



Sergey
PROKOFIEV

Symphony No. 3

Scythian Suite

Autumn

**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 Dyagilev for whom he wrote several ballet scores. He spent much of the next 16 years in France, though he returned periodically to Russia where his music received qualified approval. By 1936 he had decided to resettle 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.

The *Scythian Suite* had originated in music for a ballet *Ala and Lolly*, depicting the ancient Slavic people, commissioned by Sergey Dyagilev to a scenario by Sergey Gorodetsky – only to be rejected on grounds of being undanceable. The composer then reworked the incomplete score into the present suite, which received an equivocal reception at its première in Moscow – conducted by the composer – on 29th January, 1916. A scheduled

performance in December was cancelled as the large orchestra needed more players than could be found owing to their being mobilized for the war effort, though not before the influential critic Leonid Sabaneyev had penned a scathing review of the non-existent hearing. Subsequently, the suite found some popularity as a showpiece in the repertoire of international orchestras, where it has remained.

The first movement, *The Adoration of Veless and Ala*, opens with hectic activity on brass and percussion, rapidly broadening into a surging processional for the whole orchestra. This duly subsides until a low murmuring remains in the depths, then flutes and harp unfold a sensuous theme that gradually draws in the strings with their whirling ostinato patterns. More ominous elements soon come to the fore, but the music retains its unworldly calm through to a quietly undulating close. The second movement, *The Enemy God and the Dance of the Spirits of Darkness*, launches straight into an aggressive dance with brass and drums much in evidence, while this is succeeded by a hectic string fugato alternating with a bizarre episode for woodwind, tuned percussion and string harmonics. Aspects of all three ideas are brought together in a climactic resumption of the earlier dance, now even more uninhibited as it surges to its brazen ending.

The third movement, *Night*, starts in near inaudibility on upper strings, against which the woodwind and tuned percussion share a chaste theme that takes on a more ominous import as the harmonic texture fills out and a mystical aura envelops the music. Greater rhythmic activity on woodwind and strings presages a short-lived climax with menacing figures heard on brass, though the initial calm is restored as the music returns to the ethereal realms whence it came. The fourth movement, *The Glorious Departure of Lolly and the Procession of the Sun*, commences with scurrying activity in the lower strings, settling into a quirky martial rhythm with resourceful writing for woodwind and percussion. This takes on a more rapid dance-like motion, building to a brief climax before alighting on a chord for strings. Against this suspenseful

backdrop, gently rotating patterns on woodwind, brass, harp and percussion gradually expand into a resplendent apotheosis which brings about the dazzling conclusion.

The symphonic sketch *Autumn* was written in 1910 and first performed on 19th July the following year at Moscow's Sokolniki Park, where it was conducted by the composer. Unlike the earlier *Dreams* [Naxos 8.573353], where the influence of Scriabin is uppermost, this work looks to that of Myaskovsky in its dark-hued textures and an underlying air of resignation. Prokofiev revised it in 1915 then again in 1934, retaining a fondness for the piece throughout his life. The piece begins with sombre gestures in lower woodwind and strings, establishing a steady motion that largely persists throughout. Speculative activity from upper woodwind adds to the prevailing restive mood, then more aggressive gestures from the strings presage an increase in expressive tension – upper strings assuming the foreground with a soulful melody (made up from those fragmentary gestures) that acts as the work's main climax before it returns to the earlier ambivalence. Woodwind and brass pursue a tentative dialogue, though the final word is given to strings as the music pensively heads into the depths from which it emerged.

The *Third Symphony* came about through Prokofiev's desire to salvage music from his opera *The Fiery Angel*, on which he worked throughout the mid-1920s and which was accepted for staging at the Berlin State Opera. This failed to materialize (a complete performance did not occur until 1955), and after a concert hearing of the second act in June 1928, the composer reworked portions of the opera in symphonic terms. The resulting symphony (dedicated to Nikolay Myaskovsky) was premiered in Paris on 17th May, 1929, Pierre Monteux conducting.

The first movement opens with clamorous gestures from the whole orchestra, whose nagging underlying rhythm persists as the music subsides into a darkly expressive theme for the lower strings. This unfolds at length and takes in variants for oboe and upper strings before reaching a brief pause. From here a second theme emerges on strings, more rhythmically defined than its predecessor, and which is increasingly disrupted by lively activity on upper woodwind and brass. From here an increasingly strenuous development of both themes ensues, gaining all the while in

emotional intensity as the initial rhythm re-emerges and the music duly builds to its climactic reprise in a powerful restatement of the first theme on strings with elements of the other ideas, culminating in glowering brass chords then a manic burst of activity on brass and percussion. This dies down to leave the first theme sounding on upper woodwind and strings, against a mesmeric backdrop of interlocking rhythmic patterns lower in the texture – which latter coalesce into the ostinato rhythm from the outset, thereby providing an ominous close.

The second movement begins with chorale-like textures on strings, against which woodwind intone a plaintive theme whose blissful refrain (often decked out with harmonics on strings) reappears at key junctures. The central section conjures a more anxious note with glinting gestures on upper strings that merge into a searching theme on woodwind then strings, but solo violin restores the earlier poise as the initial theme is restated on woodwind. The refrain then appears once more as the music moves eloquently if questioningly to its conclusion.

The third movement starts with strident activity on strings and brass, soon heading into an arresting texture where multi-divided string harmonics evoke an intangible and malevolent atmosphere. At length solo flute is heard, supplicatory chords presaging the central section which focusses on a plangent melody for woodwind and upper strings before opening into some of the work's most lush textures. At length the string harmonics resume and tension increases, the supplicatory chords this time leading into a coda of stark splendour on brass.

The finale is launched with grinding chordal activity on brass and strings, the motion soon increasing as strings unfold a theme of mounting desperation against assaultive gestures on brass and percussion. Suddenly this activity ceases to leave woodwind and strings musing plaintively on earlier motifs, denoting an element of calm to offset the intensity elsewhere, but this latter inevitably returns in the guise of the earlier 'desperate' theme then on to the opening chordal gestures – imbued with a finality that engenders the seismic closing bars.

Richard Whitehouse

São Paulo Symphony Orchestra



Since its first concert in 1954, the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra – OSESP – 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.

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Marin Alsop



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. 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 in 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. 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. 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.

This fourth volume in Marin Alsop's acclaimed Prokofiev symphonic cycle features two of his most viscerally exciting works. Using material salvaged from his opera *The Fiery Angel*, the *Third Symphony* was hailed by Serge Koussevitzky at its 1929 première as 'the best symphony since Tchaikovsky's *Sixth*'. Originally commissioned as a ballet by Sergey Dyagilev but rejected as un-danceable, the *Scythian Suite* has become a popular orchestral showpiece, while Prokofiev retained a lifelong fondness for his dark-hued early symphonic sketch *Autumn*.



Sergey
PROKOFIEV
(1891-1953)

Scythian Suite (Ala et Lolly), Op. 20 (1914-15)	20:25
1 I. The Adoration of Veless and Ala	6:26
2 II. The Enemy God and the Dance of the Spirits of Darkness	2:47
3 III. Night	5:58
4 IV. The Glorious Departure of Lolly and the Procession of the Sun	5:14
5 Autumn – Symphonic Sketch, Op. 8 (1910, rev. 1915, 1934)	6:35
Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Op. 44 (1928)	34:27
6 I. Moderato	12:58
7 II. Andante	7:01
8 III. Allegro agitato – Allegretto	8:09
9 IV. Andante mosso – Allegro moderato	6:19

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Marin Alsop

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