

Русская фортепианная музыка
Russian Piano Music Series

volume 14



Sergei Prokofiev

Piano Sonata No. 1
Piano Sonata No. 6
4 Etudes
Six Pieces from 'Cinderella'
Suggestion diabolique

Stefania
Argentieri

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Six Pieces from Cinderella, Op. 102		25:26
1	I. Waltz: Cinderella and the Prince	7:29
2	II. Cinderella's Variation	1:36
3	III. The Quarrel	3:34
4	IV. Waltz: Cinderella goes to the Ball	3:07
5	V. Pas de Chale	4:46
6	VI. Amoroso	4:52
 Piano Sonata No. 6 in A major, Op. 82		31:30
7	I. <i>Allegro moderato</i>	9:38
8	II. <i>Allegretto</i>	5:10
9	III. <i>Tempo di valzer, lentissimo</i>	8:38
10	IV. <i>Vivace</i>	8:03
 Piano Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Op. 1		8:14
 Four Etudes, Op. 2		11:33
12	No. 1 in D minor <i>Allegro</i>	2:45
13	No. 2 in E minor <i>Moderato</i>	2:38
14	No. 3 in C minor <i>Andante semplice</i>	4:19
15	No. 4 in C minor <i>Presto energico</i>	1:50
 Suggestion Diabolique, Op. 4 No. 4		2:54
 total duration :		79:39

Stefania Argentieri piano

“The Rhythmic Charm of Prokofiev”

by Attilio Cantore

The revolution in Russian music took place through the so-called "Group of Five", whose popularity (in the sense of *Volkstümlichkeit*) was the result of a successful negotiation, a magnificent syncretism, between native components (the style of harmonization of folk songs) and Central European elements (the Liszt harmonic cycles and Beethoven elaborative processes). Mily Balakirev, Cesar Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Borodin were the brave messengers of a dazzling "opening": 'It was as if the sky and the earth had suddenly opened, to deliver their most intimate and jealous voice. This "opening" took place immediately after 1850' (Alberto Savinio). According to the well-known tale, which inspired all European historiography, the "Five" inaugurated a heroic school of honest Russian nationalists, who urgently felt the need 'to confine themselves to an exotic ghetto in order to claim their peculiarity as outsiders. The legend was later validated on a cosmopolitan level by Sergei Diaghilev in order to promote the Russian Ballets by relying on the taste for the rampant exoticism in the Western Area' (Mario Carrozzo).

What happened on the music scene during the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century? As in a Homeric catalog of ships, we could count with passionate fussiness all those composers, 'almost full sails in race' (to quote a verse by Osip Mandelstam), who sailed together for "liberation" from the dominant Eurocentric culture, furrowing the waters of harmonic and tonal transgression. The "race" had begun which set as a final landing the deconstruction of the system of scales in Eurocentric music, in first place the "prime star" Alexander Skriabin, the eccentric prophet of ecstasy who certainly was the most attentive participant of the crisis in European tonal organization.

Due to their origin, the Group followed this lead with their own precious peculiarities and with different parameters – Sergei Rachmaninov, Nikolai Miaskovsky, Igor Stravinsky, Sergei Prokofiev and also Dimitry Shostakovich a few lengths behind.

A pupil of Liadov, Tcherepnin and Rimsky-Korsakov (from whom he assimilated constructivism and epic vein), Sergei Prokofiev made his appearance at a very young age on the Russian and international music scene. His uncontainable propensity for eclecticism found fertile ground at a moment in time where we find French impressionism, Skriabin, the late-romantic mid-European symphonism and Schönberg's music leading the way.

If it is true that, as the great cellist Rostropovich recalled, in his later years Prokofiev felt himself a stranger to dodecaphonic thinking (and one would be tempted to say that perhaps he had always been), it is equally true that in 1911 it was precisely the young Prokofiev who performed for the first time in Russia the *Klavierstücke*, Op. 11 by Schönberg. Equally significant is the never-resolved rivalry with the older Stravinsky: a continuous battle that led him,

tactically, to careful listening and to tacit assimilation (as in the case of certain "anti-organic disorders of the cadential scheme" characteristic of Stravinskian music).

In an early twentieth century scenario so faceted and unregular, Prokofiev's music essentially offers a return to tonality: to its system of heights, rhythm, meter and formal articulations. In a completely new way, he brings to life a mutable neo-tonality, which is balanced on the two plates of a double world: on alterations of the phraseological-cadential tonal course and on structures of corroded tonality. It is a tonal music made of "wrong notes". It is a music in which rules the displacement by semitone or tritone (apparently unjustifiable) of the diatonic sounds pertinent to the key: suspended dissonances and tonal deviations that the listener perceives as discontinuous to the harmonic course.

On closer view, Prokofiev's musical writing, although controlled, seems to avoid codified strategies or deep structures. In short, it is a writing with its own laws. Its discontinuity is a reflection of the intrinsic characteristic of a musical language accustomed to absorbing a multiplicity of stimuli and stylistic references which, even within the same work, coexist according to a whole series of principles of integration difficult to identify. In this regard, the composer's first biographer, Israel Nestev, argued:

'Although Prokofiev has never formulated a particular system, his music has unquestionably his own laws, his own specific logic [...] I have always had the feeling that Sergej composed according to intuitions, based on what he felt to write in that moment.'

