



DDD

8.550566

PROKOFIEV

Piano Concertos

No. 1, Op. 10 • No. 3, Op. 26 • No. 4, Op. 53

Kun Woo Paik, Piano

Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra

Antoni Wit



Sergey Prokofiev (1891 - 1953)

Piano Concerto No. 1 in D Flat Major, Op. 10

Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Major, Op. 26

Piano Concerto No. 4 in B Flat Major, Op. 53

Sergey Prokofiev was born in 1891 at Sontsovka in the Ukraine, the son of a prosperous estate manager. An only child, his musical talents were fostered by his mother, a cultured amateur pianist, and he tried his hand at composition at the age of five, later being tutored at home by the composer Glière. In 1904, on the advice of Glazunov, his parents allowed him to enter the St.Petersburg Conservatory, where he continued his studies as a pianist and as a composer until 1914, owing more to the influence of senior fellow-students Asafyev and Myaskovsky than to the older generation of teachers, represented by Lyadov and Rimsky-Korsakov.

Even as a student Prokofiev had begun to make his mark as a composer, arousing enthusiasm and hostility in equal measure, and inducing Glazunov, now director of the Conservatory, to walk out of a performance of The Scythian Suite, fearing for his sense of hearing. During the war he gained exemption from military service by enrolling as an organ student and after the Revolution was given permission to travel abroad, at first to America, taking with him the scores of The Scythian Suite, arranged from a ballet originally commissioned by Dyagilev, the Classical Symphony and his first Violin Concerto.

Unlike Stravinsky and Rachmaninov, Prokofiev had left Russia with official permission and with the idea of returning home sooner or later. His stay in the United States of America was at first successful. He appeared as a solo pianist and wrote the opera The Love for Three Oranges for the Chicago Opera. By 1920, however, he had begun to find life more difficult and moved to Paris, where he re-established contact with Dyagilev, for whom he revised The Tale of the Buffoon, a ballet successfully mounted in 1921. He spent much of the

next sixteen years in France, returning from time to time to Russia, where his music was still acceptable.

In 1936 Prokofiev decided to settle once more in his native country, taking up residence in Moscow in time for the first official onslaught on music that did not sort well with the political and social aims of the government, aimed in particular at the hitherto successful opera *A Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* by Shostakovich. Twelve years later the name of Prokofiev was to be openly joined with that of Shostakovich in an even more explicit condemnation of formalism, with particular reference now to Prokofiev's opera *War and Peace*. He died in 1953 on the same day as Joseph Stalin, and thus never benefited from the subsequent relaxation in official policy to the arts.

As a composer Prokofiev was prolific. His operas include the remarkable *Fiery Angel*, first performed in its entirety in Paris the year after his death, with ballet-scores in Russia for *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella*. The last of his seven symphonies was completed in 1952, the year of his unfinished sixth piano concerto. His piano sonatas form an important addition to the repertoire, in addition to his songs and chamber music, film-scores and much else, some works overtly serving the purposes of the state. In style his music is often astringent in harmony, but with a characteristically Russian turn of melody and, whatever Shostakovich may have thought of it, a certain idiosyncratic gift for orchestration that gives his instrumental music a particular piquancy.

After the death of his father in July 1910 Prokofiev began to turn his attention to the commercial possibilities in the publication of his music, without immediate success. During the summer he also began to sketch a piano concerto, which he completed early in 1912. The work was welcomed by Vladimir Derzhanovsky for his series of concerts at Sokolniki Park in Moscow and scheduled for subsequent performance at Pavlovsk, outside St. Petersburg in August, with Prokofiev making his first appearance as a soloist with an orchestra. The conductor in Moscow was Konstantin Saradzhev, who secured a better degree of proficiency from the orchestra than Alexander Aslanov at Pavlovsk. The concerto had a mixed reception, wild enthusiasm from some

and marked disapproval from others, to the composer's gratification. The concerto, after all, marked a significant change in Russian music, from the romanticism of Rachmaninov and Skryabin to a new world of clear and sometimes harsh contours. Prokofiev chose to play the work at his graduation from the Conservatory in 1914, in competition for the Anton Rubinstein Prize, a controversial choice when other students offered Liszt and Saint-Saëns. The jury was divided, but Prokofiev was eventually awarded the prize, with the support of his teacher Tcherepnin and former pupils of his piano teacher Esipova. Glazunov voted against their choice and, as director of the Conservatory, presented the award with the greatest reluctance.

The Piano Concerto No. 1 in D flat major, Opus 10, dedicated to Nikolay Tcherepnin, is scored for a full orchestra, its percussion section augmented unusually by tubular bells, and with transposing instruments written, in what became Prokofiev's normal practice, as they sound. After resonant D flat chords, the soloist introduces, with the oboes and later the flutes, thematic material that is to recur, repeated forcefully three times in the opening section of the work, described curiously by Prokofiev as "the three whales that hold the concerto together". The second theme is announced by the soloist, material derived from an earlier composition, its two rhythmic elements of dotted notes and triplets later combined and contrasted. The opening theme re-appears, leading to an Andante episode, introduced by muted strings and followed by an Allegro scherzando in which the soloist enters after plucked string chords, soon moving forward to an episode based on the rhythmic second theme, which also opens the piano cadenza. The initial theme returns to bring the concerto to an energetic and powerful conclusion.

In 1920 Prokofiev returned from America to Europe and was eventually joined by his mother in Paris. There was renewed contact with Dyagilev and talk now of staging *The Buffoon* (Chout), commissioned and completed in 1915 after the rejection of the earlier commissioned ballet, *Ala and Lolly*, which became the *Scythian Suite*, to the distress of Glazunov at the Conservatory. There was a further concert tour in America and a return to France for the staging of *The Buffoon*, followed by a summer in Brittany working on a new

piano concerto, for which he relied to some extent on earlier material, written before he left Russia. In France he renewed his earlier friendship with the symbolist poet Konstantin Bal'mont, who had taken refuge abroad after 1918. Prokofiev was the soloist at the first performance of the new concerto, which took place in Chicago on 16th December 1921, two weeks before the opening of his opera *Love for Three Oranges* in the same city.

