



Sergey

PROKOFIEV

Symphony No. 6

Waltz Suite

São Paulo
Symphony
Orchestra

Marin Alsop



Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Symphony No. 6 • Waltz Suite

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 Lyadov 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 a concert pianist and fulfilled prestigious commissions for the likes of 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 sixteen 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 – in Moscow on 5th March 1953, barely an hour before that of Stalin – went largely unnoticed.

If its predecessor [Naxos 8.573029] offered an obliquely affirmative take on the notion of a 'victory symphony', the *Sixth Symphony* is a decidedly equivocal response to the aftermath of war and its consequences. Prokofiev began work on it towards the end of 1945, but the onset of ill-health the following year delayed its completion and the work was not finished until February 1947. Yevgeny Mravinsky and the Leningrad Philharmonic

Orchestra gave the première in Leningrad on 11th October, where it was well received by audience and critics alike, but the official response was initially cautious – leading to its outright condemnation in the 'Zhdanov decree' of February 1948. Thereafter the work made its way relatively slowly, and it was not until the 1980s that performances occurred with some frequency. Despite his ambivalence to abstract music, Prokofiev regarded the symphony highly (he had considered dedicating it to the memory of Beethoven), but a more tangible influence is that of Nikolay Myaskovsky – twelve years Prokofiev's senior, with whom he enjoyed lasting personal and professional friendship.

The first movement opens with a sardonic descending gesture on brass that prefaces the first theme, expounded cautiously on strings then woodwind in typically unpredictable harmonies that offset the often soloistic orchestration. At length this makes way for the second theme, a plaintive and Eastern-sounding melody initially on oboes before being taken up by horn and upper strings. A surging idea on strings and woodwind emerges as *codetta* to an exposition which ends with fugitive echoes of the first theme. The development begins with an ostinato pattern from piano over which strings then woodwind exchange phrases of an ominous idea that is derived from the first theme, which latter heads forth in increasingly animated terms prior to its violent culmination on brass and percussion. A ricocheting horn motif subsides into the calm recall of the second theme in more subdued tones, all that is heard of a reprise that summarily passes into a coda whose bringing back of the ostinato pattern rapidly erupts into massive brass chords. These remain subdued though unresolved as the music dies away.

The slow movement begins with shrill exchanges on upper woodwind over glowering chords on lower strings and percussion which presage the heartfelt main theme, unfolding on brass and strings before being restated in expressively heightened terms. A brief transition with the

piano to the fore leads into a more restrained second theme, initially shared between strings and woodwind before this is taken up by upper strings and transformed into its predecessor on the way to a central climax that centres on an ominous 'ticking' motion on woodwind and percussion over thundering timpani. Dying away, this is followed by a glowing recollection of the second theme from horns and strings, with solo woodwind and strings intoning further variations as are punctuated by chords on piano then brass. Upper strings then build towards a climactic restatement of the first theme heard across the orchestra, which culminates in a return of the shrill exchanges and glowering chords as heard at the opening. From here the music subsides into a tranquil coda, in which elements of both themes are gently laid to rest.

The finale's main theme is immediately announced in animated terms by upper strings and woodwind, over a forceful rhythmic accompaniment on piano and lower strings. A subsidiary and more ambivalent theme is allotted to woodwind over quietly marching strings, prior to a curtailed return of the first theme. There follows an agile *fugato* with the main theme always to the fore, one whose momentum is maintained through to the subtly altered restatement of the second theme – elements from both these themes now being combined as the music heads towards a recklessly affirmative climax. At length it dies down on solo woodwind and strings, itself making way for the unexpected return of the chant-like theme from the first movement over hesitant gestures on piano and strings. The mood grows ever more ominous, before this erupts despairingly on strings and brass – the focal-point towards which the whole work has been headed – then the rhythmic accompaniment from the outset provokes a furious activity, whose deadening final thuds are brutally answered by the desperately defiant closing chords.

Prokofiev was never averse to recycling music between projects, and his *Waltz Suite* – written at much the same time as the *Sixth Symphony* and premiered in Moscow on 13th May 1947 under the composer – does so

with sections from three separate works. Thus the first and fifth waltzes derive from the opera *War and Peace*, the second, fourth and sixth waltzes from the ballet *Cinderella*, and the third waltz from the aborted score for the film *Lermontov* – thereby resulting in a waltz-sequence which works (surprisingly?) well as a quasi-symphonic entity.

