

Sergei Prokofiev
The 2 Violin Concertos
Arabella Steinbacher
Sonata for Violin Solo in D maior, Op.115



Russian National Orchestra
Vasily Petrenko

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Violin Concert No. 1 in D major Op. 19

1	Andantino	10.22
2	Scherzo – Vivacissimo	3.59
3	Moderato-Allegro moderato-Più tranquillo	9.09

Violin Concerto No. 2 in G minor Op. 63

4	Allegro moderato	11.20
5	Andante assai-Allegretto-Andante assai	10.06
6	Allegro, ben marcato	6.12

Sonata for Violin Solo in D major Op. 115

7	Moderato	5.15
8	Theme – Andante dolce	0.28
9	Variation 1	0.28
10	Variation 2 – Scherzando	0.26
11	Variation 3 – Andante	0.32
12	Variation 4	0.37
13	Variation 5	0.41
14	Con brio-Allegro precipitato	4.07

Arabella Steinbacher, Violin

Russian National Orchestra conducted by **Vasily Petrenko**

Total playing time: 64.27

Recording Venues:

Grand Hall of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory January, 2012 (Concertos)
Concertgebouw Valthermond, The Netherlands, May 2012 (Violin Sonata)

Executive Producers: Rick Walker & Job Maarse

Recording Producer: Job Maarse

Balance Engineers: Erdo Groot (Concertos), Jean-Marie Geijzen (Violin Sonata)

Recording Engineers Concertos: Roger de Schot & Igor Solovyov

Editing: Erdo Groot; Matthijs Ruijter

Ms. Steinbacher currently plays the "Booth" Stradivari (1716) generously provided by the Nippon Music Foundation.

The Russian National Orchestra wishes to thank the Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation, the Mikhail Prokhorov Foundation, and the Charles Simonyi Fund for Arts and Sciences for their support of this recording.

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Sergei Prokofiev

Composed in an extraordinarily tumultuous time, Prokofiev's First Violin Concerto is a work with a long and complicated genesis and reception history. In 1915, Prokofiev completed his studies at the St Petersburg Conservatory, where he had gained a reputation as a highly original talent who enjoyed nothing more than giving a jolt to the established musical order. The First Piano Concerto, which he himself had performed with none other than Serge Koussevitzky, had already delivered him the prestigious Rubinstein Prize, and it was not long before the European music world was abuzz with his name. In Paris, he met the famed impresario of the Ballets Russes, Sergei Diaghilev, as well as his protégé, one Igor Stravinsky. And although Prokofiev and Stravinsky would never truly become friends, his *Sacre* left an indelible impression on the young composer.

Diaghilev, always on the look-out for new talent, commissioned Prokofiev to compose a ballet: *Ala and Lolly*. Although in Diaghilev's eyes, the ballet had the makings of a worthy successor to the *Sacre*, it was nevertheless a project that, from the outset, appeared destined for failure, one reason being that Prokofiev lacked the necessary experience for writing a ballet. It was not until 1921 that *Ala and Lolly* would appear in the repertoire of the Ballets Russes. A second ballet for the company, entitled *Chout*, would have a similar fate, with, this time, the outbreak of war as the fly in the ointment.

To avoid being drafted into military service, Prokofiev re-enrolled at the St Petersburg conservatory. This indeed enabled him to work undisturbed on such new compositions as a concertino for violin and orchestra. He however soon shelved the project in order to work on a much more ambitious one: an opera based on *The Gambler* by Dostoevski. Rehearsals for the opera's premiere, planned for the Mariinski Theatre's 1917 season, were however plagued by problems: after dissatisfaction amongst the singers and rebellion in the orchestra, the director ultimately packed it in. But, as if all that hadn't been enough, the actual *coup de grâce* came when growing political instability finally led to the February and October Revolutions, and the premiere was cancelled.

