

**PROKOFIEV: SYMPHONY NO. 5**

**Pure Melodrama**

**Perusal script**

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Chapter 1: A turning point

**VO 1**

ACTOR 2                    *[American news journalist, reporting]*

January the 13th, 1945...

at exactly 9.30 pm...

and in the Great Concert Hall of the Moscow Conservatory...

the intermission had just ended...

when...

an announcer stepped to the platform...

WOMAN                    *[Soviet wartime official]*

In the name of the Fatherland,

there will be a salute to the gallant warriors

of the First Ukrainian Front...

who have broken the defenses of the German Army...

20 volleys of artillery from 224 guns...

ACTOR 2            *[personal friend, remembering]*

Prokofiev had already mounted the podium...

His baton was raised...

There was silence...

*[embedded audio 1: distant artillery salute]*

He... waited... and until the canon-fire ceased...

he did not begin...

It was as if all of us... together... had reached a turning point...

**ME 1            Mvt 1, 0- beat before fig 3**

**1'12"**

**VO 2**

HISTORIAN

This was not the first turning-point in history...

at which Sergei Prokofiev had been present...

Nearly thirty years before... in 1917...

PROKOFIEV        *[interrupting, mixing pride and amazement]*

I was in Petrograd...

when the first... February Revolution came...

and the Tsar was overthrown...

I went out into the streets to see the fighting...

hiding behind house-corners when the shooting came too close...

By summer... things died down a little...

and I moved into the countryside...

to write a symphony in the classical style...

the sort of thing that Haydn might have thought of...

had he lived in our time...

**ME 2**            **Symphony No.1 (1917), Mvt 1, 0-fig 2 + 4 bars + downbeat  
28"**

**VO 3**

HISTORIAN

A few months later... in October...

came another revolution...

Lenin and his Bolsheviks...

The young composer went to meet...

the newly appointed... 'Commissar for Enlightenment'...

PROKOFIEV            *[keen but nervous]*

Comrade Lunacharsky, I want to go abroad...

I need fresh air...

ACTOR 2            *[Bolshevik official, threatening]*

Don't you think there's plenty of fresh air...

here in our new Soviet Russia?

PROKOFIEV            *[insisting]*

Of course...

But I mean physical air... seas and oceans...

LUNACHARSKY

You are a revolutionary in music...

we are revolutionaries in life...

We should work together...

*[change of tone]*

But if you want to go to America...

I won't stand in your way...

*[embedded audio 2: steam train]*

PROKOFIEV *[remembering, in amazement]*

I took the train from Moscow...

we crossed the Urals...

then... Siberia...

Through the window, nothing but forests...

Soldiers boarded our train...

to search for weapons, vodka and cocaine...

After sixteen days... we came to Vladivostok...

where I learned...

the enemy captured the railroad

along which I just travelled...

So I slipped through on the very last train!

This journey is a fairy tale...!

*[embedded audio 3: ship's horn]*

HISTORIAN

On the 29th of May 1918, Prokofiev set sail for Japan...

By August the 13th... he was in Honolulu...

And finally... one week later... he arrived in San Francisco...

PROKOFIEV *[in excitement and irony]*

America...

The land of miraculous comfort... and gold dollars!

No ancient castles here...

HISTORIAN

He travelled northwards to Vancouver...

where he boarded another railroad...

the Canadian Pacific Express...

*[embedded audio 4: train whistle]*

PROKOFIEV *[more excitement]*

We climbed higher and higher through the Rocky Mountains...

There were pine trees thick on every side...

Then back again...

across the border... into the USA...

This morning I saw Niagara!

HISTORIAN

And at last... New York...

PROKOFIEV *[with dry humor]*

And in my pocket, 30 cents...

enough for one coffee and a sandwich...

HISTORIAN

He gave a piano recital...

his first concert in America...

*[embedded audio 5: Prokofiev playing]*

ACTOR 2 *[New York critic, awe-inspired]*

This blond-haired Russian giant...

this Bolshevik...

has fingers of steel, wrists of steel...

biceps, triceps and scapulae of steel...

HISTORIAN

And his next performance...

was in Chicago... with the orchestra!

PROKOFIEV *[pride]*

I took seven curtain calls...

(I'm compiling statistics while I'm here...

It's in the spirit of America...)

*[excitement]*

And... I've come back from Chicago to New York...

with a commission for an American opera...

**ME 3** **March from Love of 3 Oranges (1919), 0- fig 3 + 8 bars**  
**53"**

**VO 4**

PROKOFIEV      *[numb despair, after so much excitement]*

My opera has been postponed...

and I have no more concerts...

*[mounting anger]*

I've been wandering Central Park...

thinking with cold fury of these wonderful American orchestras

indifferent to my music...

and the critics...

rejecting everything they do not understand...

