 2021. Alsop took up the post of Principal Conductor of the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra in 2012 and became Music Director in July 2013. She continues to steer the orchestra in its artistic and creative programming, recording ventures and its education and outreach activities. Alsop led the orchestra on a European tour in 2012, with acclaimed performances at the BBC Proms in London and at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, and they returned to Europe in October 2013, with concerts in Berlin, London, Paris, Salzburg and Vienna. Since 1992 Marin Alsop has been Music Director of California's Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, where she has built a devoted audience for new music. Building an

orchestra is one of Alsop's great gifts, and she retains strong links with all of her previous orchestras – the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, where she was Principal Conductor from 2002 to 2008 and now holds the post of Conductor Emeritus, and the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, where she was Music Director from 1993 to 2005 and is now Music Director Laureate. In 2008 Marin Alsop became a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, and in the following year was chosen as *Musical America's* Conductor of the Year. She is the recipient of numerous awards and is the only conductor to receive a MacArthur Fellowship, the award given by the MacArthur Foundation for exceptional creative work. In 2011 Alsop was made an Honorary Member (Hon RAM) of the Royal Academy of Music, London. In September 2013, Marin Alsop made history as the first female conductor of the BBC's Last Night of the Proms in London. Her extensive discography, which already includes a notable set of Brahms symphonies with the London Philharmonic Orchestra [8.557428, 8.557429, 8.557430, 8.570233], is further distinguished by a new Dvořák series [8.570995, 8.572112, 8.570714], which has been highly praised. Recent recordings include Bernstein's *Mass* [8.559622-23] (Editor's Choice at the 2010 *Gramophone Awards*) and John Adams's *Nixon in China* [8.669022-24], to which the *Financial Times* gave five stars, calling it an "incandescent performance".

Born in New York City, Marin Alsop attended Yale University and received her Master's Degree from The Juilliard School. Her conducting career was launched when, in 1989, she was a prize-winner at the Leopold Stokowski International Conducting Competition and in the same year was the first woman to be awarded the Koussevitzky Conducting Prize from the Tanglewood Music Center, where she was a pupil of Leonard Bernstein.

Prokofiev had written two symphonies as a student but his first numbered work in the genre was the *Classical Symphony*, completed in 1917. This evokes, melodically though not necessarily harmonically, the world of Haydn and Mozart, and it has remained one of his most popular works. The *Second Symphony*, by contrast, is a work of ‘iron and steel’ (in the composer’s words), a symphony of conscious modernity and visceral power. *Dreams*, a ‘symphonic tableau’, reveals the potent, early influence on Prokofiev of Scriabin. Of Marin Alsop and the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra’s recording of the *Fourth Symphony* and *The Prodigal Son* [8.573186], *International Record Review* wrote: ‘Conductor and orchestra both shine with the excitement of a special relationship in the ascendant’.



Sergey
PROKOFIEV
(1891-1953)

**Symphony No. 1 in D major,
‘Classical’, Op. 25
(1916-17) 13:44**

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|----------|---|-------------|
| 1 | Allegro | 4:17 |
| 2 | Larghetto | 4:03 |
| 3 | Gavotta: Non troppo allegro | 1:26 |
| 4 | Finale: Molto vivace | 3:58 |
| 5 | Dreams, Op. 6
(Symphonic Tableau)
(1910) | 9:26 |

**Symphony No. 2 in D minor,
Op. 40 (1924-25) 33:44**

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| 6 | I. Allegro ben articolato | 11:16 |
| 7 | II. Theme – | 1:50 |
| 8 | Variation 1 – | 2:21 |
| 9 | Variation 2 – | 2:48 |
| 10 | Variation 3 – | 1:59 |
| 11 | Variation 4 – | 4:28 |
| 12 | Variation 5 – | 2:41 |
| 13 | Variation 6 and Theme | 6:21 |

São Paulo Symphony Orchestra
Marin Alsop

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