The Piano Concerto in C major, Opus 26, opens with a Russian theme, a clarinet solo, written in 1916-17, immediately followed by an energetic Allegro, its impetus continued with the entry of the solo piano, a third theme being introduced by the soloist, to form the basis of a movement that ends with an ascending sequence first written down in 1911. The second movement is in the form of a theme and variations, the melody itself sketched in 1913 and at first presented primarily by the woodwind, before the five variations, two of which had been written in 1916-17. The first variation is given to the soloist, the second accompanied by a stormy piano part, the third relaxing to lead to an Andante meditativo, and the brusque fifth variation followed by the re-appearance of the theme, with percussive accompaniment from the soloist. The last movement makes use of two themes from a string quartet started but abandoned in 1918. A bassoon melody starts the movement, two further themes offering a lyrical decrease of tension, before the percussive energy of the conclusion.

The fourth Piano Concerto was commissioned by Paul Wittgenstein, the distinguished Austrian pianist, who had lost his right arm in the war. Ravel and Richard Strauss had written for him works that he did not care for, although Benjamin Britten's later *Diversions* for Wittgenstein seem to have been better received. He greeted Prokofiev's concerto coldly, thanking him for the work, but saying that he did not understand a note of it and would not play it. The composer thought at one time of rewriting the concerto for two hands, but never did so, and the first public performance only took place in 1956 in Berlin. The concerto is, in fact, an attractive work. Its first movement is impelled forwards by that motor energy that is so characteristic of Prokofiev. There is a gentle enough Andante and a third movement marked Moderato, and in a modified

version of sonata-form. The last movement in its rhythms, textures, turns of melody and harmonies, continues in a musical idiom that is characteristic of Prokofiev at the height of his powers, so that it can only be the peculiar technical difficulties the work offers a soloist that have prevented wider popularity.

Kun Woo Paik

The Korean pianist Kun Woo Paik studied at the Juilliard School in New York, in London and in Italy, and now lives in Paris, where he has established himself as a pianist of rare virtuosity and breadth of vision. He is particularly well known for his interpretation of the piano music of Ravel and of Liszt, the second demonstrated in 1982 in an acclaimed series of six recitals, in Paris repeated with similar success at the Wigmore Hall in London two years later. Kun Woo Paik has appeared in recitals and as a soloist with major orchestras throughout Europe and North America. In 1991 he performed in Poland the five piano concertos of Prokofiev with the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra and recorded them immediately following the concerts. He has also recorded the complete piano music of Ravel, including the two concertos, and the complete piano music of Mussorgsky.

The Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra of Katowice (PNRSO)

The Polish Radio National Symphony Orchestra of Katowice (PNRSO) was founded in 1945, soon after the end of the World War II, by the eminent Polish conductor Witold Rowicki. The PRNSO replaced the Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra which had existed from 1934 to 1939 in Warsaw, under the direction of another outstanding artist, Grzegorz Fitelberg. In 1947 Grzegorz Fitelberg returned to Poland and became artistic director of the PRNSO. He was followed by a series of distinguished Polish conductors - Jan Krenz, Bohdan Wodiezko, Kazimierz Kord, Tadeusz Strugala, Jerzy Maksymiuk, Stanislaw Wislocki and, since 1983, Antoni Wit. The orchestra has appeared with conductors and soloists of the greatest distinction and has recorded for Polskie Nagrania and many international record labels.

Antoni Wit

Antoni Wit was born in Cracow in 1944 and studied there, before becoming assistant to Witold Rowicki with the National Philharmonic Orchestra in Warsaw in 1967. He studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris and with Penderecki and in 1971 was a prize-winner in the Herbert von Karajan Competition. Study at Tanglewood with Skrowaczewski and Seiji Ozawa was followed by appointment as Principal Conductor first of the Pomeranian Philharmonic and then of the Cracow Radio Symphony Orchestra. In 1983 he took up the position of Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra in Katowice. Antoni Wit has undertaken many engagements abroad with major orchestras, ranging from the Berlin Philharmonic and the BBC Welsh and Scottish Symphony Orchestras to the Kusatsu Festival Orchestra in Japan.

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STEREO

PROKOFIEV
Piano Concertos

Kun Woo Paik, Piano

Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra
Antoni Wit

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**Playing
Time :
71'33"**

Concerto No. 3 in C Major, Op. 26

- | | | |
|----------|------------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | Andante-allegro | (9:24) |
| 2 | Tema con variazioni | (9:27) |
| 3 | Allegro ma non troppo | (9:34) |

Concerto No. 4 in B Flat Major, Op. 53

- | | | |
|----------|-----------------|----------------|
| 4 | Vivace | (4:40) |
| 5 | Andante | (12:14) |
| 6 | Moderato | (8:23) |
| 7 | Vivace | (1:30) |

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|----------|---|----------------|
| 8 | Concerto No. 1 in D Flat Major, Op. 10 | (15:58) |
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Recorded at the Concert Hall of the Polish Radio in Katowice from 13th to 18th May, 1991.

Producer: Beata Jankowska

Engineer: Otto Nopp

Music Notes: Keith Anderson

Publishers: Tracks 1-3, Boosey & Hawkes

Tracks 4-7, Sikorski

Track 8, Forberg/Jurgenson

Cover Painting by Vasily Bakscheyev



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Concerto No. 4 in B Flat Major, Op. 53

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