Translated letters, play script, and sketchbook, index, bibliography, illustrations, musical score examples.

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For musicologists, it is very challenging to develop and present new theories concerning Russian composers of the twentieth century. Because of the loss of key primary sources and the continually shifting political culture of the past century, most Russian composer’s autobiographies and their compositions are shrouded in mystery. Simon Morrison aims to clarify some of the misconceptions that surround one prominent composer of the Russia canon, Sergey Prokofiev. Using newly found manuscripts and journals, along with the archival contributions of many other musicologists (Malcolm Hamrick donated his vast research collection), Simon Morrison brings together a series of essays and documents that clearly examine the thoughts, joys, and difficulties of Sergey Prokofiev’s life in the new book Sergey Prokofiev and His World.¹

Morrison’s text focuses on Sergey Prokofiev’s life after the age of forty. He uses new archival findings to answer questions surrounding Prokofiev’s moves to America and Paris, the pressures encircling the composer during the Stalinist era, and the legacy that Prokofiev inspired by returning to Soviet Russia in 1936. Morrison’s main points address Prokofiev’s celebration as a modernist composer; his reception in America; his decline in popularity in Russia; and his written responses to the difficulties and delights of his own life. Simon Morrison achieves this by using new manuscripts and journal entries recently released by the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, The Russian

State Archive of Social and Political History, and the State Archive of the Russian Federation. Furthermore, Russian scholars and archivists have been recovering previously destroyed or lost articles of the Stalinist era, and this eventually resulted in the release of the journal diaries found in the Prokofiev estate entitled *Dnevnik*. In the first half of his book, Simon Morrison includes transcriptions of previously unknown and unpublished material, such as Maria Prokofieva’s literary notebook; a translation of *Eugene Onegin*—a play that Prokofiev wrote the incidental music for—and the ninety eight letters between Sergey Prokofiev and his good friend and financial manager, Levon Atovmyan.

These new documents are also used provocatively within the second half of the book as a basis for new research. A collection of essays from a wide range of prominent scholars aims at employing these new findings to go beneath the surface of Sergey Prokofiev’s professional activity and explore the issues of his life as he balanced a musical career between America and Russia. Stephen Press and Elizabeth Bergman begin by examining Prokofiev and his reception in the United States. Though both essays do not deal with developments in Prokofiev’s musical style, they do use excerpts from Prokofiev’s diaries and cross examine them with critics’ reviews, documenting in acute detail Prokofiev’s financial difficulties, his professional reception, and his personal reactions to America.

Kevin Bartig looks at Prokofiev and his entrance into composing film music, and how this new platform for creating music for the wider Russian audience prompted Prokofiev’s musical shift from atonal modernist works to a more Russian, conservative, and simplistic style. Mark Aranovksy confirms this stylistic change with the use of numerous musical examples alongside Prokofiev’s own sketchbooks to examine the composer’s creative focus, his compositional method, and his desire to make music pleasing to both Americans and Russians.

Marina Frolova-Walker takes on the task of explaining the difficulties Prokofiev faced after his return to Russia following his tours of America in 1935. She demonstrates how Prokofiev’s music had to change upon his return because of political pressures and how these pressures prevented his music from gaining popularity. This idea of Soviet political influences on the composer is also discussed by Leonid Maximenkov and Peter Schmelz, who describe Prokofiev’s political and musical legacy following his death in Russia. Maximenkov focuses on Prokofiev’s immortalization ritual and the political debates that occurred after Prokofiev’s death, while Schmelz writes through the lens of other composers and their reaction to Prokofiev’s passing.

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The book concludes with a discussion by Leon Botstein of Prokofiev and his belief in Christian Science, and how this affected the composer’s music. The essay is a fitting end to Simon Morrison’s text, because it features the author who inspired the creation of *Sergey Prokofiev and His World* after planning the 2008 Bard Music Festival with a focus on Prokofiev.³

While *Sergey Prokofiev and His World* may not be a biography of the composer—which would appeal to one who wishes to see the key moments in Prokofiev’s career or surface level facts—this may be one of the book’s greatest strengths. Most literature surrounding Prokofiev already describes his life and works, such as those texts written by Daniel Jaffe, David Nice, and Anthony Phillips. Daniel Jaffe’s *Sergei Prokofiev* is the largest in scope and breadth, and is often referenced as one of the most complete biographies on the composer.⁴ Anthony Phillips’ *Behind the Mask* and David Nices’ *To Russia and Back* follow the same autobiographical format, but focus on specific years such as 1915 to 1923, or Prokofiev’s return to Russia, respectively.⁵ When used together, they provide a clear picture of Prokofiev’s life, but they stop short of going into greater detail on controversial topics. Whereas these books’ large collection of broad information is an asset, they lack depth and possible nuanced detail, both of which are found in *Sergey Prokofiev and His World*.

Because *Sergey Prokofiev and His World*’s aim is to present detailed information, especially the new research made possible by the opening of The Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts (RGALI), this sometimes undermines the book’s continuity, for it skips over the first forty years of Prokofiev’s life and leaves the significance of the writings and documents published within the book up to the reader to discern. Compared to the existing biographical literature, Morrison’s collection provides crucial details about Prokofiev’s life, but refrains from locating it within the larger context of the composer’s career.

Furthermore, *Sergey Prokofiev and his World*’s format is much different from other texts concerned with Prokofiev. Previous books, such as Schlifstien’s influential *S. Sergey Prokofiev: Autobiographies, Articles, Reminiscence* have included Prokofiev’s letters and journal entries, but they have organized them in clear ways, whether that be

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autobiographical, chronological, or by composition number.\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Sergey Prokofiev and His World}, as a collection of essays, lacks any central organization, and in this way presents a fresh perspective by which to view Prokofiev historiographically. The purpose is not to describe Prokofiev, but more to portray the new research musicologists are undertaking. In order to promote outside discussion and debate, Morrison’s text deals purely with topics about Prokofiev that are currently cloudy or have been overlooked. This new information now awaits further incorporation into a autobiographical writings for enhanced cohesiveness.

