

About the Music

by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Sinfonietta in A major, Op. 5/48
(1904; revised in 1914-1915 and 1929)

— **Sergei Prokofiev**
Born April 23, 1891 in Sontzovka, Russia.
Died March 5, 1953 in Moscow.

“In the field of instrumental music, I am well content with the forms already perfected. I want nothing better, nothing more flexible or more complete than sonata form, which contains everything necessary to my structural purpose.” This statement, given to Olin Downes by Prokofiev during an interview in 1930 for *The New York Times*, seems a curious one for a composer who had gained a reputation as an ear-shattering iconoclast, the *enfant terrible* of 20th-century music, the master of modernity. While it is undoubtedly true that some of his early works (*Scythian Suite*, *Sarcasms*, the first two piano concertos) raised the hackles of musical traditionalists, it is also true that Prokofiev sought to preserve that same tradition by extending its boundaries to include his own personal style. A glance through the listing of his works shows a preponderance of established Classical forms: sonatas, symphonies, concertos, operas, ballets, quartets, overtures and suites account for most of his creative output.

Prokofiev’s penchant for using Classical musical idioms was instilled in him during the course of his thorough, excellent training. When he was a little tot, his mother played Beethoven sonatas to him while he huddled beneath the piano. He was soon playing them for himself and showing enough evidence of compositional talent that in 1902 Mama Prokofiev displayed her son to the highly respected pianist and Moscow Conservatory professor Sergei Taneyev, who was sufficiently impressed to arrange lessons for the boy with his student Reinhold Glière. Two years later, at the ripe age of thirteen, Prokofiev was admitted to the St. Petersburg Conservatory, where the brilliant but obstreperous youngster found his harmony classes with Liadov “extremely dull” and maintained that he “learned nothing” from his orchestration lessons with Rimsky-Korsakov. He found his conducting classes with Alexander Tcherepnin much more congenial, however, later admitting that “Tcherepnin played a very big role in my musical development. He was a brilliant musician who could discuss old and new music with equal understanding and appreciation.” Tcherepnin stressed the importance of the Viennese Classicists in his students’ training, and Prokofiev recalled that he soon found himself “acquiring a taste for Haydn and Mozart.” The most famous offspring of Prokofiev’s utilization of Classical forms and idioms was to be the Symphony No. 1 of 1917, but he had begun trying out Mozartian ideas as early as the juvenile Symphony in E minor of 1908 (given a reading and then abandoned by Prokofiev except for some materials incorporated into the Piano Sonata No. 4, “From Old Notebooks”) and the Sinfonietta in A major of the following year. Prokofiev said that the Sinfonietta, a “little symphony” reminiscent in its five-movement structure and its largely genial expression of a Classical serenade, was “an attempt to create a transparent piece

for small orchestra, but the attempt was not particularly successful. I had not yet learned to write light, graceful music, and it was only many years later, after two revisions [in 1914-1915 and 1929] that the Sinfonietta was finally whipped into shape.... I gave it a double opus number — 5/48. Incidentally the Sinfonietta has been comparatively rarely performed, whereas the 'Classical' Symphony, written in the same manner, has been played everywhere. I cannot quite understand why the fate of these two pieces should be so different."

The mood of the Sinfonietta's opening movement is neatly summarized by its tempo marking: *Allegro giocoso* — literally, "cheerful, joyous." The movement's form, like that of many from Haydn's later years, is a sonata structure based throughout on a single theme. The *Andante*, surprisingly somber and austere, contains many gestures of harmony and orchestration that were to become essential elements in Prokofiev's fully mature musical style. Prokofiev would have classed the next two movements — *Intermezzo* and *Scherzo* — with his rhythmically driving "motoric" compositions: the first is nimble and gracious; the second weighty and stolid, even grotesque-humorous in its bassoon-led central episode. The finale rounds out the Sinfonietta's formal cycle by again taking up the main subject of the opening movement and complementing it with new thematic material.

