PROKOFIEV

Alexander Nevsky (Cantata)
Pushkiniana (Orchestral Suite)

Irina Gelahova, Mezzo-soprano
Stanislavsky Chorus • Russian State Symphony Orchestra
Dmitry Yablonsky

NAXOS
DDD
8.555710
From his first mature stage-work, the opera *The Gambler* (1917), it was clear that Sergey Prokofiev had an innate feel for the cinematic. On his last visit to the United States in 1938 he studied the film-making techniques prevalent in Hollywood film studios, intending to adapt them to Soviet films. Back in the Soviet Union, he was able to put his ideas into practice when Sergey Eisenstein (1898-1948) asked him to collaborate on *Alexander Nevsky*. Work proceeded apace, the creative affinity between composer and director ensuring that the music for each sequence was written with a minimum of pre-planning or the need for re-editing.

Released in late 1938 this dramatization of the thirteenth-century conflict between the Russian people and Teutonic invaders struck a resounding chord in the Soviet Union at a time when war with Hitler’s Germany seemed inevitable. The film itself was acclaimed internationally as a masterpiece of cinema, and remains a classic of the medium. In 1939, Prokofiev re-arranged the score as a cantata for concert performance, in which form it was first performed in Moscow on 17th May, soon establishing itself as one of the most popular choral works of the century.

The cantata consists of seven sections, which follow the course of the film quite closely:

**I - Russia under the Mongol Yoke**
The weight of oppression is vividly evoked by cutting strings and plangent woodwind, intentional microphone distortion on the original soundtrack ensuring a suitably harsh sound.

**II - Song about Alexander Nevsky**
Male voices recall the massacre of Swedish soldiers on the banks of the River Neva, and the determination of the Russian people to defend their homeland against foreign invaders.

**III - The Crusaders in Pskov**
The chanting of the Teutonic knights invokes their subjugation of the Russian people, underlined by dissonant brass and, in the contrasting central section, supplicating strings.

**IV - Arise, ye Russian People**
A defiant call-to-arms as the people prepare to defend the Motherland, offset by the gentler, expressive central section of remembrance.

**V - The Battle on the Ice**
After the frozen wastes of the coming scene of battle have been pointedly evoked by strings, a tramping motion in lower strings and brass depicts approaching Teutonic hordes. The Latin chanting returns, as do a number of motifs heard earlier in the cantata, as in the original film-score. Brass fanfares from the preceding movement mark the Russian counter-attack, and a scherzo-like section, skilfully amalgamated from disparate fragments of the film-score, the mounting excitement of the battle. A pile-driving march episode depicts the Russian victory and terrible loss of life, with a closing allusion to the Nevsky Song as calm descends on the carnage.

**VI - The Field of Death**
The emotional heart of film and cantata, a solitary woman, mezzo-soprano, wanders across the silent battlefield in search of her lover, commemorating the dead and apostrophizing the living.

**VII - Alexander’s Entry into Pskov**
The Nevsky Song sounds out imperiously as the finale, depicting the hero’s homecoming, ushers in a tableau of songs and dances, again recalling earlier movements, in honour of Russia’s glorious victory. The crash of tam-tams and peal of bells caps proceedings in appropriately triumphal manner.
1937, the year after Prokofiev returned to the Soviet Union for good, also marked two important anniversaries: the 20th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution and the centenary of the death of poet Alexander Pushkin. With the latter in mind, Prokofiev became involved in three major projects - stage adaptations of Eugene Onegin and Boris Godunov, and a film version of The Queen of Spades. In the event, none of these projects was ever realized, but the composer - resourceful as ever - re-used the music in a number of major compositions over the next decade. In the 1960s, as part of the wider rehabilitation of Prokofiev's output, the conductor Gennady Rozhdestvensky assembled a suite of movements from these aborted projects under the title Pushkiniana.