Due to such circumstances, Prokofiev was now a highly promising young composer with a growing catalogue of works, most of which had however yet to be performed. But despite these sombre prospects, he remained undaunted: in the summer of 1917, ensconced in a small village on the outskirts of St Petersburg, he commenced work on his First Symphony (the *Classical*) and resumed work on the sketches for the violin concertino. He reworked the latter into a fully-fledged violin concerto, whose slow first movement is based on music already composed

in 1915, and whose remaining two movements (the scherzo and slow final movement) betray the influence of Karol Szymanowski, in particular his *Myths* for violin and piano, a work Prokofiev had heard in 1916, in a performance by Polish violinist Paul Kochanski.

The concerto's premiere was planned to take place in November 1917, with Paul Kochanski as soloist. Political developments however once again conspired to throw a spanner in the works: the October Revolution and Lenin's accession to power had rendered the work's premiere impossible. In May of 1918, Prokofiev emigrated to the United States, in the hope of encountering a climate more conducive to artistic creativity. Nevertheless, the First Violin Concerto would not have its first public performance until 1923 – in Paris, but not with Paul Kochanski, with whom Prokofiev had lost all contact. Bronislav Huberman turned out not to be interested in the piece, and the young Russian virtuoso, Nathan Milstein, was unable to leave the Soviet Union. Ultimately, it was to Marcel Darrieux, leader of the orchestra of the Paris Opera, that the role fell. (Darrieux was a reasonably respected violinist, and would also christen Kurt Weill's violin concerto in 1925.) The conductor was Serge Koussevitzky, in a programme which also included the world premiere of Stravinsky's Octet, under the baton of its composer (in his debut as a conductor).

The concerto met with mixed reactions. Critics found its form too traditional and the violin part not virtuoso enough. Composer Georges Auric even referred to it as "Mendelssohnian," prompting Prokofiev to respond that Tchaikovsky's universally loved violin concerto had elicited the same criticism at its premiere. The renowned Hungarian violinist, Joseph Szigeti, was however fascinated by its "mixture of fairy-tale naïveté and daring savagery, in layout and texture." He performed the work a year later in Prague with Fritz Reiner and went on to introduce it in numerous other musical capitals in Europe and America. Koussevitzky also continued to champion it, conducting the first American performance on 24 April 1925 with Richard Burgin, leader of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, as soloist. The Soviet premiere was given by Nathan Milstein three days after the world premiere in Paris, accompanied, for want of an orchestra, by the young Vladimir Horowitz at the piano.

In contrast to the difficult birth of the First Violin Concerto, the Second presented Prokofiev with substantially fewer problems. The work was composed in 1935, shortly after Prokofiev's composition of the ballet *Romeo and Juliet* in an amazing four months. He had now returned to the Soviet Union, something which clearly left its mark on his musical style. Without denying his own personal idiom, Prokofiev began increasingly to assign greater importance to melody, striving to give this aspect of his

music an extremely clear, almost classical architecture. While it has been suggested that this stylistic shift had to do with the increasing pressure exerted by the Soviet leadership on artists, it is at the same time true that, already in numerous earlier works – the First Violin Concerto and First Symphony are prime examples – Prokofiev had exhibited a progression toward greater stylistic simplicity. Prokofiev's own comments on the subject are ambiguous, such that it is difficult to distinguish between politically correct language and truth. What is nevertheless clear is that, in the 1930s, Prokofiev regularly made reference to the concept of simplicity: "I strive for greater *simplicity* and more melody [...]. There has been too much dissonance [...]. We want a simpler and more melodic style for music, a simpler, less complicated emotional state, and dissonance once again relegated to its proper place as one element in music, resting principally upon the meeting of melodic lines." In an article entitled, *The Paths of Soviet Music* dating from 1934, he writes that the new musical style for which he stands is entirely based on melody, which "should be clear and simple, without, however, becoming repetitive or trivial. [...] The same applies to the technique, the form – this too must be clear and simple, but not stereotyped. It is not the old simplicity that is needed, but a new kind of simplicity. And this can be achieved only after the composer has mastered the art of composing serious, significant music, thereby acquiring the technique of expressing himself in simple, yet original terms."