Concerto for Violin, Cello, Piano and Orchestra — Ludwig van Beethoven
in C major, Op. 56, "Triple Concerto" (1803-1804) *Born December 16, 1770 in Bonn.*
Died March 26, 1827 in Vienna.

"Everyone likes flattery; and when you come to Royalty you should lay it on with a trowel," counseled the 19th-century British statesman Benjamin Disraeli. He would have gotten no argument from Beethoven on that point. When Rudolph, Archduke of Austria and titled scion of the Habsburg line, turned up among Beethoven's Viennese pupils, the young composer realized that he had tapped the highest echelon of European society. Beethoven gave instruction in both piano performance and composition to Rudolph, who had a genuine if limited talent for music. Questioned once whether Rudolph played really well, the diplomatic teacher answered with a hoarse chuckle, "When he is feeling just right." Concerning flattery, the most important manner in which 19th-century composers could praise royalty was by dedicating one of their compositions to a noble personage. Rudolph, who eventually became Archbishop Cardinal of Austria and remained a life-long friend and patron of Beethoven, received the dedication of such important works as the Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos, "Lebewohl" and "Hammerklavier" Sonatas, Op. 96 Violin Sonata, "Archduke" Trio, the *Missa Solemnis* and *Grosse Fuge*. While Rudolph was still a boy of sixteen, however, his teacher wrote for him his very own composition, a piece that made a grand noise and showed off his piano skills in a most sympathetic setting.

Beethoven's choice of piano, violin and cello for Rudolph's concerto appears to be unprecedented in the literature — "really something new," he wrote to his publisher. There was a popular genre in the Classical era known as the *sinfonia concertante* for

two or more soloists with orchestral accompaniment, a revamped model of the Baroque *concerto grosso*. Mozart and Haydn left lovely examples. The *sinfonia concertante* was especially favored in France, where the combination of violin and either viola or cello was most common. Beethoven, powerfully under the influence of French music at the time (the “Eroica” Symphony and *Fidelio* also date from 1803-1804), took over the form for two solo strings and added to it a piano part and — behold! the adolescent Archduke had become a virtuoso. Beethoven liked his student, who seems to have been quite a nice young man. The composer tailored the piano part to Rudolph’s skills so that it did not present extremely difficult technical demands but still showed off his abilities to good advantage. The string parts, on the other hand, he filled with florid lines woven around the keyboard writing so that the soloists as a group come off as a dazzling band of virtuosos. To assure a good first performance, Beethoven called in two of the best players of the day to share the stage with Rudolph — violinist Carl August Seidler and cellist Anton Kraft. If the demands of the cello part on the range and technique of the soloist are any indication, Kraft, especially, seems to have warranted his reputation as a master performer.

The Concerto’s first movement is a modified sonata design with a lengthy exposition and recapitulation necessitated by the many thematic repetitions. After a hushed and halting opening in the strings, the full orchestra takes up the main thematic material of the movement. The soloists enter, led, as usual throughout this Concerto, by the cello with the main theme. The second theme begins, again in the cello, with a snappy triad played in the unexpected key of A major rather than the more usual dominant tonality of G. It is through such original and, for 1804, daring technical excursions that Beethoven widened the expressive possibilities of instrumental music. Much of the remainder of the movement is given over to repetitions and figuration rather than to true motivic development. A sudden quickening of the tempo charges the concluding measures with flashing energy. The second movement is a peaceful song for the solo strings with elaborate embroidery for the piano. The movement is not long, and soon leads into the finale without a break. The closing movement is a strutting *Rondo alla Polacca* in the style of the Polish polonaise.

Symphony No. 1 in C major (1855)

— **Georges Bizet**

Born October 25, 1838 in Paris.

Died June 3, 1875 in Bougival, near Paris.

Georges Bizet lived for only three dozen years, and each of those dozens marked an important phase of his short life. During the first twelve years, only little time was devoted to the usual activities of childhood, since Georges, the offspring of two talented musicians, was breathtakingly precocious in musical matters. He was admitted to the Paris Conservatoire at the age of nine and was winning prizes there within a year. He produced his earliest known works, two vocalises for soprano, at twelve.