Given that the film was never shot, it would be impossible to recreate the score for The Queen of Spades in the way intended by Prokofiev. The extracts chosen by Rozhdestvensky demonstrate the composer's empathy for the two main characters, Hermann and Liza - the one ominous and restless, the other elegant and wistful. These are followed by a Polonaise depicting the Ball Scene towards the climax of the drama.

As Prokofiev recalled in his autobiography, it was the Eugene Onegin project that most interested him, but the production at the Moscow Chamber Theatre fell through by decree of the Committee for Artistic Affairs, the score remaining unheard in its entirety until a BBC broadcast in 1980. The extracts selected and orchestrated by Rozhdestvensky are from the divertissement depicting the Grand Ball at the Larins: a gently-paced Menuet, a lively Polka with a moodier central section, and a Mazurka alternately engaging and yearning in manner.

The innovative music for Boris Godunov was shelved when the director, Vsevolod Meyerhold, fell foul of the authorities, and remained unheard until a Moscow production in 1957. The Polonaise depicts the scheming Imposter during the fountain scene, in music which recalls similar set-pieces in the operas of Glinka and Tchaikovsky.

A better fate awaited Prokofiev’s incidental music to Radlov’s production of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, which opened in Leningrad on 15 May 1938. Of the ten numbers which comprise the score, The Ghost of Hamlet’s Father evokes the presence of the spirit in sombre, even wrathful terms.

In comparison with the success of Alexander Nevsky, Prokofiev and Eisenstein’s collaboration on Ivan the Terrible was a failure. Part One of this historical chronicle was released in January 1945, with Part Two following towards the end of that year. However, Stalin’s growing paranoia as to the representation of the Czar he himself identified with proved fatal to the project, Part Three being left in fragments at Eisenstein’s death. Dance of the Oprichniki is a vivid depiction of the ruthless body guard which carries out Ivan’s decrees to the letter.

Richard Whitehouse
Irina Gelahova

Mezzo soprano soloist at the Stanislavsky Nemirovich-Danchenko Moscow Academic Musical Theatre, Irina Gelakhova graduated in 1989 at the Lunacharsky Moscow State Institute of Theatrical Art. The 1990s brought prizes in international competitions at Vervier and Marseille, with third prize in the Moscow Tchaikovsky Competition in 1994 and a special prize at the Vienna Belvedere Competition. She has appeared in festivals at home and abroad and taken leading rôles in opera, notably in Russian and Italian repertoire, in addition to concert performances. Her recordings include a 1997 release of Shostakovich’s operetta Cheremushki.

Stanislavsky Chorus

The Moscow Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko music theatre has a reputation as the third theatre in Russia, after the Bolshoy and the Mariinsky. The theatre gave its first opera performance in 1941. The company chorus is called after Stanislavsky, because of his insistence on singing actors and not just singers. It has a long history of dramatic performance in Russian repertoire, including Boris Godunov, The Queen of Spades, Eugene Onegin, Ruslan and Lyudmila, and more recently in standard Italian and French opera. The first chorus master was A. Stepanov, followed by I. Mertens. The present principal chorus master of the theatre is A. Toplov and the chorus master for the present recording is O. Kusnezov.
**Russian State Symphony Orchestra**

The Russian State Symphony Orchestra is one of the leading ensembles in Russia, a symbol of the country’s musical culture. The first performance of the orchestra took place in the Great Hall of Moscow Conservatory in October 1936, shortly followed by a concert tour. Throughout its history, the orchestra has collaborated with many of the world’s greatest conductors and soloists. It has had five renowned music directors: Alexander Gauk (1936-41), Nathan Rakhlin (1941-45), Konstantin Ivanov (1946-65), Evgeni Svetlanov (1965-2000), and Vasily Sinaisky, the last of whom has served as the orchestra’s music director and chief conductor since 2000. Russian music has always been an integral part of the orchestra’s repertoire and the works of many of the great Russian composers were performed under their own direction. Foreign tours, since 1957, have brought the orchestra to the attention of audiences throughout the world, with appearances also at major festivals, including the Edinburgh Festival, the Athens Music Festival, the Florence May Festival, the Lugano Festival and the Ascona Festival.

