



Volume II

SOMMCD 256



DDD

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)

PIANO SONATAS nos. 9 & 10

SONATINAS nos. 1 & 2

CELLO SONATA

Peter Donohoe piano

Raphael Wallfisch cello

Sonata No. 9, Op. 103 in C major (21:33)

- 1 1. Allegretto 6:44
- 2 2. Allegro strepitoso – Andantino – Allegro strepitoso 2:56
- 3 3. Andante tranquillo 6:38
- 4 4. Allegro con brio, ma non troppo presto 5:13

Sonata No. 10 (fragment), Op. 137 in E minor

- 5 Allegro moderato 0:57

Sonata for Cello & Piano, Op. 119 in C major (23:13)

- 6 1. Andante grave 11:01
- 7 2. Moderato 4:40
- 8 3. Allegro ma non troppo 7:30

Sonatina No 1, Op. 54 in E minor (9:12)

- 9 1. Allegro moderato 3:08
- 10 2. Adagietto 3:29
- 11 3. Allegretto 2:34

Sonatina No. 2, Op. 54 in G major (8:52)

- 12 1. Allegro sostenuto 3:25
- 13 2. Andante amabile 2:15
- 14 3. Allegro ma non troppo 3:11

Total duration 64:05

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Sonatas nos. 9 & 10

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CELLO SONATA



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CELLO SONATA

IT IS SOMETIMES CLAIMED that artists die when their life's work is completed, and whilst there may be some truth in the claim, within the history of music there are great composers whose unfinished work gives the lie to that proposition, from Bach (and coming no further forward in musical history than the last forty years) to Shostakovich or Britten. So far as Serge Prokofiev was concerned, his life's work was certainly not completed at the time of his death, which occurred in Moscow in the early evening of Thursday, March 5, 1953 at the age of 61. That very morning he had been working at his music, leaving not just one work unfinished, but five, with two others planned – each having been given an opus number in advance. His death coincided with that of Josef Stalin, and the irony of the deaths of composer and tyrant on the same day was not lost on Shostakovich, who – like Prokofiev and other leading Soviet composers – had suffered badly as a consequence of the notorious Zhdanov Decree, issued under Stalin's direct orders, in 1948.

The Decree meant that Prokofiev was virtually forced to renounce his own work, with the result that this great and original composer, a fabulously gifted musician, spent his last years mostly in artistic seclusion, an increasingly sick man who tended to be largely ignored by the state until a year or so before he died.

Amongst Prokofiev's friends during those last years were the pianist Sviatoslav Richter and the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich. They sought out the composer and encouraged him – indeed, more than encouraging him, they inspired him. Prokofiev dedicated his Ninth Piano Sonata to Richter – his last completed such work – which was premiered on April 21 1951 (in a programme marking the composer's 60th birthday), and for Rostropovich he wrote an amazing group of late works: two concertos, a sonata with piano, and a sonata for solo cello. The solo Sonata and the second of the concertos were amongst those unfinished works, although both have been edited for performance and have been published and recorded.

A study of the list of works Prokofiev had planned at the time of his death is instructive: apart from the works for Rostropovich, he had planned a Concerto for two pianos and string orchestra and a new version of the Second Symphony – neither of which was left in a performable or editable state. In addition there were no fewer than three piano sonatas, one of which – a new, much revised version of the Fifth (given the opus number 135) – *was* completed, followed by plans for his Tenth and Eleventh Sonatas, these latter works based, so far as we can tell, on new material.

Despite official antipathy towards Prokofiev, his last completed works show no falling away of his powers: the Symphony-Concerto for cello and orchestra (Opus 125; in its first version, premiered by Rostropovich with Richter conducting) and Seventh Symphony (Opus 131 – his last completed original work) are masterpieces, albeit widely different in expression, and in

the unfinished first movement of the Tenth Sonata (given the opus number 137), the music's strength and determination demonstrate the composer's unflagging creativity.

The confident fragment of the unfinished Tenth Sonata contrasts vividly with the Ninth, which many regard as the composer's masterpiece for his own instrument. The Ninth Sonata dates from 1947 and is an extraordinarily original work, implying that Prokofiev had not returned to the Soviet Union fifteen years before to toe whatever party line was in force. The Ninth Sonata does not readily reveal its essentially intimate qualities. The piano writing is distinctive, challenging, wholly original yet entirely 'pianistic', and if the Sonata appears contemplative, that should not infer any lack of momentum: Prokofiev may be musing over his ideas, yet does so in a manner wherein one may imagine the composer, intrigued by his own inventiveness, wondering perhaps where these ideas might lead him.

