Prokofiev - Semyon Kotko (Zhukov) [1960/2013]

Disc: 1 *1. Introduction - Andante 2. Tableau 1 - In Front Of Semyon's Cottage 3. Scene 1: A Soldier Came Back From The Front 4. Scene 2: Who D'You Want? 5. Scene 1: The Soldier Kemyon Kotko Has Come Back 6. Scene 2: He's Woken Up, He's Got Dressed 7. Scene 3: Good Day, Friends And Neighbours 8. Scene 4: We Are Very Pleased To See You Again 9. Scene 5: A Soldier Came Back From The Front 10. Scene 6: It's Papa Coming Back From The Market 11. Scene 7: Greetings, Soldiers! Welcome Home! 12. Scene 8: The Sound Of The Rain 13. Scene 9: Frosya! 14. Scene 10: Mother...Mother 15. Scene 1: I Can't Understand It 16. Scene 2: Khivrya! What's That? 17. Scene 3: We've Got Business With You 18. Scene 4: A Young Prince 19. Scene 5: We Get The Same Sort... 20. Scene 6: Women's Tears! 21. Scene 7: The Groom Is Coming 22. Scene 8: Morgen! 23. Scene 9: To Eat?* Disc: 2 *1. Scene 10: Did You See? 2. A Little Garden Alongside Tkachenko's Cottage 3. Scene 1: I Had The Same Dream Again 4. Scene 2: Sonya! Is That You? 5. Scene 3: So It's The Young Prince! 6. Scene 4: I Had A Dream, Mikola 7. Scene 5: Early, Early In The Morning 8. Scene 6: I Can't Hear Anything... 9. Scene 7: Uncle Tsaryov...Uncle Tsaryov... 10. Scene 8: Permettez-Moi De Parler Francais 11. Scene 9: Permit Me To Present For Your Perusal 12. Scene 10: No, No, That Wasn't My Vasilyok 13. Scene 11: So Things Turn Out... 14. Scene 12: Uncle Semyon...Uncle Semyon 15. Scene 13: Oh, Frosechka, It's Terrible... 16. Scene 14: The Swine!*
Disc: 3
1. Scene 1: Oh My God, My God, Forgive Me 2. Scene 2: So...So... 3. Scene 3: When I Die, Bury Me In A Grave 4. Scene 1: So...So... 5. Scene 2: Then We've Got... 6. Scene 3: Cu-ckoo. Cu-ckoo 7. Scene 4: Eh! 8. Scene 1: Oh Woe, Bitter Woe! 9. Scene 2: Semyon! 10. Scene 3: Hm...Hm... 11. Scene 4: So Now, Stand Up, My Friends 12. Scene 5: The Cavalry Flies Over A Free Ukraine
N. Panchekhin (Bass) A. Kleshcheva (Mezzo Soprano) L. Gelovani (Soprano) T. Antipova (Soprano) N. Gres (Tenor) T. Yanko (Mezzo Soprano) Nikolai Timchenko (Tenor) Georgi Troitsky (Bass) Tatyana Tugarinova (Soprano) USSR Radio & TV Choir USSR Radio Symphony Orchestra Mikhail Zhukov - conductor

Semyon Kotko was the fifth of Prokofiev's eight operas and the first on a Soviet theme.

Conceived and written during the period of Stalin's purges, it is based on a blatantly propagandist novel by Valentin Katayev, I Am the Son of Working People. Even that did not prevent it from running into trouble. It is a story of love and heroism in Ukraine during the disturbed period after the 1917 revolution, when the Bolsheviks were only just establishing their authority, bitterly opposed by the Haydamaks in league with the invading Germans. By the time it was given its first performance in 1940 Stalin had made his pact with the Nazis, and German characters had to be changed to Austrians.

This first really complete recording stems from a studio performance for Moscow radio in 1960, and scores surprisingly well over the 1999 Philips version with Kirov soloists in concert conducted by Valery Gergiev. It contains some 45 minutes more of music omitted from that earlier set, and the Moscow cast is markedly stronger too, with Slavonic wobblers excluded - so often the bane of Russian opera recordings. The tenor, N Gres, is particularly magnificent in the title role, far firmer and more heroic than his opposite number on Philips. Though the Philips recording of the orchestra is more atmospheric, this 1960 radio recording captures the voices vividly, with words exceptionally clear. As for the music, it demonstrates once again that even when he was saddled with a propagandist Soviet theme, Prokofiev's fluent originality could not be submerged, any more than it is in the later propagandist opera, The Story of a Real Man, also issued recently by Chandos.

The libretto, which Prokofiev wrote in collaboration with the author of the novel, tells a complicated story crisply with plenty of contrasts of mood, including Mussorgsky-like passages of rustic humour. Its easy melodic style with hints of Russian folk-music relates it to the music which Prokofiev wrote for the film, Alexander Nevsky, and the dramatic timing also reflects the composer's experience of writing for film. The only disappointment is that it lacks the big surging melodies that make Prokofiev's masterpiece, War and Peace, so memorable, though some of the choruses come close. --- Edward Greenfield, theguardian.com

Sergei Prokofiev Semyon Kotko "The night I heard Semyon Kotko for the first time I realized that Prokofiev was a great composer" – Sviatoslav Richter Firma Melodiya presents a recording of one of Sergey Prokofiev's least frequently performed operas Semyon Kotko. It was the first opera Prokofiev composed after he returned to the Soviet Union. It took him long to find a source for the plot. "I wanted to have living people with their passions, love, hate, joy and sorrow naturally ensuing from the new conditions", the composer remembered. Prokofiev eventually chose a novel titled "I, Son of Working People" by Valentin Katayev who agreed to rework it into an opera libretto. Vsevolod Meyerhold, a director, old friend and companion, was

supposed to stage the new opera but he fell victim to the Stalinist terror. The opera was premiered in 1940 in Moscow and just as it was the case with some other outstanding works of that time was a great success with the public and severely criticized 'from above'. Even today, bright and figurative music of Semyon Kotko with its genuinely Gogol-esque humour and genre scenes from everyday life of a Ukrainian village, neat descriptions of the characters, passionate dramatism and monumental chorus scenes cannot leave a keen listener indifferent. The opera Semyon Kotko was recorded in 1960 by soloists of the Moscow opera theatres and the All-Union Radio Choir and Orchestra conducted by Mikhail Zhukov. This remarkable musician was taught by Nikolai Golovanov and Konstantin Stanislavsky. The latter acknowledged Zhukov as an "exemplary music director who was able to decrypt the life of human spirit hidden in the score and explain it to an actor". Zhukov conducted at the premiere of Semyon Kotko at the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Theatre, and its recording became the conductor' last work. --- melody.su

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