The 'inspiration' behind Violin Concerto No. 2 was the French violinist, Robert Soetens, with whom Prokofiev toured extensively in 1935 and 1936. Soetens had, together with Samuel Dushkin, given the first performance of Prokofiev's Sonata for Two Violins. And as Stravinsky had written a violin concerto for Dushkin (1931), Prokofiev decided to do the same for Soetens. The work was largely written during Prokofiev's and Soetens' concert tour. "The number of cities in which I worked on the concerto directly reflects the nomad's existence I led during the concert tour. The first theme of the first movement was written in Paris, the first theme of the second movement, in Voronezh. The orchestration was completed in Baku and the premiere took place in Paris," he would later recall. Soetens would continue to perform the concerto throughout his career, and other great virtuosos, such as David Oistrakh and Jascha Heifetz quickly included it in their repertoires.

The Sonata for Solo Violin is a special work, not only in Prokofiev's oeuvre, but, indeed, the entire violin literature, as, in contrast to the solo violin works of, e.g., Bach, Ysaÿe and Bartók, Prokofiev did not intend it for a single soloist, but, rather, an entire ensemble of violins in unison! This owes to the fact that the piece was the result of a commission from the Soviet Art Council for a pedagogic work for talented children, suitable for performance both at concerts and competitions.

It was not uncustomary in Soviet violin classes for groups of violinists to play a work together in unison. But Prokofiev's sonata will have presented such young violinists with considerable difficulties. Above all the *con brio* finale demands the ultimate in ensemble playing. Like the Sixth Symphony, it was written in 1947, but its first public performance would not take place until after Prokofiev's death, with Ruggiero Ricci as soloist, on 10 July 1959. It has never become truly popular, and even Prokofiev's friend, Oistrakh, who performed all of Prokofiev's other works for violin, both in the concert hall and on disc, never played it. Performances by violin ensembles have also been few and far between – a pity, as, although it perhaps lacks the profundity of Prokofiev's other violin works, it is nevertheless an attractive and rewarding composition. While in their works for solo violin, Prokofiev's predecessors, Bach and Ysaÿe, had tried to create the illusion of polyphony and chords by means of double stops and arpeggios, Prokofiev employed solely the melody as the carrier of the musical argument. His genius emerges above all in the second movement, in which a simple tune serves as the basis for a set of variations, each with its own individual character. Here, the master reveals himself through his ability to turn necessity into a virtue, devising an artistic statement of a high order using the simplest of musical means.

Ronald Vermeulen

Translation: Nicholas Lakides

Arabella Steinbacher

Violinist Arabella Steinbacher, a native of Munich, has firmly established herself as one of today's leading violinists on the international concert scene, performing with the world's major orchestras. The New York Times reports that she plays with, "Balanced lyricism and fire - among her assets are a finely polished technique and a beautifully varied palette of timbres." After her debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, performing the Sibelius Violin Concerto under Christoph von Dohnányi, The Chicago Tribune reported, "From her magical entry over hushed orchestral strings to the biting swagger she brought to the dancing finale, it was evident that her feeling for this music runs as deep as her technical command. The central Adagio came off especially beautifully, Steinbacher conveying its brooding melancholy with a rich vibrato, impeccable intonation and a remarkable breadth of phrasing." Ms. Steinbacher's career was launched in 2004 with an extraordinary and unexpected debut in Paris, when she stepped in on short notice for an ailing colleague and performed the Beethoven Violin Concerto with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France under Sir Neville Marriner. Her diverse and deep repertoire includes more than thirty concertos for violin. In addition to all of the major concertos of the Classical