Since We Met opens with a capricious theme for upper woodwind, given added suavity by strings and brass before heading into a more speculative episode as punctuated by rhythmic gestures from lower strings and with notably resourceful scoring – the initial theme at length resuming to provide a robust conclusion. *In the Palace* begins with delicate exchanges on woodwind and strings, making way for a main theme that is plaintive and incisive by turns, and decked out with especially piquant harmony – the secondary episode betraying a hint of wistfulness that persists through to the hushed close. *Mephisto Waltz* is the most energetic, its often sweeping gestures enhanced by glinting percussion, and while the central episode is correspondingly subdued, the prevailing rhythmic activity reasserts itself for a lively ending.

End of the Fairy Tale is by contrast the most inward waltz, its elegant main theme sounding especially sensuous on divided strings – and if the secondary idea is slightly more animated in profile, the conclusion is one of enveloping repose. *New Year's Eve Ball* commences with a rush of activity that persists through the agile and occasionally arch-sounding main theme, for all that its successor is more restrained in scoring and expression – such activity bringing the music to its brief climax prior to the artful close. *Happiness* makes for a decisive rounding-off in every sense – its determined manner underlined by some of the liveliest scoring in the sequence, and with nothing in the way of a contrasting episode to impede its onward progress on the way to a forceful culmination which ends this unusual yet appealing opus in fine style.

Richard Whitehouse

São Paulo Symphony Orchestra



Since its first concert in 1954, the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra (Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo/Osesp) 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, since 2008 the group has toured widely throughout the São Paulo countryside, promoting concerts, workshops, and courses in music appreciation for over 250,000 people. The orchestra has released over seventy recordings, and its concerts are regularly broadcast on nationwide television and radio, as well as the internet. In 2012 Marin Alsop took the post of Principal Conductor, with Brazilian Celso Antunes as Associate Conductor. In 2013 Alsop was appointed as music director of Osesp and the orchestra made its fourth European tour, performing for the first time, and to great acclaim, at the Salle Pleyel in Paris, at the Berliner Philharmonie, and at the Royal Festival Hall in London. In 2014, to commemorate its 60th anniversary, Osesp co-commissioned a saxophone concerto by John Adams, and performed in five Brazilian states. It performs over a hundred concerts every season, for nearly 10,000 subscribers, at its own Sala São Paulo, which was chosen in 2015 by *The Guardian* as one of the ten best concert halls in the world. In 2016 it appears in major European Summer festivals, conducted by Marin Alsop. www.osesp.art.br

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Marin Alsop



music director of the acclaimed Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music in California. Alsop is often making history; in 2005 she was the first conductor to be awarded a MacArthur Genius award and in September 2013 as the first female conductor of the BBC's Last Night of the Proms in London.

www.marinalso.com

Marin Alsop is an inspiring and powerful voice in the international music scene, a music director of vision and distinction who passionately believes that "music has the power to change lives". She is recognized 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. Marin Alsop made history with her appointment as the 12th music director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra (BSO). With her inaugural concerts in September 2007, she became the first woman to head a major American orchestra. Her success as the BSO's music director has garnered national and international attention for her innovative programming and artistry. Her success was recognized when, in 2013, her tenure was extended to the 2020-2021 season. Alsop took up the post of principal conductor of the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra in 2012, and became music director in July 2013. She also holds the title of conductor emeritus at the Bournemouth Symphony in the United Kingdom, where she served as the principal conductor from 2002 to 2008. In the summer of 2016, she serves her 25th and final season as

Prokofiev started work on his *Sixth Symphony* in 1945 and, unlike the victorious mood of the *Fifth* (Naxos 8.573029) it reveals a darker response to war and its consequences. The work was condemned by the 'Zhdanov decree' but composer and critics regarded the symphony highly, the noble yet anguished threnody of its central *Largo* balanced by the painful violence of the outer movements. The work's ending has been described as "one of the most shattering in the repertoire". With themes both capricious and sensuous, the *Waltz Suite* recycles material from earlier scores to create a remarkably effective quasi-symphonic entity.



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PROKOFIEV
(1891-1953)

Symphony No. 6, Op. 111 (1945-47)

38:57

1 I. Allegro moderato

13:23

2 II. Largo

14:14

3 III. Vivace

11:20

Waltz Suite, Op. 110 (1946-47)

29:24

4 I. Since We Met – Allegro moderato (from *War and Peace*)

6:18

5 II. In the Palace – Allegro (from *Cinderella*)

5:39

6 III. Mephisto Waltz – Allegro precipitato (from *Lermontov*)

3:27

7 IV. End of the Fairy Tale – Adagio (from *Cinderella*)

4:58

**8 V. New Year's Eve Ball – Allegro, ma non troppo
(from *War and Peace*)**

5:40

9 VI. Happiness – Allegro espressivo (from *Cinderella*)

3:22

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Marin Alsop

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