The second dozen years of Bizet’s life were the happiest he was to know. He studied at the Conservatoire until he was nineteen, garnering awards for piano,

organ, fugue and solfeggio, and composing a variety of works, one of which was a prize-winning operetta in a competition sponsored by Jacques Offenbach. At nineteen, he won the *Prix de Rome*, which supplied him with a five-year stipend, a residency in Italy and France, and the opportunity to devote himself to composition. He did complete several works during this time, but he projected far more that came to nothing. Despite developing a throat ailment that plagued him all his life, Bizet was active enough during those years to establish a modest reputation as a composer and an excellent one as a pianist. The years of planning, composing and travel came to an end when his prize stipend expired. At the age of 24 he was faced with the perplexing reality of providing his own living.

After 1863, Bizet gave much of his time to all manner of musical hackwork: private teacher, rehearsal accompanist, music critic, but mostly to transcribing the popular pieces of the day for a variety of instruments. "It is maddening to interrupt the work I love for two days in order to write cornet solos. Still, one must live!" he lamented. He continued to plan many works for both opera house and concert hall, but had to abandon most of them because of lack of time. From these later years date the works for which he is mainly remembered: *The Pearl Fishers*, *Jeux d'enfants*, the incidental music to *L'Arlésienne* and *Carmen*. None of these pieces provided him the success he worked so hard to achieve, however, and he lived in a state of continual frustration that Winton Dean described as "settled melancholy." "We often sensed tears in his voice," a friend wrote. Bizet died before he knew that *Carmen* would make his name famous around the world.

Bizet's Symphony in C, written in his seventeenth year, is a marvel of early musical maturation that rivals the precocity of Mozart and Mendelssohn. It is a work in which the composer exhibited his careful study of, among others, Haydn, Rossini and Gounod (Gounod was Bizet's counterpoint teacher whose own First Symphony appeared only a year earlier), and vitalized it with his own ebullient, youthful spirit and characteristic touches of melody, harmony and orchestration. Curiously, the work seems not to have been performed during Bizet's lifetime. The manuscript became part of his estate after his death and passed into the possession of his wife, who did not fully appreciate her husband's genius. She bequeathed it to the composer Reynaldo Hahn, and he to the Paris Conservatoire Library, where it gathered dust until Bizet's first English biographer, D.C. Parker, unearthed it in 1933. It was finally premiered on February 26, 1935 in Basle, Switzerland by Felix Weingartner.

The Symphony in C opens with a movement in traditional sonata form, with a bubbling main theme outlining chordal patterns and a contrasting legato second theme, introduced by the oboe, in longer notes. The slow second movement contains a haunting, bittersweet serenade for oboe followed by a soaring melody for strings. The movement is rounded out by the return of the oboe theme. The concluding two movements are a sprightly scherzo with a rustic-sounding trio and a vivacious finale cast, like the first movement, in sonata form.

HARRISBURG SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Saturday, November 4, 2017 at 8:00 p.m.

Sunday, November 5, 2017 at 3:00 p.m.

STUART MALINA, Conducting
MENDELSSOHN PIANO TRIO

PETER SIROTIN, Violin
FIONA THOMPSON, Cello
YA-TING CHANG, Piano

Sinfonietta in A major, Op. 5/48

Sergei Prokofiev
(1891-1953)

Allegro giocoso
Andante
Intermezzo: Vivace
Scherzo: Allegro risoluto
Allegro giocoso

Concerto for Violin, Cello, Piano and Orchestra in C major, Op. 56, "Triple Concerto"

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Allegro
Largo —
Rondo alla Polacca

— INTERMISSION —

Symphony No. 1 in C major

Georges Bizet
(1838-1875)

Allegro vivo
Adagio
Scherzo: Allegro vivace
Finale: Allegro vivace