*[confusion]*

I can't go home... Russia is in the grip of civil war...

I must stay here doing nothing in New York...

*[excitement at new idea]*

or find a way to Paris!

**ME 4      Symphony No.2 (1925), 0-fig2 + bar + downbeat      38"**

**VO 5**

PROKOFIEV      *[pride and excitement]*

At last... they are staging my opera in Chicago...

and in magnificent style...

In two weeks, I'll be going to America!

*[thoughtfully, and stressing the opposite locations of the United States and Russia]*

Meanwhile, my friends keep urging me to visit Russia...

HISTORIAN

21st of January 1927

PROKOFIEV *[pride at his success]*

As I walked into the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory...

the orchestra played a fanfare...

then they burst into applause...

I told them...

'What a pleasure it is to be here in Moscow once again!'

*[with energy]*

and we immediately began rehearsing my Third Piano Concerto...

HISTORIAN

Russia... America...

And in between them... Europe...

and rising threats on every side...

In Italy, Mussolini was in power...

In Germany, Hitler was growing stronger...

**ME 5** **Symphony No.3 (1928), 0-fig 2**

**25"**

**VO 6**

HISTORIAN

1929...

The Wall Street crash...





I have decided...

The air of foreign lands does not inspire me...

I am Russian... and I cannot live in exile...

I must hear Russian speech, and talk with people dear to me...

This will give me what I lack here in the West...

For their songs are my songs...

Yes, my friend...

I am going home...

## Chapter 2: Art for the people

*[embedded audio 6: Stalinist song]*

HISTORIAN *[wait two phrases for music to establish]*

In Stalin's Soviet Union

art... and music...

were controlled by government...

under the banner of a brand new doctrine...

Socialist Realism...

ACTOR 2 *[Soviet official announcement]*

Socialist Realism demands of every artist...

a truthful... historically concrete...

representation of revolutionary reality...

linked...

to the ideological transformation and education of the workers...

in the spirit of socialism...

PROKOFIEV *[confident]*

This summer...

I composed a cantata...

for the 20th anniversary of the October Revolution...

It's scored for enormous forces...

*[mounting excitement]*

double chorus...

a speaker with a megaphone...

and four orchestras...

including a symphony orchestra...

a military band...

accordions...

and sound effects...

guns... artillery... sirens...

and I have been inspired by Lenin... Stalin...

Marx and Engels...

ACTOR 2 *[Marx and Engels striking fear into their enemies]*

A spectre is stalking Europe... the spectre of communism!

**ME 7** **Cantata for the 20th Ann (1936), 0-bar and a half after fig 2 (45")**

**VO 8**

ACTOR 2 *[outraged Stalinist official]*

How dare you, Sergei Sergeevich...

take these words...

which belong not to you but to the people...

and put such music to them?

PROKOFIEV *[still not understanding]*

I spent two months scribbling this cantata...

and it has already caused more indignation than rapture...

What will happen I wonder... when it is performed?

ACTOR 2 *[with anger and deep threat]*

There will be no performance...

HISTORIAN

This was one of the darkest times in Soviet history...

The Terror...

ACTOR 2 *[one of the great lines of 20th century Russian literature]*

A time when only the dead smiled...

HISTORIAN

Arrests... show trials... executions... mass imprisonments...

Then one day... Prokofiev was approached...

by the Soviet Union's most famous film director...

Sergei Eisenstein...

He was shooting a new patriotic movie...

about mediaeval Russia...

and its heroic struggles with its evil Western enemies...

ACTOR 2 *[Eisenstein, recalling with pride]*

Every night... at midnight... I come out of the projection room...

and I feel completely calm...

For I know that at exactly 11.55 next morning,

a small, blue car will drive through the studio gates...

Sergei Prokofiev will get out of it...

and in his hands will be the next day's piece of music...

for 'Alexander Nevsky'...

**ME 8**            **Alexander Nevsky (1938), figs 32-34**

(1'30")

**VO 9**

HISTORIAN

The 22nd of June 1941...

PROKOFIEV            *[remembering another great turning-point in history]*

It was a warm and sunny morning...

and I was sitting at my desk...

when the watchman's wife appeared...

WOMAN            *[in fear]*

The Germans are invading us!

They're bombing our cities!

HISTORIAN

Four and half million troops of the Axis Powers...

were flowing across a frontier nearly 2,000 miles long...

By September, the enemy was besieging Leningrad...

Inside that starving city... another composer...

Shostakovich... was beginning his Seventh Symphony...

*[Embedded audio 7: opening of the Leningrad symphony]*

**SAMPLE/DO NOT COPY**

HISTORIAN *[wait for the Shostakovich music to establish]*

Time Magazine... 20th of July 1942

ACTOR 2 *[American news journalist, reporting]*

This Sunday... a special NBC symphony broadcast...

will give the whole Western Hemisphere its chance to hear this music...

Its themes are exultations... agonies...

Death and suffering haunt it...

But it prophesies...

the victory of humanity over barbarism...

HISTORIAN

The very next year... in 1943... came two mighty Soviet victories...

In February... Stalingrad...

In August... Kursk...

Slowly... the Red Army began to push the Wehrmacht back to Germany...

### Chapter 3: Movement 1

ACTOR 2 *[another composer, Khachaturian, recollecting]*

The following spring... a group of us...

all Soviet composers...

were sent to a peaceful village in the countryside...

where we worked together...

in an atmosphere of friendship... and of hope...

PROKOFIEV *[writing to a close friend]*

Our room is big and quiet...

they feed us wonderfully...





But I dislike this word...

I prefer...

'satire... laughter... mockery...'

**ME 12**      **Mvt 1, from fig 8 bar 9 to fig 9 bar 5**      **(20")**

**VO 13**

PROKOFIEV      *[speaking in public]*

I do not want to be negative in my music...

I have no wish to dwell on the shortcomings of our lives...

I want to assert... the positive...

**ME 13**      **Mvt 1, from fig 10 to fig 11**      **(30")**

**VO 14**

PROKOFIEV      *[speaking in public]*

I have no need of meditation... or of privacy...

I work quickly...

and my most important task is jotting down in notebooks...

an abundance of ideas and images...

**ME 14**      **Piano sketches for following orchestral ME**

**VO 15**

PROKOFIEV      *[interwoven with ME14, beginning in the 2 pauses]*

*[pause 1]*

These ideas are my material...

*[pause 2]*

which I weigh and ponder...

*[piano re-enters with third fragment, in octaves]*

and then... transform into my symphony...

***attacca from ME 14 into ME 15***

**ME 15**      **Mvt 1, from 2 bars before fig 13 to fig 14**      **(40")**

**VO 16**

PROKOFIEV      *[speaking in public, with conviction]*

I want my music...

to reflect the fervour and enthusiasm of my country...

**ME 16**      **Mvt 1, from fig 15 bar 5 to fig 18 bar 1**      **(1'03")**

**VO 17**

HISTORIAN

In the fall of 1944... as this symphony was being orchestrated...

the Allied Armies entered Germany...

the Americans, British and other Allies from the West...

and the Soviet Union from the East...

**ME 17**      **Mvt 1, from fig 23 bar 1 to fig 24 bar 1**      **(40")**

**VO 18**

HISTORIAN

On the 20th of April 1945...

four months after the first performance of this symphony...

began... the Battle of Berlin...

**ME 18**      **Piano sketch for next orchestral ME**

***attacca***

**ME 19**      **Mvt 1, from fig 25 to end**      **(34")**

Chapter 4: Movement 2

**VO 19**

PROKOFIEV      *[with pride]*

My Fifth Symphony is intended as a hymn to free and happy Man...

to his mighty powers...

to his pure and noble spirit...

ACTOR 2      *[Western erstwhile friend, with some venom]*

It was obvious to me...

Prokofiev welcomed the artistic doctrines of the Communists...

because they fitted with his own ideas...

about what music ought to be...

HISTORIAN

Twenty five years earlier... in New York...

this Russian composer had become a Christian Scientist...

PROKOFIEV      *[remembering Christian Science slogans]*

Fear is the devil!

We should accomplish more!

The soul cannot be touched

by outside laws and power!

HISTORIAN

Soviet Socialist Realism...

and American Christian Science...

both appealed...

to a man who loved happy endings...

PROKOFIEV *[thinking with joy of one of his most popular pieces]*

In 1935 I was commissioned...

to write a four-act ballet...

...'Romeo and Juliet'...

**ME 20**

**Romeo & Juliet, mvt 10, fig 50 to fig 51**

**(13")**

**VO 20**

PROKOFIEV *[recalling the episode]*

I decided to give this famous tragedy...

a happy ending...

My reasons were simply choreographic...

the living can dance... the dead cannot...

But our official scholars made quite a fuss!

ACTOR 2 *[outraged Soviet scholar]*

Prokofiev should show respect... and follow Shakespeare!...

PROKOFIEV *[resigned, but a little baffled]*

So I wrote a 'corrected'... tragic... ending...

and the ballet was performed that way...

HISTORIAN

But nine years later...

as he began the second movement of this symphony...

Prokofiev remembered that happy ending...

they'd forced him to abandon...

**ME 21 Piano sketch of Romeo happy ending**