The Sonata's opening theme is relatively simple, but before many bars have passed the labyrinthine-like counterpoint has glanced at adjacent tonalities, the melodic line returning often to the initial C major, tracing the underlying journeying, but not avoiding varied textural layout or rhythmic displacements. None of these events is violent, none is sudden or disruptive to the overall mood, the result being musical thought such as Mozart or Schubert would have understood, perhaps smiling at, Prokofiev's subtleties, including the change to B major (so near, yet so far) and the cross-thematicism, whereby in each movement's codetta, Prokofiev reveals

the main theme of the next. The third movement is cast as continuous variations as the Sonatas's overall tonal scheme (C major, D major, A flat major, C major) unfolds through simple concluding cadences. The drama of this endlessly-fascinating Sonata lies within its half-hidden expressive nature, not always publicly displayed

Such music as this must have epitomised the aesthetic 'formalism' to which Zhdanov took exception several months later: the intimate nature of the Ninth Sonata is not for the wider public, and neither is the Cello Sonata of 1949, by which time, of course, Zhdanov's Decree had become the benchmark for all Soviet composers. How each reacted to such public humiliation as was heaped upon Myaskovsky, Shostakovich, Kabalevsky, Khachaturian and – of course – Prokofiev over sixty years ago, we may now understand: at the time, and for a short while afterwards, the post-Zhdanov period was termed 'the agony of an art', fitting within a Western view coloured by the Berlin Air Lift of 1948, the first Soviet atom bomb test and the rise of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950.

Prokofiev – alongside his distinguished colleagues – may have been pressed to serve the party with the children's *Winter Bonfire* orchestral suite and the *On Guard for Peace* oratorio, but his inner creativity shone more brightly in his singular Cello Sonata – written for Rostropovich and Richter and first performed by them in Moscow in March 1950. The Cello Sonata is dedicated to Lev Atovmyan (editor of the State Music Publishing House) and is in three

movements, being so perfectly realised for cello and piano that we may regret Prokofiev did not add further such works to the repertoire – his only other composition for this combination being the Ballade Opus 15 of 1912.

The first movement is the strongest of the three in terms of length and structure, the dialogue between the instruments showing Prokofiev at the height of his powers. The pianist is not merely accompanimental, but is an equal partner, as we hear early in the first movement through the appearance of a simple – but increasingly important – theme in an apparently innocuous C major. The cello opens proceedings with a statement in the bass register shared between both instruments: when the piano discloses that simple C major theme, the contrast is clear, and, as the movement progresses, Prokofiev's subtleties in exploring differences in register, the contrast between the single-line delineation of the cello and the piano's ability to express fuller harmonies – and the wonderful sense of 'give-and-take' are fascinating. It is as if we overhear colleagues in a conversation piece, each responding to the other's ideas with varied suggestions: here, surely, is a twentieth-century equivalent of Haydn's inexhaustible creativity and concentration on the prospect before him; the manner by which, the music having traversed a wide range of expression over a relatively long time-scale, the movement's final C major resolution is reached would bring a knowing understanding to any attentive listener.

After the concentration and seriousness of the first movement, the second (in the subdominant, F major) comes as a lighter contrast, a simple ABA

structure, the A sections somewhat wry in their appeal, the movement's slower central section in a further subdominant – B flat – warmly lyrical, before the whimsical initial material returns. The finale is a remarkable achievement: beginning relatively light-heartedly, as a rondo, the music discloses various aspects in the relatively short episodes, each in a different key. A sudden much slower single line on the piano brings a series of slower variants before the cello returns to the original discussion. The initial fast tempo reminiscences of the unifying Sonata material are heard, before the final C major is reached – the harmonic arbiter of what has gone before. Music of this quality may be appreciated at various levels: but by any standards the Sonata is a great work.

Soon after the Bolshevik revolution in October 1917 Prokofiev planned to leave Russia – not to escape the new regime but to reinforce his growing international reputation. He had travelled abroad before May 1918 (the month he left), always intending to return permanently. But circumstances conspired to prevent him until the end of 1932. Even then, he was obliged to fulfil a number of foreign engagements, but after 1936 Russia was his permanent home,

Prokofiev's contribution to the piano in the twentieth-century places him alongside other great composer-pianists. If the range of his total output was wider – especially in the fields of opera and ballet – than, say, Rachmaninoff or Bartók, in the early 1930s Prokofiev found himself writing exclusively for the piano, particularly in his Fourth (Opus 53, 1931) and Fifth (Opus

55, 1932) Piano Concertos, and, in between, two Sonatinas for solo piano (Opus 54). The Fourth Concerto was preceded by six piano transcriptions from earlier scores, the set warranting the opus number 52 (1930). The Opus 54 Sonatinas are each in three movements the contraction of scale not commensurately reflected in less demanding execution. In each of these works, Prokofiev favoured more concentrated expression: the Fourth Concerto is in four movements, the Fifth in five, but each is shorter than, say, the 29 minutes of the three-movement Third Concerto.

The Sonatinas are similar in structure and in expression; greater interest lies in Prokofiev's changing attitude to traditional harmony – the first is in E minor, the second in G minor. The Fifth Concerto is ostensibly 'in G major', but the tonality veers toward C major so frequently that it might be described as being 'on the dominant of C' – an impossible but nonetheless more accurate subtitle(!).

In these delightful miniature Sonatas – each lasts less than ten minutes overall – Prokofiev's wide exploration of key-relationships produces kaleidoscopic miniature characterisation; he was to pursue those key-relationships in later large-scale instrumental works, such as the three 'War' Piano Sonatas (6,7 and 8) and, as we hear on this disc, in the Ninth Sonata. The opening pages of the unfinished Tenth give us a tantalising glimpse of 'what might have been', had this great composer been granted a little more time on earth.

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PETER DONOHOE

Peter Donohoe was born in Manchester in 1953. He studied at Chetham's School of Music for seven years, graduated in music at Leeds University, and went on to study at the Royal Northern College of Music with Derek Wyndham and then in Paris with Olivier Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod.

Since his unprecedented success as joint winner of the 1982 International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, he has developed a distinguished career in Europe, the USA, the Far East, New Zealand and Australia. He is acclaimed as one of the foremost pianists of our time, for his musicianship, stylistic versatility and commanding technique.

Donohoe played with the Berliner Philharmoniker in Sir Simon Rattle's opening concerts as Music Director. He has also performed with all the major London orchestras, Royal Concertgebouw, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Munich Philharmonic, Swedish Radio, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Vienna Symphony and Czech Philharmonic Orchestras. He made his twenty-second appearance at the BBC Proms in 2012 and has appeared at many other festivals including six consecutive visits to the Edinburgh Festival, La Roque d'Anthéron in France, and at the Ruhr and Schleswig Holstein Festivals in Germany. In the United States, he has performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Detroit Symphony Orchestras. Peter Donohoe also performs numerous recitals internationally and continues working with his long standing duo

partner Martin Roscoe, as well as more recent collaborations with Raphael Wallfisch, Elizabeth Watts, and Noriko Ogawa.

Peter Donohoe is an honorary doctor of music at seven UK universities and is artistic director at Fishguard Festival. He was awarded a CBE for services to classical music in the 2010 New Years Honours List.

RAPHAEL WALLFISCH

Raphael Wallfisch was born in London into a family of distinguished musicians, his mother the cellist Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, and his father the pianist Peter Wallfisch. At an early age, Raphael was greatly inspired by hearing Zara Nelsova play, and, guided by a succession of fine teachers, including Amaryllis Fleming, Amadeo Baldovino and Derek Simpson, it became apparent that the cello was to be his life's work.

While studying with the great Russian cellist Gregor Piatigorsky in California (Thornton School of Music), he was chosen to perform chamber music with Jascha Heifetz in the informal recitals that Piatigorsky held at his home.

At the age of twenty-four he won the Gaspar Cassadó International Cello Competition in Florence. Since then he has enjoyed a worldwide career playing with such orchestras as the London Symphony, London Philharmonic, Philharmonia, BBC Symphony, English Chamber

Orchestra, Hallé, City of Birmingham Symphony, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Berlin Symphony, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Indianapolis Symphony, Warsaw Philharmonic, Czech Philharmonic and many others. He is regularly invited to play at major festivals such as the BBC Proms, Edinburgh, Aldeburgh, Spoleto, Prades, Oslo and Schleswig Holstein.

Teaching is one of Raphael Wallfisch's passions and he teaches masterclasses all over the world. Raphael holds professorships in Switzerland at the Zürich Winterthur Konservatorium and in Manchester at the Royal Northern College of Music. He has an extensive discography of recordings with EMI, Chandos and other labels. Britain's leading composers have worked closely with Raphael Wallfisch, often writing works for him. Among these are Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Kenneth Leighton, James MacMillan, John Metcalf, Paul Patterson, Robert Simpson, Robert Saxton, Roger Smalley, Giles Swayne, John Tavener and Adrian Williams.

Raphael Wallfisch plays the 1865 Vuillaume "Sheremetev" and a Gennaro Gagliano of 1760.

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