



London Philharmonic Orchestra

PROKOFIEV
ALEXANDER NEVSKY

KURT MASUR *conductor*
SARAH WALKER *mezzo-soprano*
LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA *and* **CHOIR**

PROKOFIEV CANTATA, ALEXANDER NEVSKY, OP. 78

Russia under the Mongolian Yoke
Song about Alexander Nevsky
The Crusaders in Pskov
Arise, Ye Russian People
The Battle on Ice
Field of the Dead
Alexander's Entry into Pskov

In the spring of 1938 Sergei Eisenstein, the Russian film director, invited Prokofiev to compose the music for a film about Alexander Nevsky, the Prince of Novgorod who defeated the Baltic Knights, invading Teutonic Crusaders, in a great battle on the ice at Lake Chud in 1242. Prokofiev had previously written film scores for *Lieutenant Kijé* and *The Queen of Spades*, and had just returned from a visit to the United States, where he studied the techniques of recording film music in Hollywood. He admired Eisenstein's films, and when he started work on the new commission he was delighted to discover that the film director was himself very knowledgeable about music. Prokofiev also involved himself in the technicalities of recording and sound mixing. The film, which was first shown in December 1938, has been internationally recognised as one of the classic masterpieces of screen art.

It is the usual fate of film music to sink or swim with its associated film, but Prokofiev believed in getting the maximum mileage out of anything he wrote. His Third and Fourth Symphonies had been based on an unperformed opera and a ballet, and he extracted concert suites from *Lieutenant Kijé* and the ballets *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella*. Perceiving that his *Alexander Nevsky* score could have an independent life in the concert hall as a cantata, he arranged it into a sequence of seven movements roughly corresponding to a sonata-form structure, re-scored the orchestral parts for a full symphony orchestra and in some parts had to re-compose the music.

The battle movement, which corresponds to a symphonic development section, and the finale required the most re-writing. The cantata received its first performance on 17 March 1939 with the composer conducting the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra, and has established a place for itself in the concert repertory.

To prepare himself for this work Prokofiev studied the history of the period and the Gregorian plainsong of the 12th and 13th centuries, but he concluded that the medieval chants would not make much impact on cinema audiences. He decided that rather than attempting to

re-create the actual music of 1242 the better course was to write the Crusaders' chants and the Russian songs as a present-day audience could imagine them to have sounded. The overall musical idiom, therefore, is modern and the technical procedure very much Prokofiev's own, but this vivid, heterogeneous score embraces evocations of medieval and Russian folk music. It also owes something to 19th-century Russian opera – Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* particularly – and quite appropriately meets the Soviet demand for ultimate optimism. Only two years after the cantata's first performance its heroic patriotism acquired a sudden topicality with the invasion of Russia by the 20th-century Teutons.

A short orchestral prelude, *Russia under the Mongolian Yoke*, conjures up a desolate picture by simple musical means. Shivering *tremolos* and soft patterns of demi-semiquavers in the strings are set beside wide-spaced parallel octaves and lonely-sounding solos for the woodwind. In the second movement (a *Lento* with a faster middle section) the altos, tenors and basses of the chorus sing of Nevsky's victory over the Swedes on the banks of the River Neva, and of their resolve to crush all invaders.

The Crusaders in Pskov introduces us to the enemy forces. Beginning softly but growing fiercer the Baltic Knights implacably repeat a Latin chant: 'Peregrinus, expectavi pedes meos in cymbalis est' ('As a foreigner, I expected my feet to be cymbal shod') to a darkly aggressive accompaniment. Then the Orchestra depicts the doleful condition of the people of Pskov. Their chromatic lamentations on strings and woodwind are almost drowned by the Knights' music, brutally declaimed by the brass. The fourth movement (*Allegro risoluto*) takes up again the call to arms at the end of the second. The simple but warm-blooded and bright-toned peasants – the choral sopranos are now brought in for the first time – firmly sound the call, and in a short central episode the altos and basses in turn voice the determination that 'in our native Russia no foe shall live'.