Noelle Mann, in her article “Prokofiev’s Autobiographical Writings” deals with issues similar to Simon Morrison’s book.\textsuperscript{7} With the availability of newly released journals and diaries from RGALI, she warns scholars that one must explore the validity of each document. \textit{Sergey Prokofiev and His World} aims to achieve this, thusly including within the book transcriptions of new documents, such as Prokofiev’s ninety-eight letters to Levon Atovmyan, and the translation of the play, \textit{Eugene Onegin}. The first section of the book entitled “Documents” is useful in this way, for it allows scholars to publicly access texts that were previously locked away or lost in the Russian Archive. This resembles Anthony Phillip’s and S. Schlifstien’s books, both of which include journal entries in print, although theirs are surrounded by autobiographical information, whereas the documents in Morrison’s lack cohesion via an editorial theme or additional organization other than brief explanatory introductions.\textsuperscript{8}

Noelle Mann warns: “all of Prokofiev’s autobiographical writings were published posthumously at significantly different times in the history of the Soviet Union, and were therefore subject to varying degrees of editing that reflect changing ideologies.” \textit{Sergey Prokofiev and His World} fails to label the historical significance of key parts of Prokofiev’s life in this exact way.\textsuperscript{9} For example, it relies heavily on documents such as Prokofiev’s recently found diary \textit{Dnevnik}.\textsuperscript{10} Though basing new research on this diary greatly enhances the information of \textit{Sergey Prokofiev and His World}, it also generates a fault within the book, for almost all the essays quote heavily from the diary without including any discussion of either its significance or its historical validity.


\textsuperscript{7} Noelle Mann, “Prokofiev’s Autobiographical Writings,” \textit{The Three Oranges Journal} 13 (2003): 27-29.

\textsuperscript{8} Prokofiev, \textit{Behind the Mask}; Schlifstien, \textit{Prokofiev: Autobiographies}.

\textsuperscript{9} Mann, “Autobiography.”

\textsuperscript{10} Prokofiev, \textit{Dnevnik}.
Moreover, though there are many contributors to the book, Simon Morrison does not create a dialogue between them. *Sergey Prokofiev and His World* includes many scholars, but each author provides a completely different thesis, and Simon Morrison does not attempt to draw connections between them.\(^{11}\) Thus, information is presented clearly and succinctly, but discussion and debate, as well as autobiographical relations, are saved for the companion book to *Sergey Prokofiev and His World*, Simon Morrison’s *The Peoples Artist: Prokofiev’s Soviet Years*\(^{12}\).

In my opinion *Sergey Prokofiev and His World* as a collection of essays provides the essential material needed to provide nuanced detail on a variety of topics. With the large amount of resources at its disposal from the Russian Archives, as well as the prominent use of Prokofiev’s newly found diary *Dnevnik*, this book provides scholars with accurate detail concerning previously unknown parts of Prokofiev’s life. As stated before, essays such as Aranovsky’s, Bartigs’, and Frolova-Walker’s all aim to go beyond the facts, and give us an understanding of Prokofiev’s personality, such as his reactions to his dismal financial state and his persecution in Russia. Yet the book lacks any organization for the reader to follow, for the topics covered range from Prokofiev’s life in Russia, to his American tours, to his love of Christian Science. Significance and connections have to be made by the reader.

The “Documents” section of the book both aids and frustrates. It provides a great resource for any scholar who cannot go to Russia, but this also takes up over half of the book, and can be very monotonous. Furthermore, frustration mounts when one reads through the transcriptions but fails to find little to no editorial annotations that would clarify the significance of what one is reading. Though it is useful supplementary material to understanding Prokofiev, I found many of the writings included redundant. For example, the printed transcription of the script for *Eugine Onegin*. The introduction by Caryl Emerson was enough to explain to the reader the history of the play, and if the reader was so inclined she or he could go out and listen to the play, rather than reading the translation.

Finally, Simon Morrison’s book suffers from an internal tension when discussing Prokofiev’s music. It is understood that the aim of the book is to provide information about Prokofiev’s life, but very little of his actual music is discussed. Though musical scores are included, Arankovsky and Bartig are the only two authors that deal with musical examples directly. Whereas the book is excellent at describing currently

\(^{11}\) One also finds this in Noelle Mann’s festschriften *Serge Prokofiev 1891-1953*, where numerous musicologists are included in an edition, but all act as separate texts. Noelle Mann, ed., *Serge Prokofiev 1891-1953* (London: The Serge Prokofiev Association, 2003).

unknown parts of Prokofiev’s life, and generates the possibility for a paradigm shift concerning Prokofiev, it misses the possible advantages that detailed discussions of Prokofiev’s music could bring. The book continues to treat Prokofiev as a literary figure rather than a musical one, and a discussion about his music is needed within future literature.

The crowning jewel of Simon Morrison’s book is its use of Prokofiev’s new diaries and archival findings that draw together new perspectives concerning Prokofiev. The book’s compilation of essay topics depicting Prokofiev in new ways separates it from the pre-existing literature. Whereas the text might lack cohesion or content specifically dealing with Prokofiev’s music, it greatly expands the details available concerning Prokofiev’s life, and this book will surely provide much needed depth to any biographies produced after it. Not recommended for the general reader, it is an invaluable resource for any scholar looking to gain more insight into Prokofiev and his life, as heralded by its fitting title.

Bibliography:


