

PROKOFIEV • WORKS FOR VIOLIN & PIANO



audite

FRANZISKA PIETSCH
DETLEV EISINGER

Violin Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Op. 80

- I. Andante assai 7:04
- II. Allegro brusco 7:01
- III. Andante 7:48
- IV. Allegrissimo 7:31

Violin Sonata No. 2 in D major, Op. 94b

- I. Moderato 8:19
- II. Scherzo: Presto 5:17
- III. Andante 4:04
- IV. Allegro con brio 7:31

Cinq mélodies, Op. 35b

- I. Andante 2:29
- II. Lento, ma non troppo – Poco più mosso – Tempo I 2:58
- III. Animato, ma non allegro – Poco più tranquillo – Meno mosso 3:45
- IV. Allegretto leggero e scherzando 1:27
- V. Andante non troppo – Pochissimo più animato 3:24

Prokofiev's works for violin and piano

In 1918 Sergei Prokofiev left the Soviet Union via the back door, travelling from Vladivostok into the USA via Japan. Eighteen years later, after several visits and performances, he returned permanently, taking up residence in Moscow with his family. Nostalgia had driven the cosmopolitan composer to this move, and generous promises by Stalin's mighty henchmen facilitated his decision. The two violin sonatas were composed after his voluntary repatriation and finalised during the war years during which he was mainly occupied with large-scale film scores, oratorios and symphonic projects. In the face of these colossal works, geared towards open and public presentation, his chamber works on the one hand provide a necessary contrast, whilst on the other they seem to be inward echoes of his mighty works.

The two violin sonatas vary significantly from one another, representing two opposite poles of Prokofiev's musical expressivity. The F minor Sonata was the first to be started, with initial sketches going back to 1938. The D major Sonata was the first to be completed; Prokofiev composed it, originally for flute and piano, during a relatively compact period from September 1942. Immediately after the public premiere of this version on 7 December 1943 at the Moscow Conservatoire, violinists as well showed interest in the work. On 25 April 1944, the composer noted: "Recently David Oistrakh, one of our greatest violinists, and I created a transcription for violin. That was not too difficult as the flute part could easily be transferred to fit the violin. The number of changes in the flute part was minimal, resulting mostly from bowing necessities. The piano part remained unchanged."

The Sonata in F minor, Op. 80

The genesis of the F minor Sonata extended, in total, over eight years. The composer repeatedly put the piece aside, bringing forward commissions, arranging his film score to *Alexander Nevsky* into a cantata, and composing his opera *War and Peace*, as well as his *Fifth Symphony*. In 1938, when he noted down the first sketches (mainly the themes and openings of movements one to three), intellectual life in the USSR was virtually paralysed following years of political persecution and terrifying show trials. Although Prokofiev himself did not end up in the mills of the Great Terror – having remigrated relatively recently, he served as a figurehead, including in foreign affairs – many of his friends and colleagues disappeared from public life. On 20 April 1937, the general director of the Bolshoi, Vladimir Mutnykh, was arrested (he had commissioned the ballet *Romeo and Juliet* which went on to be premiered outside the Soviet Union), followed on 3 November by the composer and musicologist Nikolai Zhilyayev, a friend of Prokofiev; and on 15 November Adrian Piotrovsky, one of the authors of the ballet scenario, was taken away. Natalya Sats, who had commissioned *Peter and the Wolf*, was taken into custody on 21 August. She was the only one to return, having served five years in a Gulag, whereas the others were all killed shortly after being arrested. Even if it is not clear exactly how much Prokofiev knew about the fate of the Stalin victims, it is fair to assume that the same holds true for his F minor Sonata as for Dmitri Shostakovich's symphonies: the latter once explained that every movement was a musical memorial.

When Germany invaded Russia in June 1941, all powers of the Soviet Union were sworn to the “Great Patriotic War”. On 8 August 1941, Prokofiev and several other artists, as well as Conservatoire teachers, were evacuated from Moscow to the northern Caucasus; here, he was initially to work on his opera *War and Peace* and the film score to *Ivan the Terrible*. It was not until 1943 that he restarted work on the sonata, only to put it aside once again; only after he had written and revised the D major Sonata did he finally complete his Op. 80.