The Battle on Ice graphically develops the themes of the previous movements. A masterly orchestral picture of dawn on the frozen lake precedes the heat of battle. The Crusaders approach, still singing the chant heard earlier. Then the battle begins (*Allegro fff*) and the Crusaders at once take up a new chant: 'Vincent arma crucifers! Hostis pereat!' ('May the arms of the Cross conquer! May the enemy perish!'). The Orchestra answers with strains of

RUSSIA UNDER THE MONGOLIAN YOKE

the Russian call to arms, and Nevsky’s forces enter the fray with a lively new theme. The themes associated with both sides are played off against one another until the Russian victory is won. Then a slow coda mourns the dead, high violins supported by muted other strings finally recalling in longer note-values the theme of ‘in our native Russia no foe shall live’.

After the battle the personal cost must be counted. *Field of the Dead*, an *Adagio* with a slightly quicker middle section, is the dignified but deeply-felt lament of a Russian girl, set by Prokofiev as a mezzo soprano solo accompanied by woodwind and strings.

Alexander’s Entry into Pskov, the choral finale, recapitulates the Russian themes and introduces a song of celebration, which brings the cantata to a rejoicing climax.

Programme notes © Eric Mason

*A, I bylo delo na Neve reke.
Na Neve reke, na bolshoi vode.
Tam rubili my zloe voinstvo,
Zloe voinstvo, voisko shvedskoe.*

*Ukh! Kak bilis my, kak rubilis my!
Ukh! Rubili korabli po dostochkam,
Nashu krovrudu ne zhaleli my
Zo velikuyu zemlyu russkuyu.*

*Gei! Gde proshel topor, byla ulitsa.
Gde letelo kope, pereulohek.
Polozhili my shvedov nemchinov,
Kak kovyl travu na sukhoi zemle.*

*Ne ustupim my zemlyu russkuyu.
kto pridet na Rus’, budet na smert bit.
Podnyalasya Rus’, suprotiv, vraga,
Podnimis naboi, slavnyi Novgorod!*

*Yes, ‘twas on the River Neva it occurred,
On the Neva’s stream, on the waters deep.
There we slew our foes’ pick of fighting men,
Pick of fighting men, army of the Swedes.*

*Ah! How we did fight, how we routed them!
Yes, we smashed their ships of war to kindling wood.
In the fight our red blood was freely shed
For our great land, our native Russian land.*

*Hey! Where the broad-axe swung was an open street.
Through their ranks ran a lane where the spear was thrust.
We mowed down the Swedes, the invading troops,
Just like the feather-grass grown on desert soil.*

*We shall never yield native Russian land.
They who march on Russia shall be put to death.
Rise against the foe, Russian land arise!
Rise to arms, arise, great town of Novgorod!*

ARISE, YE RUSSIAN PEOPLE

*Vstavaite, lyudi russkie,
Na slavnyi boi, na smertnyi boi,
Vstavaite, lyudi volnye,
Za nashu zemlyu chestnuyu.*

*Zhivym boitsam pochet i chest,
A mertvym slava vechnaya.
Za otchii dom, za russki krai,
Vstavaite, lyudi russkie.*

*Na Rusi rodnoi, na Rusi bolshoi ne byvat vragu.
Podnimaisya, vstan, mat rodnaya Rus'!*

*Vragam na Rus' ne khazhivat,
Polkov na Rus' ne vazhivat,
Putei na Rus' ne vidyvat,
Polei Rusi ne teptyvat'.*

*Arise to arms, ye Russian folk,
In battle just, in fight to death.
Arise ye people, free and brave,
Defend our fair, our native land.*

*To living warriors high esteem,
Immortal fame to warriors slain.
For native home, for Russian soil
Arise ye people, Russian folk.*

*In our Russia great, in our native Russia no foe shall live.
Rise to arms, arise, native mother Russia!*

*No foe shall march 'cross Russian land,
No foreign troops shall Russia raid,
Unseen the ways to Russia are.
No foe shall ravage Russian fields.*

FIELD OF THE DEAD

*Ya poidu po polyu belomu.
Ploechu po polyu smertnomu.
Poishchu ya slavnykh sokolov,
zhenikhov moikh dobrykh molodtsev.*

*Kto lezhit mechami porublennyi,
Kto lezhit streloyu poranennyi.
Na poili oni krovyyu aloyu
Zemlyu chestnuyu, zemlyu russkuyu.*

*Kto pogib za Rus' smertyu dobroyu,
Potseluyu tgo v ochi mertvye,
A tomu molodtsu, chto ostalsya zhit,
Budu verno zhenoi, miloi ladoyu.*

*Ne vozmu v muzhya krasivogo;
Krasota zemnaya konchaetsya.
A poidu ya za khrabrogo.
Otzovitesya, yasny sokoly!*