**Dmitry Yablonsky**

Dmitry Yablonsky was born in 1962 into a musical family. His mother, Oxana Yablonskaya, is a highly regarded concert pianist, and his father is a principal oboist with the Moscow Radio and Television Orchestra. He entered the Central School of Music for Gifted Children in Moscow at the age of six, and at the age of nine made his orchestral début with Haydn’s *Cello Concerto in C major*. In 1977, he and his mother emigrated to the United States, where he studied at the Juilliard School of Music, the Curtis Institute, and Yale University. His principal cello teachers have been Isaak Buravsky, Stefan Kalianov, Aldo Parisot, and Zara Nelsova. Dmitry Yablonsky has performed in many prestigious venues throughout the world, including La Scala, Milan, the Concertgebouw in The Netherlands, the Great Hall of Moscow Conservatory, and St Petersburg Philharmonic Hall, in addition to numerous appearances in the United States, including concerts at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall. He has appeared in collaboration with major orchestras and conductors, and together with chamber music partners of distinction. His interest in conducting began at Yale, when he studied with Otto-Werner Müller and also with Yuri Simonov. He made his début as a conductor in 1990 with the Santa Cecilia Orchestra of Rome. In 1999 he was named Principal Guest Conductor of the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra, and has appeared as guest conductor with orchestras in Europe and in the Far East, and was for three years Principal Guest Conductor of the Moscow Symphony Orchestra. His many recordings, both as a cellist and as a conductor, include a number of releases for Naxos/Marco Polo.
1 Rus’ pod igom mongol’skim

2 Pesnya ob Aleksandre Nevskom
A, i bïlo delo na Nevye-rekye,
na Nevye-rekye, na bol’shoy vodye.
Tam rubili mï zloye voinston,
zloye voinston, voysko shvedskoye.
Ukh, kak bilis’ mï, kak rubilis’ mï!
Ukh! Rubili korabli po dostochkam.
Nashu krov’-rudu ne zhaleli mï
za velikuyu zemlyu russkuyu.
Gde proshol topor, bïla ulitsa,
gde letelo kop’yo, - pereulochek.
Polozhili mï shvedov, nemchinov,
kak kovïl’-travu, na sukhoy zemlye.
Ne ustupim mï zemlyu russkuyu.
Kto pridyot na Rus’ budet nasmert’ bit.
Podnyalasya Rus’ suprotiv vraga;
podnimis’ na boy, slavnïy Novgorod!

3 Krestonostsi vo Pskovye
Peregrinus, expectavi, pedes meos in cymbalis

4 Vstawaytye, lyudi russkiye
Vstawaytye, lyudi russkiye,
na slavniiy boy, na smertniy boy.
Vstawaytye, lyudi vol’niy
za nashu zemlyu chestnuyu!
Zhivîm boytsam pochot i chest’,
a myortvîm slava vechnaya.
Za otchiy dom, za russkiy kray,
vstawaytye, lyudi russkiye.
Vstawaytye, lyudi russkiye,
na slavniiy boy, na smertniy boy,
Vstawaytye, lyudi vol’niy
za nashu zemlyu chestnuyu!
Na Rusi rodnoy, na Rusi bol’shoy
ne bïvat’ vragu.

1 Russia under the Mongolian yoke

2 Song about Alexander Nevsky
It happened on the river Neva
on the river Neva, on the watery expanses.
There we were hacking down the enemy hosts,
the Swedish forces.
Oh, how we fought them,
how we hacked them down!
Oh! We smashed their boats for firewood,
and we didn’t spare our life’s blood.
The swing of our axes carved streets
and the flight of our spears forged lanes!
We lay low the invading Swedes
like feather grass on the arid earth.
We will not yield our Russian land.
Whoever comes to Russia will be mortally
defeated!
Russia has risen up against its enemy,
rise to the fight, glorious Novgorod!