From the age of 17 Prokofiev performed as a pianist in St. Petersburg's *Evening of Contemporary Music* promoted by Sergei Diaghilev. On December 18, 1908, the future master of socialist musical realism and the brilliant author of soundtracks for Eisenstein's films had the opportunity to officially introduce his extraordinary performance skills and to have his first compositions heard. With the execution of the **Suggestion Diabolique** (a "modernist" piece which then flowed into the *Four Pieces* op. 4) everyone realized the boundless potential of that *enfant terrible*, noting his playing with feverish energy.

The "President of the world of music" from his debut seemed to have succeeded in realizing what "the President of the world of poetry" (Vladimir Mayakovsky) had long desired: that language should explode like a mine! Also the **4 Studies, Op. 2** partly keep faith with this aesthetic wish. With metallic dissonances, acrobatic impulsion and percussive style, the "slap to the audience taste" was soon served. In this way Prokofiev made himself faithful protesters (his music was accused of "coarseness" and "football style") as well as a loyal following. His name began to circulate in Russian modernist musical circles.

In those first few years of musical activity (these were the years of apprenticeship in the Conservatory) Prokofiev made his first venture into the sonata genre. In 1909 he completed the **Sonata for Piano No. 1 in F minor, Op. 1**, in a single movement, demonstrating that he had not yet emancipated himself completely from the teaching of his masters but evidently knowing how to admirably measure, within limited time frames, an intense lyricism and a smooth stylistic balance.

On his return to Russia after a long period of international traveling, he would compose the **Sonata No. 6 in A major, Op. 82**. The memorable incipit, played entirely on false harmonic relationships, in a certain way typifies the late works of Prokofiev. We are in the period of drafting the opera *Semën Kotko*. Performed for the first time on live radio in April 1940, the *Sonata no. 6* is structured in four stages (*Allegro moderato*, *Allegretto*, *Tempo di valzer lentissimo*, *Vivace*) and, while respecting the “classic” architecture of the sonata genre and the tonal organization, points to an original reorganization of the sound space, deforming motifs and melodic arches.

But how can we forget the music for *Peter and the Wolf* and *Cinderella*, “proverbial fairy tales for good children and Carla Fracci” (Alberto Arbasino)? Specifically, the ballet *Cinderella*, *op. 87* (1945) was created in the period in which Prokofiev was preparing the great historical fresco *War and Peace*, finding his place the great tradition of classical Russian ballet. From the 50 parts of which the ballet is composed Prokofiev drew three Orchestral Suites (*op. 107*, *108* and *109*), and piano reworkings, including the **6 Pieces from Cinderella, Op. 102** (1944): *Waltz: Cinderella and the Prince*, *Cinderella’s Variation*, *The Quarrel*, *Waltz: Cinderella goes to the Ball*, *Pas de Chale* and *Amoroso*.

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Stefania Argentieri



The pianist

An artist renowned for innate elegance, communicative ability and superb control of the keyboard, **Stefania Argentieri** graduated in piano in 2009, when not yet twenty years old, with the highest marks and praise at the Conservatory "T. Schipa" in Lecce, Italy, and later also obtained with excellence the Biennial Academic Diploma in Music Disciplines as soloist at the "N.Rota" Conservatory in Monopoli. Following her extensive education, she attended the three-year mastercourse in chamber music and solo performance at the Academy of Music in Florence; she also obtained the prestigious diploma in Piano and Chamber Music at the Advanced Course at the Santa Cecilia Piano Music Academy. She works intensively as a teacher; she teaches Principal Piano at the Conservatory U.Giordano in Foggia and at the Conservatory T.Schipa in Lecce.

Stefania has recently received the Gold Medal at the Maison Des Artistes International Award, performing at the Great Hall of the Sapienza University in Rome; she also performed in Washington at the Italian Embassy in the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, in Los Angeles at the Italian Institute of Culture and, in piano duo, performed the *Concerto for Two pianos and Orchestra* by Poulenc with the "N.Rota" orchestra of Monopoli. Stefania enjoys continuous collaboration with major orchestras such as the Bacau Philharmonic Orchestra and she performed with such conductors as O.Balan, D.Frandes, M.Nitti and many others.

She has performed, in addition to the numerous engagements in the United States, at the University of Music in Kharkiv, at the Italian Institute of Culture in Budapest, Paris and Strasburg, at the Athens Concert Hall in Bacau, Romania (Tchaikovsky *Concerto No. 1* and Liszt *Concerto No. 2*), at the Parco della Musica in Rome, at the CASC Auditorium of the Bank of Italy in Rome, at the Teatro dal Verme in Milan, and at the European Young Festival in Passau (Germany). She has also won the first prize in many competitions and she also works in the editorial field, with Florestano Edizioni di Bari: her recent works include the essay "Vertigini e Maschere", an in-depth analysis of *Carnaval* Op.9 by R.Schumann and a transcript for two pianos on the ballet "Sleeping Beauty" Of P.I.Tchaikovsky. She has recorded for Vatican Radio, EuroClassicPlanet and IICC in Los Angeles. Her artistic career has been enriched through international masterclasses held by such maestros as C.Elton, R. Cappello, L. Margarius, A. Jasinski, A.Ciccolini, K.Bogino P.Bordoni. She plans for her Prokofiev recording to be followed by numerous and special ambitious projects.

She lives in Brindisi, Italy.



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