*I shall go across the snow-clad field.
I shall fly above the field of death.
I shall search for valiant warriors there,
Those to me betrothed, stalwart men and staunch.*

*One lies quiet where sabres mangled him.
Here lies one impaled by an arrow shaft.
From their wounds warm red blood like the rain was shed
On our native soil, on our Russian fields.*

*He who fell for Russia in noble death
Shall be blest by my kiss on his dead eyes.
And to him, brave lad, who remained alive,
I shall be a true wife and a loving friend.*

*I'll not be wed to a handsome man;
Earthly charm and beauty fade fast and die.
I'll be wed to a man who's brave.
Hark ye, warriors brave, lion-hearted men!*

ALEXANDER’S ENTRY INTO PSKOV

*Na veliki boi vykhodila Rus’,
Voroga pobedila Rus’.
Na rodnoi zemle ne byvat vragu.
Kto pridet budet ne smert’ bit.*

*Veselisya, poi, mat rodnaya Rus’!
Na rodnoi Rusi ne byvat vragu.
Ne vidat vragu nashikh russkikh sel.
Kto pridet na Rus’, budet na smert bit.*

*Na Rusi rodnoi, na Rusi bolshoi ne byvat vragu.
Na velikii prazdnik sobralasya Rus’.
Veselisya, Rus! Veselisya Rus’, rodnaya mat!*

Russian transliteration by Catherine Elwall

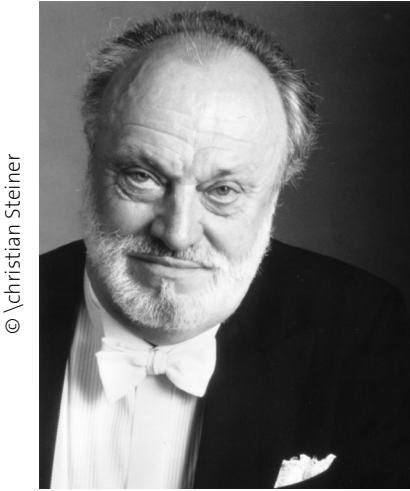
*In a great campaign Russia went to war.
Russia put down the hostile troops.
In our native land foemen shall not live.
Foes who come shall be put to death.*

*Celebrate and sing, native mother Russia!
In our native land foemen shall not live.
Foes shall never see Russian towns and fields.
They who march on Russia shall be put to death.*

*In our Russia great, in our native Russia no foe shall live.
To a fete in triumph all of Russia came.
Celebrate, rejoice, celebrate and sing, our mother land.*

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KURT MASUR *conductor*



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Kurt Masur was well known as a distinguished conductor and humanist. His 25-year relationship with the LPO began in 1987, and he became Principal Guest Conductor from 1988–1992. He was appointed the Orchestra’s Principal Conductor in September 2000 and led it for the following seven years. In September 2002 Masur also became Music Director of the Orchestre National de France in Paris, and in July 2007 he conducted the joint forces of the two orchestras in an extraordinary BBC Prom concert to celebrate his 80th birthday.

Masur was Kapellmeister of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra for an unprecedented 26 years from 1970, after which he became the Orchestra’s first ever Conductor Laureate. He was instrumental in preventing an outbreak of violence in Leipzig in the lead up to the fall of the Berlin Wall, and during his tenure as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra he led a moving performance of Brahms’s German Requiem in the wake of 9/11.

As well as towering interpretations of the core central European orchestral repertoire, Masur conducted world

premieres of works by many of the major composers of the late 20th century, and collaborated with jazz pianist Herbie Hancock and Wynton Marsalis’s Lincoln Centre Jazz Orchestra.

A professor at the Leipzig Academy of Music from 1975, Kurt Masur received numerous honours and titles, including Commander of the Legion of Honour from the Government of France and New York City Cultural Ambassador from the City of New York in 1997; Commander Cross of Merit of the Polish Republic in 1999; and the Cross with Star of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2002. He held an honorary doctorate from London’s Royal College of Music and was an Honorary Citizen of his hometown, Brieg. Kurt Masur died in 2015.

SARAH WALKER *mezzo-soprano*



Sarah Walker began her musical life as a violinist at the Royal College of Music in London and subsequently studied singing with Vera Rozsa, with whom she has built up a wide repertoire ranging from Bach to 20th-century works by composers such as Berio, Boulez, Cage, Henze, Ligeti, Copland and Ives.