Is it possible to create a coherent piece after such a long period of time and with so many interruptions? Without a doubt: for the history of this sonata was also a history of a search for a concise form of expression – one which is not common in Prokofiev’s œuvre. David Oistrakh, who seems to have been the main source of motivation to complete the work, remembered the preparations for the premiere, which he played alongside the pianist Lev Oborin in the small hall of the Moscow Conservatoire on 23 October 1946: “Never have I worked on a piece with greater passion or dedication. Before the first public performance of the sonata I was not able to play, or think of, anything else.” When Prokofiev presented the new work to the violinist and fellow composer Nikolai Myaskovsky, the latter asked Prokofiev if he realised what he had achieved with this work. The four movements of the sonata are similarly proportioned: the first one features prominent metre changes as well as that “cold” passage which Prokofiev likened to wind “sweeping across a cemetery”; the second movement, a harsh scherzo, which he suspended between two characters, “brusco” (brusque) and “eroico” (heroic); the third with its otherworldly, floating qualities; and the fourth, agitated movement which, at the end, refers back to the beginning before contracting into one single note and fading away. “In fact, there is nothing like the gloomy First Sonata for Violin and Piano in Prokofiev’s entire œuvre. Dense, intellectual and tragic, it stands in a class by itself”, according to Harlow Robinson. “Some years later, Oistrakh would play its first and third movements at Prokofiev’s funeral; the sonata was the only piece he could find, amidst Prokofiev’s overwhelmingly optimistic music, that conveyed an understanding of grief.”

The D major Sonata, Op. 94b

For his F minor Sonata Prokofiev opted for the classical sequence of sonata form, scherzo, slow movement and finale. All four movements are of similar length. The D major Sonata also follows the classical model; the last movement is cast in rondo form. The proportions, however, are conceived differently. The two central movements of Op. 94 taken together are barely longer than the outer movements on their own. They thus move together into a unit of contrasts, as it were: the four movements veil a latent three-movement form. In the scherzo, the composer combines a fast, effervescent and dance-like character (the outer sections of the ABA form) with a song-like central section. This refers, in a different temperament, to the calm, *cantabile* third movement. There, a song-like first section, whose melody made up of triadic figures initially in the violin part and then briefly also in the piano part, is followed by a wave-like, relaxed middle section. Its soundscape is reminiscent of the third movement of the F minor Sonata – the only moment where these two contrasting works touch each other. The central pieces of the D major Sonata are interlocked by virtue of expectation, recollection and variation of their main characters.

Prokofiev conceived the opening piece in sonata form with classicist clarity. The two main themes differ noticeably, one accentuating the rhythmically articulated motion, the other emphasising stylised singing. The middle section, the development of musical ideas, reveals a chronological proximity to the *Cinderella* ballet score. The manner in which the march character has been stressed in the motifs of the first theme, and the popular qualities highlighted in the *cantabile* secondary theme, creates a cheerful, lively sense of theatricality in which the music takes place. The final rondo lives up to the classical ideal of the spirited grand finale. The themes appear as musical characters that are partly decorated with props from contemporary light music from France and America. Prokofiev adds the odd melancholy passage to this jolly memory of the *Symphonie classique* and the momentous experiences of that time outside Russia: this forms part of the game, the internal theatricality of the neoclassical style.

The *Cinq mélodies*, Op. 35b

In his autobiography, Sergei Prokofiev recalled: “In December/January [1919/20] I went on tour to California. The concerts themselves were not particularly interesting, but the six weeks which I spent in that wonderful state were [...] relaxing for me. In California, and partly even beforehand in Chicago, I wrote the *Five Songs without Words* Op. 35.” The title does not follow Mendelssohn’s example, denoting a (Romantic) piano piece: instead, Prokofiev used it in an entirely literal sense. The *Cinq mélodies* were originally written for accompanied voice, which does not present a poetic text but sings only vowel sounds. Maurice Ravel’s *Vocalise-étude en forme de Habanéra* of 1907 and the vocalise with which Sergei Rachmaninov closed his song cycle Op. 34 of 1915 might have served as sources of inspiration. In Prokofiev’s oeuvre, the *Songs without Words* form a link between the songs based on poems by Anna Akhmatova, Op. 27, composed in 1916 when he was still in Russia, and the *Five Poems of Konstantin Balmont* which he wrote in the USA and in France in 1921.

In his memoirs, Prokofiev continued: “This form [of vocalise with piano accompaniment], however, proved impractical, so I later arranged it for violin and piano with the help of the violin virtuoso [Paul] Kochánski [from Odessa].” Even today, the *Cinq mélodies* are better known in this instrumental version of 1925. What originally represented a significant shift in Prokofiev’s composing for the human voice now principally enriches the violin repertoire. Heinrich Neuhaus, pianist and eminent pedagogue (his students included Sviatoslav Richter and Emil Gilels), found that the piece’s *cantabile* qualities came into their own in the transcription: “Few of our contemporary composers are capable of producing such expansive, elegantly curved, seamless, expressive and emotionally intensive melodic lines.”