3 The Crusaders in Pskov
Peregrinus, expectavi, pedes meos in cymbalis

4 Arise, ye Russian people
Arise, ye Russian people,
take arms in the glorious and mortal battle.
Arise, ye free people
for our sacred land!
All honour and esteem to our living warriors
and eternal glory to the fallen!
In the name of the paternal home and our
Russian land, arise, ye Russian people.
Arise, ye Russian people,
take arms in the glorious and mortal battle.
Arise, ye free people
for our sacred land!
In our native Russia, in our vast Russia
let there be no enemy.
Podnimaysya, vstan’, mat’ rodnaya Rus’!
Na Rusi rodnoy, na Rusi bol’shoy
ne bïvat’ vragu.

Podnimaysya, vstan’, mat’ rodnaya Rus’!
Vstavaytye, lyudi russkiye,
na smertniy boy, na smertniy boy.
Vstavaytye, lyudi vol’niye
za nashu zemlyu chestnuyu!

Vragam na Rus’ ne khazhivat’,
polkov na Rus’ ne vazhivat’,
putey na Rus’ ne vidivat’,
poley Rusi ne taptivat’.

Podnimaysya, vstan’, mat’ rodnaya Rus’!
Vstavaytye, lyudi russkiye,
na slavnii boy, na smertniy boy.
Vstavaytye, lyudi vol’niye
za nashu zemlyu chestnuyu!

5 Ledovoye poboishche
Peregrinus, expectavi, pedes meos in cymbalis est!
Vincant arma crucifera! Hostis pereat!

6 Myortvoye polye - Mezzo-soprano solo
Ya poydu po polyu belomu,
polechu po polyu smertnomu,
poishchu ya slavnikh sokolov,
zhennikh moikh, dobrikh molodtsev.
Kto lezhit mechami porublenniy,
kto lezhit streloyu poranenniy,
napoili oni krov’yu aloyu
zemlyu chestnuyu, zemlyu russkuyu.
Kto pogib za Rus’ smert’yu dobroyu,
potseluyu tovo v ochi myortviye,
a tomu molodtsu, shto ostalsya zhit’
budu vernoy zhenoy, miloy ladoyu.
Ne voz’mu v muzh’ya krasivovo,
krasota zennaya konchayetsya,
a poydu ya za khrabrovo.
Otzovitesya, yasnï sokoli!

Rise up, take up arms, our mother Russia!
In our native Russia,
in our vast Russia
let there be no enemy.

Arise, ye Russian people,
take arms in the glorious and mortal battle.

Arise, ye free people
for our sacred land!

No enemies shall march to Russia,
they shall lead no regiments to Russia,
they shall not see the roads to Russia,
they shall not trample our Russian fields.

Arise, ye Russian people,
take arms in the glorious and mortal battle.

Arise, ye free people
for our sacred land!

5 The Battle on the Ice
Peregrinus, expectavi, pedes meos in cymbalis est!
Vincant arma crucifera! Hostis pereat!

6 The Field of Death - Mezzo-soprano solo
I shall cross the snow-white field,
I shall fly over the field of death,
I shall search out the bright-eyed falcons,
my husbands, my fine fellows.

Some lie hacked by swords,
some lie pierced by an arrow,
they have watered with their scarlet blood
the sacred land, the Russian land.

Whoever died a fine death for Russia
I shall kiss him on his lifeless eyes,
I shall be the faithful wife and the loving bride
of that fine lad who survived the battle.