Walker is much in demand on the concert platform worldwide and has worked with Ozawa, Davis, Mackerras, Solti, Norrington, Boulez, Rozhdestvensky, Masur, Harnoncourt and Rattle. She appears regularly with the major British orchestras and at the major British and European festivals. She was a memorable soloist at the Last Night of the BBC Proms and sang under the late Leonard Bernstein in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in Berlin to celebrate the opening of the Berlin Wall (televised worldwide and recorded by Deutsche Grammophon).

She is closely associated with the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, where she has sung Baba the Turk in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* (recorded for Decca), Charlotte (*Werther*), Mrs Sedley (*Peter Grimes*) and new productions of Sallinen's *The King Goes Forth To France*, Maxwell Davies's *Taverner*, *Le Nozze di Figaro* and Handel's *Samson*. With English National

Opera her many roles include Mary Stuart, Charlotte, the Countess (*The Queen of Spades*), Cornelia (*Julius Caesar*), the title role in Britten's *Gloriana* and Katisha in *The Mikado*. Her Vienna State Opera debut was as Didon in *Les Troyens*; she has performed Cornelia in Geneva, Ottavia and Cornelia in San Francisco, Magdalene in Chicago and Cornelia and Micah at the Metropolitan Opera. Her Glyndebourne debut was as Diana in Cavalli's *La Calisto* and she has since sung Monteverdi's Ottavia, Penelope and Poppea.

Sarah Walker has perhaps received the greatest critical acclaim for her recitals. Since the overwhelming success of her Wigmore Hall debut she has visited all the major European cities and festivals, the USA, Australia and New Zealand and has made numerous recordings which reflect her vast recital repertoire.

Sarah Walker was made a CBE in the 1991 Queen's Birthday Honours.

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The London Philharmonic Choir was founded in 1947 as the chorus for the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

It is widely regarded as one of Britain's finest choirs and consistently meets with critical acclaim. Performing regularly with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the London Philharmonic Choir also works with many other orchestras throughout the United Kingdom and makes annual appearances at the BBC Proms. It has performed under some of the world's most eminent conductors – among them Marin Alsop, Pierre Boulez, Semyon Bychkov,

Sir Mark Elder, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Edward Gardner, Bernard Haitink, Neeme Järvi, Vladimir Jurowski, Kurt Masur, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Sir Roger Norrington, Andrés Orozco-Estrada, Sir Simon Rattle, Sir Georg Solti, Nathalie Stutzmann and Klaus Tennstedt.

The London Philharmonic Choir has made numerous recordings for CD, radio and television. The Choir often travels overseas and in recent years it has given concerts in many European countries, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Australia. lpc.org.uk



LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is one of the world’s finest orchestras, balancing a long and distinguished history with its present-day position as one of the most dynamic and forward-looking ensembles in the UK. This reputation has been secured by the Orchestra’s performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, trail-blazing international tours and wide-ranging educational work.

Founded by Sir Thomas Beecham in 1932, the Orchestra has since been headed by many of the world’s greatest conductors, including Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. Vladimir Jurowski was appointed the Orchestra’s Principal Guest Conductor in March 2003, and became Principal Conductor in September 2007. From September 2021 he will become the Orchestra’s Conductor Emeritus

The Orchestra is based at Southbank Centre’s Royal Festival Hall in London, where it has been Resident Orchestra since 1992, giving around 30 concerts a season. Each summer it takes up its annual residency at Glyndebourne Festival Opera where it has been Resident Symphony Orchestra for over 50 years. The Orchestra performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous international tours, performing to sell-out audiences in America, Europe, Asia and Australasia.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti and Tennstedt, to Masur and Jurowski. **lpo.org.uk**

01	02:59	Russia under the Mongolian Yoke
02	02:36	Song about Alexander Nevsky
03	05:48	The Crusaders in Pskov
04	02:08	Arise, Ye Russian People
05	11:45	The Battle on Ice
06	04:54	Field of the Dead
07	04:17	Alexander’s Entry into Pskov

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891–1953)

Cantata, Alexander Nevsky, Op. 78

KURT MASUR *conductor*
SARAH WALKER *mezzo-soprano*
LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
Konstantin Stoianov *leader*

Recorded live at the Southbank Centre’s **ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL**, London



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