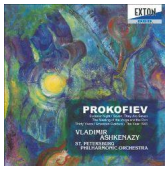
Prokofiev – Summer Night and other works (2011)



Summer Night: Suite from 'The Duenna' Op. 123 *1. Introduction 2. Serenade 3. Minuet 4. Dreams 5. Dance 6. Seven, They Are Seven, Cantata, Op. 30 7. The Meeting of the Volga and the Don, Festive Poem, Op. 130 8. Thirty Years - Festive Poem, Op. 113 9. Overture in B flat major, Op. 42 'American'* The Year 1941, Op. 90
10. In the Struggle 11. In the Night 12. For the Brotherhood of Man
Leonid Repin (tenor) St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra & Choir of The St. Petersburg Conservatory Vladimir Ashkenazy – conductor

One of the greatest orchestras of the last century, the St Petersburg Philharmonic, and the legendary Russian conductor Vladimir Ashkenazy perform a collection of rarely-recorded works by their compatriot, the 20th century composer Sergei Prokofiev. Included are the suites Summer Night and The Year 1941, the two Festive Poems titled ‘The Meeting of The Volga and The Don’ and ‘Thirty Years’, as well as the cantata Seven, They are Seven and the American Overture.

In January 2009 Vladimir Ashkenazy took up the position of Principal Conductor and Artistic Adviser to the Sydney Symphony. He is also Conductor Laureate of the Philharmonia Orchestra, and the Iceland and NHK Symphony Orchestras, as well as being Music Director of the European Union Youth Orchestra. The legendary St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra was founded in 1882, and is Russia's oldest symphonic ensemble.

Sergei Prokofiev is mostly known for his seven symphonies, two violin and five piano concertos, and music for the ballets Romeo and Juliet and Cinderella. The music on this CD however, which includes the suites Summer Night and The Year 1941, the two Festive Poems and the American Overture, as well as the cantata Seven, They are Seven (sung by the Choir of The St.

Petersburg Conservatory), is rarely performed or recorded. These pieces are more representative in style and substance of Prokofiev as a Russian composer living through the violent changes of the first half of the 20th century. --- prestoclassical.co.uk

There could hardly be a more dissimilar assortment of miscellany spanning Prokofiev's career than the six pieces on this collection featuring Vladimir Ashkenazy leading the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, recorded in 2002. Seven, They Are Seven, a cantata for tenor, chorus, and orchestra (with a text based on an ancient Chaldean incantation) dates from 1917, during the composer's iconoclastic early period, and uses the brash primitivism characteristic of Scythian Suite, written a few years earlier. It's a striking, powerful work that lasts just seven minutes. At the other end of Prokofiev's stylistic spectrum are three unabashedly propagandistic pieces, The Year 1941, Thirty Years, and, The Meeting of the Volga and the Don, commissioned to celebrate various Soviet accomplishments, written in the composer's blandly lyrical "Soviet" style, all of which sound like he didn't quite have all his available creative engines fired up. Another late piece, Summer Night, a suite from the opera, The Duenna (Or, Betrothal in a Monastery), is from the same period but is another thing entirely, and demonstrates what Prokofiev was capable of when his heart was in his work. It's an elegantly witty, sometimes genuinely funny piece that's easily recognizable as the work of the composer of Romeo and Juliet. American Overture, written in 1926, doesn't have a lot of depth, but it's a pleasant piece, written with a considerably lighter, more playful hand than the Soviet works. The players of the St. Petersburg Philharmonic clearly have Prokofiev's idioms in their blood, but the performances lack much spark; especially in the Soviet works, they play with a level of animation that sounds perfunctory rather than genuinely enthusiastic, and intonation in exposed passages is occasionally dicey. The sound in the purely orchestral pieces is good but in the cantata the soloist is strangely distant. ---Stephen Eddins, Rovi

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