I shall not take the handsome one to be my
husband,
earthly beauty has its end,
but I shall wed the brave one.
Now answer me, bright-eyed falcons!
V’yezd Aleksandra vo Pskov
Na velikiy boy vikhodila Rus’;
voroga pobedila Rus’.
Na rodnoy zemlye ne bïvat’ vragu.
Kto pridyot, budet nasmert’ bit.
Veselisya, poy, mat’ rodnaya Rus’!
Na rodnoy Rusi ne bïvat’ vragu,
ne vidat’ vragu nashikh russkikh syol.
Kto pridyot na Rusi, budet nasmert’ bit.
Ne vidat’ vragu nashikh russkikh syol.
Kto pridyot na Rusi, budet nasmert’ bit.
Na Rusi rodnoy, na Rusi bol’shoy ne bïvat’ vragu!
Veselisya, poy, mat’ rodnaya Rus’!
Na velikiy prazdnik sobralasya Rusi’.
Veselisya, Rus’!
Veselisya, Rus’ rodnaya mat’!

Alexander’s entry into Pskov
Russia went forth to a great battle;
Russia defeated the foe.
No enemy shall remain on Russian lands,
whoever comes will be mortally defeated.
Rejoice and sing, mother Russia!
No enemy shall remain on Russian lands,
the enemy shall not see our Russian villages.
 Whoever comes against Russia will be mortally defeated.
The enemy shall not see our Russian villages.
Whoever comes against Russia will be mortally defeated.
In our own Russia, in vast Russia
no enemy shall remain!
Rejoice and sing, mother Russia!
For the grand festivities
Russia has come together.
Rejoice, Russia!
Rejoice and sing, mother Russia!

© 2003 English translation by Philip Taylor

Words by Vladimir Lugovskoy and Sergey Prokofiev
Composed as a soundtrack for Eisenstein’s film of the same name, *Alexander Nevsky*, a dramatization of the thirteenth-century conflict between the Russian people and Teutonic invaders, struck a resounding chord in the Soviet Union at a time when war with Hitler’s Germany seemed inevitable. The film itself was acclaimed internationally as a masterpiece of cinema, and remains a classic of the medium. In 1939 Prokofiev re-arranged the score as a cantata for concert performance, and through its evocative soundscape of repression, loss and ultimate victory, it soon established itself as one of the most popular Russian choral works of the twentieth century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Track</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Russia under the Mongolian Yoke</td>
<td>3:57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Song about Alexander Nevsky</td>
<td>2:45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Crusaders in Pskov</td>
<td>5:46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Arise, Ye Russian People</td>
<td>1:59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Battle on the Ice</td>
<td>12:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Field of Death</td>
<td>6:38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Alexander’s Entry into Pskov</td>
<td>3:37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-14</td>
<td>Pushkiniana (compiled and edited by G. Rozhdestvensky, 1962)</td>
<td>20:03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Liza</td>
<td>2:42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ball (Polonaise)</td>
<td>2:54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Eugene Onegin (The Larin’s Ball)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Menuet</td>
<td>1:38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Polka</td>
<td>1:37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Mazurka</td>
<td>1:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td><strong>Boris Godunov</strong> (Polonaise, scene at the fountain)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Sambor’s Castle</td>
<td>4:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Music to Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Op. 77</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Ghost of Hamlet’s father</td>
<td>6:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>Ivan the Terrible, Op. 116</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dance of the Oprichniks</td>
<td>2:15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sergey PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)*

Alexander Nevsky, Op. 78 36:58
(Cantata for mezzo-soprano, chorus and orchestra)

Irina Gelahova, Mezzo-soprano
Stanislavsky Chorus • Russian State Symphony Orchestra
Dmitry Yablonsky

Recorded in Studio No.5, Moscow State Broadcasting and Recording House, 28th May - 5th June 2002
Producer: Lubov Doronina • Engineer: Alexandr Karasev • Editing: Pavel Lavrenenkov
Music Notes: Richard Whitehouse • Publishers: Moscow-Music, 1965 (Tracks 1-7), Soviet Composer, Moscow, 1962 (Tracks 8-14) and Soviet Composer, 1973 (Track 15)
Cover Picture: *Song for Ivan’s Battalion*, School of Palekh c.1300 (Private Collection)