Habakuk Traber

Translation: *Viola Scheffel*



FRANZISKA PIETSCH

Born in East Berlin, she received her first violin lessons from her father at the age of five. She gave her debut at the Komische Oper Berlin aged eleven, after which she regularly performed as a soloist alongside renowned orchestras of the GDR. She entered the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler as a junior student, where she studied with Werner Scholz. As an emerging talent, she enjoyed special state support until her father escaped to the West in 1984. Two years of reprisals by the regime followed until she was able to leave the country in 1986. She continued her studies with Ulf Hoelscher (Karlsruhe), Jens Ellermann (Hannover) and Dorothy Delay at the Juilliard School in New York. Masterclasses with renowned musicians including Wanda Wilkomirska, Ruggiero Ricci and Herman Krebbers rounded off her musical training.

Prokofiev's works reflect facets of her own biography to a significant degree: Franziska Pietsch's musical training, thanks to being funded and promoted by the state, was initially informed by the Eastern European tradition. Her own musical socialisation thus brought Prokofiev's music close to her heart. His two Violin Sonatas appear as two contrasting poles within his oeuvre – her life has also moved between extremes: from celebrated child star to repressive boycott, and back to success.

Franziska Pietsch has won numerous competitions, including the Bach-Wettbewerb Leipzig, Concours Maria Canals in Barcelona, the International Kocian Violin Competition and the International Violin Competition Rudolfo Lipizer. She won the Parke-Davis Förderpreis as well as the Prize of the Brahmsgesellschaft Baden-Baden. As a soloist, she has appeared in many European countries as well as in America and Asia, performing under conductors such as Antoni Wit, Arpad Joó, Moshe Atzmon, Julia Jones, Toshiyuki Kamioka and George Hanson. From 1998 until 2002 she was First Concertmaster of the Sinfonieorchester Wuppertal, and from 2006 until 2010 she was Deuxième Soliste of the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg. She is also regularly invited to lead the orchestras of the Düsseldorf and Frankfurt opera houses as well as the WDR Sinfonieorchester Cologne.

Franziska Pietsch is particularly passionate about chamber music and is a founding member of the Trio Testore. Alongside her busy performing schedule, she also arranged the trio's annual chamber music festival, "Mai Klassik". In summer 2015, Franziska Pietsch parted with the ensemble in order to be able to focus on other chamber music formations. In 2014 she became a member of the String Trio Lirico and has performed many concerts since 2012 with her piano partner, Detlev Eisinger. Their audite album of Grieg Violin Sonatas has received rave reviews as well as nominations for the Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik and the International Classical Music Award. Franziska Pietsch plays a violin by Carlo Antonio Testore (Milan) of 1751.

DETLEV EISINGER,

born in Munich, began playing the piano at the age of seven and gave his first piano recital, as well as performances with orchestra, at the age of thirteen. He studied with Walter Krafft and later with Professor Erik Then-Bergh at the Hochschule für Musik in Munich, where he graduated in 1980 with distinction. In 1986, he won a scholarship to attend the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris.

After graduating, Detlev Eisinger embarked on a busy career as a performer in Germany and abroad, an exceptional initial project being the complete performance of JS Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier* in Munich, Vienna, Graz, Salzburg and Klagenfurt. He was also invited to give concerts in Menton, Paris and Montpellier, at the *Kissinger Sommer*, the *Richard-Strauss-Tage* in Garmisch and at the *Kodály Festival* in Hungary. He has given piano recitals and played concertos in major European cities (including at the Philharmonie Berlin and *Münchner Klaviersommer*) as well as in Canada and the USA. He has also toured South Africa several times. Radio and CD recordings followed.

Alongside his career as a soloist, Detlev Eisinger also performs chamber music and appears as an accompanist, having worked with singers such as Hermann Prey and Kieth Engen. Since 2012 he has appeared regularly with the violinist Franziska Pietsch, resulting in the foundation of the Duo Pietsch-Eisinger, giving concerts and making recordings.

Detlev Eisinger's lecture recitals have proved popular with audiences. A further facet of his versatile career are his introductions to the dramatic works of Richard Wagner: from 2002 until 2008, he introduced the complete Wagner operas at the Bayreuther Festspiele in the form of piano matinees, resulting in further invitations from opera houses and festivals in Germany and abroad.



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e-mail: info@audite.de

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Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

editing: Dipl.-Tonmeister Justus Beyer

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