and Romantic period, she also performs those of Barber, Bartók, Berg, Glazunov, Khatchaturian, Milhaud, Prokofiev, Schnittke, Shostakovich, Stravinsky, Szymanowski, Hindemith, Hartmann, and Sofia Gubaidulina's Offertorium. Among Ms. Steinbacher's numerous recording honors are 2 ECHO-Klassik Awards (considered to be the German equivalent of the Grammy) "Les Chocs du Mois" from Le Monde de la Musique, and two German Record Critics Awards as well as the prestigious Editors Choice Award from Gramophone magazine. Ms. Steinbacher is recording exclusively for PentaTone Classics. Her first CD on that label, released in autumn 2009, included Dvorák's Violin Concerto in A Minor and Szymanowski's Violin Concerto No. 1, as well as Dvorák's Romance in F Minor, with the Rundfunk Sinfonieorchester Berlin led by Marek Janowski. Ms. Steinbacher recorded her second PentaTone release, which features Bartók's First and Second Violin Concertos, in July 2009. The CD was released in October 2010. Arabella Steinbacher is appearing with the leading international orchestras including the London Symphony Orchestra, Dresden Staatskapelle, London Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, NDR Sinfonieorchester Hamburg, WDR Symphony Orchestra, and NHK Symphony Orchestra; she has worked with the world's leading conductors including Riccardo Chailly, Sir Colin Davis, Christoph von Dohnányi, Charles Dutoit, Herbert Blomstedt, Marek Janowski, Lorin Maazel, Sir Neville Marriner and Yannick Nezet-Séguin, among others. Highlights of the 2010-11 season include Ms. Steinbacher's Carnegie Hall debut with the conductor-less Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and her subscription debut with both the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra as well as her debut at Maggio Musicale in Florence under Zubin Mehta and her debut with the Israel Philharmonic. During the 2009-10 season, Arabella Steinbacher made her much-anticipated debut at the BBC Proms at Royal Albert Hall with the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra led by Jonathan Nott. She also debuted with the London Symphony Orchestra under Sir Colin Davis, performed with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under Riccardo Chailly, toured with the Philharmonia Orchestra under Lorin Maazel, performed with the Bayerischer Rundfunk Orchestra led by Sir Colin Davis and in the US and Asia with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Charles Dutoit. Born in Munich in 1981 to a German father and a Japanese mother, Ms. Steinbacher began studying the violin at the age of three. Her mother is a professionally trained singer who came to Germany from Japan to study music, and her father was the first Solorepetitor in the Bayerische Staatsoper, from 1960 to 1972. At nine, she became the youngest violin student of Ana Chumachenko at the

Munich Academy of Music. She received further musical inspiration and guidance from Ivry Gitlis. In 2001, Ms. Steinbacher won the sponsorship prize of the Free State of Bavaria and in the same year she was awarded a scholarship by the Anne-Sophie Mutter Foundation. Ms. Steinbacher currently plays the "Booth" Stradivari (1716) generously provided by the Nippon Music Foundation. She lives in her hometown of Munich, and her general manager is Tanja Dorn at IMG Artists.

<http://www.arabella-steinbacher.com/>

Russian National Orchestra

The Russian National Orchestra has been in demand throughout the music world ever since its 1990 Moscow premiere. Of the orchestra's 1996 debut at the BBC Proms in London, the Evening Standard wrote, "They played with such captivating beauty that the audience gave an involuntary sigh of pleasure." More recently, they were described as "a living symbol of the best in Russian art" (*Miami Herald*) and "as close to perfect as one could hope for" (*Trinity Mirror*).

The first Russian orchestra to perform at the Vatican and in Israel, the RNO maintains an active international tour schedule, appearing in Europe, Asia and the Americas. Guest artists performing with the RNO on tour include conductors Vladimir Jurowski, Nicola Luisotti, Antonio Pappano, Alan Gilbert, Carlo Ponti and Patrick Summers, and soloists Martha Argerich, Yefim Bronfman, Lang Lang, Pinchas Zukerman, Sir James Galway, Joshua Bell, Itzhak Perlman, Steven Isserlis, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Simone Kermes and Renée Fleming, among many others. Popular with radio audiences worldwide, RNO concerts are regularly aired by National Public Radio in the United States and by the European Broadcasting Union.

Gramophone magazine called the first RNO CD (1991) "an awe-inspiring experience; should human beings be able to play like this?" and listed it as the best recording of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* in history. Since then, the orchestra has made more than 60 recordings for Deutsche Grammophon and PentaTone Classics, distinguishing the RNO as the only Russian ensemble with long-standing relationships with these prestigious labels, as well as additional discs with many other record companies. Conductors represented in the RNO discography include Founder and Music Director Mikhail Pletnev, Principal Guest Conductor Vladimir Jurowski, Kent Nagano, Alexander Vedernikov and Paavo Berglund.

