

LIEUTENANT KIJÉ, SYMPHONIC SUITE, OP. 60 • SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)

SCORED FOR: 2 FLUTES, 2 OBOES, 2 CLARINETS, 2 BASSOONS, TENOR SAXOPHONE,
4 HORNS, 2 TRUMPETS, CORNET, 3 TROMBONES, TUBA, HARP, PIANO, CELESTE, BASS DRUM, SNARE DRUM,
TRIANGLE, CYMBALS, TAMBOURINE, SLEIGH BELLS AND STRINGS.

Sergei Prokofiev was once described by Vladimir Dukelsky as looking "like a cross between a Scandinavian minister and a soccer player. His lips were unusually thick . . . and they gave his face an oddly naughty look, rather like that of a boy about to embark on some punishable and therefore tempting prank." It is these last comments about a naughty boy playing pranks that seems to be the constant factor in Prokofiev's life. Born into a well-to-do family, Prokofiev, the child prodigy of Mozartian proportions, was playing the piano and composing by age 6 and had written an opera by age nine. He enrolled at the St. Petersburg Conservatory at age thirteen and within eight years he was recognized as one of the one of the most promising young Russian pianist-composers of his generation. As his skills developed and his musical tastes evolved with the dawning of the 20th century he rapidly attained a firm reputation as composer of advanced tendencies with biting, angular, abrasive melodies, a delight for the grotesque, an incessant rhythmic drive, and a peculiar knack for combining satire and beauty. There is little wonder why, with that reputation, he was known as one of the "bad boys" of the musical world.

After the Russian Revolution (1917) Prokofiev lived abroad, first in the United States where his works were at best coolly received, and later in Paris when the local vogue for Russian art was at its height. Never fully at home in the West, and prompted by a homesick longing to compose in his native land, he returned to Russia in 1933. Sadly, the creative genius of Prokofiev was likely more stifled than stimulated by the return to his homeland. The new government under Stalin had enacted the doctrine of "socialist realism," (an expectation that composers were to write simple, heroic music with programmatic messages of political propaganda), which essentially gave the government authority in determining artistic merit. With his radically progressive compositions, Prokofiev had been regularly criticized for his work while he was living abroad and now felt that he needed to make amends with the new Soviet government. He turned his attention towards composing for larger audiences and in doing so his musical style underwent a marked process of simplification and a return to more traditional sonorities. Among works from his first years back in Russia are some of his most beloved compositions, including: *Lieutenant Kijé*, *Alexander Nevsky*, and *Peter and the Wolf*.

The music for *Lieutenant Kijé* was originally composed as incidental music for a film by the same name, produced by the Belogoskino Studio in Leningrad in 1933. Prokofiev, newly returned to Russia and anxious to prove his worth to the government authorities, was excited about the

possibilities of composing film music and wrote that "this gave me a welcome opportunity to try my hand, if not at a Soviet subject, then at music for Soviet audiences, and mass audiences at that." The subject matter of the film was also exceptionally well suited to Prokofiev's temperament as a composer: satirical. In summary, Lieutenant Kijé, the title character, never existed; rather he was a product of official bungling and buffoonery. The story goes that Czar Paul I misread a report of his military aid, creating a name that was actually not listed in the report. Since no one dared point out a mistake made by the Czar, his courtiers decided that a fictional character should be invented, along with his entire life's story, in order to cover for the error. Thus begins the life of Lieutenant Kijé.

The symphonic suite was arranged from the movie score in 1934 and its five movements are so ordered to represent the significant events in Lieutenant Kije's life.

I. The Birth of Kijé (Allegro). As befits one who is born in full regimentals in the brain of a Czar, Lieutenant Kijé is introduced by a trumpet fanfare off stage, followed by the sounds of a military drum, and the shrill sounds of the piccolo; a traditional military march. A short *Andante* section provides contrast, but is soon followed by a return of the piccolo and drum marching off into the distance and concluding with echoes of the trumpet fanfare.

II. Romance (Andante). This tender movement represents Lieutenant Kijé's discovery of his true love. The story would certainly not be complete, or at least as convincing, if our hero did not have a sentimental courtship leading to a marriage. Note the use of the tenor saxophone in the orchestration.

III. Kijé's Wedding. (Allegro fastoso). This movement presents two contrasting ideas. The first is a pompous processional, evocative of a wedding ceremony, immediately contrasted by an up-tempo tavern song played by the solo trumpet (the most memorable of the suite) that suggests that part of the wedding festivities likely takes place in a tavern.

IV. Troika (Moderato). After a brief introduction we hear another galloping tavern song whose accompaniment is suggestive of the motion created by the traditional Russian three-horse sleigh, complete with sleigh bells.

V. The Burial of Kijé (Andante assai). Kijé's exit from this world is merry rather than otherwise, considering how relieved his inventors must have been to get rid of him. The music resembles a summary of his life, beginning with the trumpet fanfare at his birth, and recalling episodes of his romance and his wedding (played overlapping each other). At the end we hear the solo trumpet fade away into silence.

