



Sergei PROKOFIEV

Concerto for piano and orchestra

No. 3, Op. 26

Sergei Sergeyevich Prokofiev (23 April 1891 – 5 March 1953) was a Russian and Soviet composer, pianist and conductor. As the creator of acknowledged masterpieces across numerous musical genres, he is regarded as one of the major composers of the 20th century. His works include such widely heard works as the March from *The Love for Three Oranges*, the suite *Lieutenant Kijé*, the ballet *Romeo and Juliet* from which *Dance of the Knights* is taken and *Peter and the Wolf*. Of the established forms and genres in which he worked, he created excluding *Juvenilia* – seven completed operas, seven symphonies, eight ballets, five piano concertos, two violin concertos, a cello concerto, a Symphony-Concerto for cello and orchestra, and nine completed piano sonatas. A graduate of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Prokofiev initially made his name as an iconoclastic composer-pianist, achieving notoriety with a series of ferociously dissonant and virtuosic works for his instrument, including his first two piano concertos. Prokofiev's greatest interest was opera, and he composed several works in that genre, including *The Gambler* and *The Fiery Angel*. Prokofiev's one operatic success during his lifetime was *The Love for Three Oranges*, composed for the Chicago Opera and subsequently performed over the following decade in Europe and Russia. After the Revolution, Prokofiev left Russia with the official blessing of the Soviet minister Anatoly Lunacharsky, and resided in the United States, then Germany, then Paris, making his living as a composer, pianist and conductor. During that time he married a Spanish singer, Carolina Codina, with whom he had two sons. In the early 1930s, the Great Depression diminished opportunities for Prokofiev's ballets and operas to be staged in America and western Europe. In 1936 he finally returned to his homeland with his family.

Prokofiev began his **Piano Concerto No. 3 in C major, Op. 26** as early as 1913 and completed in 1921. He played the solo part at the premiere on 16 December 1921 in Chicago with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra conducted by Frederick Stock. The work did not gain immediate popularity and had to wait until 1922 to be confirmed in the 20th century canon, after Serge Koussevitzky conducted a lavishly praised performance in Paris. The first Soviet performance was on 22 March 1925, by Samuil Feinberg, with the Orchestra of the Theatre of the Revolution under Konstantin Saradzhev. The tonality of the Concerto, C major, is the quintessential diatonic "white" scale, and the lyrical, introductory melody of the first movement (as well as the first theme of the finale) does not stray from its confines. With the entry of the solo piano with the main theme, however, Prokofiev's harmony begins to take on more shading. Piano and orchestra interact in dialogue and rhythmic play; whether leading or following, the soloist is given few opportunities to rest. The second movement takes the form of a theme with five variations and a coda. The graceful theme, with its octave-displaced ornaments, is reminiscent of a gavotte (the one from the *Classical Symphony* springs to mind). The variations travel far afield – from the tempestoso of Variation II, to the lumbering syncopations of III, to the unearthly evanescence of IV, to the march strides of V – before the gavotte theme returns accompanied by the staccato chords of the piano. The finale is a rondo. One of the subordinate themes is a melody as lovely as any Prokofiev ever wrote, but overall the spirit of the movement is propulsive; the momentum ratchets up steadily until the final chord.