The RNO's recording of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* and Beintus's *Wolf Tracks*, conducted by Kent Nagano and narrated by Sophia Loren, Bill Clinton and Mikhail Gorbachev, received a 2004 Grammy Award,

making the RNO the first Russian orchestra to win the recording industry's highest honor. A Spanish language version narrated by Antonio Banderas was released in 2007, following a Russian version narrated by actors Oleg Tabakov and Sergei Bezrukov, with Mandarin and other editions to follow.

The orchestra's Shostakovich cycle on PentaTone Classics is widely acclaimed as "the most exciting cycle of the Shostakovich symphonies to be put down on disc, and easily the best recorded." (*SACD.net*)

A regular visitor to the Schleswig-Holstein, Gstaad and Rheingau festivals, the RNO is also the founding orchestra of Napa Valley Festival del Sole, Festival of the Arts BOCA in Florida, and the Singapore Sun Festival, and resident orchestra for multiple seasons of the Tuscan Sun Festival in Cortona, Italy. The RNO will launch its own annual festival in 2009, which will be held at Moscow's Bolshoi Theater.

The RNO is unique among the principal Russian ensembles as a private institution funded with the support of individuals, corporations and foundations in Russia and throughout the world. In recognition of both its artistry and path-breaking structure, the Russian Federation recently awarded the RNO the first ever grant to a non-government orchestra.

Vasily Petrenko

Vasily Petrenko was born in 1976 and started his music education at the St Petersburg Capella Boys Music School – the oldest music school in Russia. He then studied at the St Petersburg Conservatoire and has also participated in masterclasses with such major figures as Ilya Musin, Mariss Jansons, Yuri Temirkanov and Esa-Pekka Salonen. Between 1994 and 1997, Petrenko was Resident Conductor at the St Petersburg State Opera and Ballet at the Mussorgsky Memorial Theatre (now the Mikhailovsky Theatre). Following considerable success in a number of international conducting competitions including the Fourth Prokofiev Conducting Competition in St Petersburg (2003), First Prize in the Shostakovich Choral Conducting Competition in St Petersburg (1997) and First Prize in the Sixth Cadaques International Conducting Competition in Spain, he was appointed Chief Conductor of the St Petersburg State Academic Symphony Orchestra from 2004 to 2007.

He commenced his position as Principal Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in September 2006 and six months into his first season this contract was extended to 2012. In 2009, the contract was again extended to 2015, and he also assumed the title of Chief Conductor. Also in 2009, following his tremendous debut with the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, which for the *Guardian* "deliver[ed] a clarity of expression that sounds as if he has been at the helm of the NYO for years", he was appointed their Principal Conductor to

work with the orchestra each season. In February 2011 it was announced that Petrenko will take up the position of Chief Conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra from the 2013/14 season.

In recent seasons, Petrenko has made numerous critically acclaimed debuts with major orchestras including the London Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia, Russian National Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Orchestre National de France, Finnish Radio Symphony, Philadelphia and Minnesota Orchestras, NHK Symphony Tokyo, Sydney Symphony and Accademia di Santa Cecilia. He has appeared at the BBC Proms with both the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and the National Youth Orchestra, and toured with the European Union Youth Orchestra. Recent years have seen a series of highly successful North American debuts, including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the San Francisco, Boston, Dallas, Baltimore and St Louis Symphony Orchestras. Highlights of the 2011/12 season included debuts with the Czech Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony, Rundfunk Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. Vasily Petrenko was named Young Artist of the Year at the annual Gramophone Awards, and in 2010 he won the Male Artist of the Year at the Classical Brit Awards. He is only the second person to have been awarded Honorary Doctorates by both the University of Liverpool and Liverpool Hope University (in 2009), and an Honorary Fellowship of the Liverpool John Moores University (in 2012), awards which recognise the immense impact he has had on the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and the city's cultural scene.

Season 2012/2013

