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# PROKOFIEV

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PETER AND THE WOLF  
PETER UND DER WOLF

Op. 67



Eulenburg

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SERGEY PROKOFIEV

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PETER AND THE WOLF  
PETER UND DER WOLF

A musical tale for children  
for Narrator and Orchestra  
Ein musikalisches Märchen  
für Sprecher und Orchester  
Op. 67

Text by the Composer / Text vom Komponisten  
English Version by Rita McAllister  
Deutsche Textfassung von Christoph Rueger



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# PREFACE

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The two decades between 1918 and 1938 offered abundant points of reference for Sergey Prokofiev's creative development – without them it is hard to imagine that *Peter and the Wolf* would have been conceived and realized.

In 1918 the composer left Russia and made his way to the USA via the Far East. The following year, in Chicago, he completed the fairytale opera *The Love for Three Oranges*, based on an idea of Carlo Count Gozzi; it had its premiere in Chicago in 1921, the same year as the first performance of his ballet *Chout* in Paris. Although he had by now settled in Paris Prokofiev was rejected by the Parisian avant garde.

After several attempts at making contact with Russian friends and colleagues and after the Russian production of *The Love for Three Oranges*, he made a tour of Russian cities; a second tour followed in 1929, and he renewed contact with the writer Vladimir Mayakovsky and the actor, producer and theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold. In 1932 Prokofiev was soloist in the first performance of his Third Piano Concerto, conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler in Berlin. After yet another Russian tour the composer decided to return to his home land.

From 1933 to 1937 Prokofiev served as consultant at the Moscow Conservatory; apart from this he enjoyed special status and was able to continue travelling in the West: holidays in the Mediterranean, concert tours in Spain and North Africa (1935) and in the USA (1936). For Moscow ensembles, at this time, he composed incidental music to *Egyptian Nights* (1934, for the Chamber Theatre) and the symphonic fairytale *Peter and the Wolf* (1936, for the Central Children's Theatre). *Peter and the Wolf* received its first performance in the same year as it was composed, 1936; likewise the Suite from *Romeo and Juliet*. Prokofiev's last guest appearances abroad were in 1938, in Hollywood, where he was familiarizing himself with the

special demands of film music and where he collaborated with Sergey Eisenstein (film music and cantata *Alexander Nevsky*). Also in 1938, his ballet *Romeo and Juliet* had its first performance in Brno.

## Composition

'The creative person remains a big child to the end of his days, and if he loses his ability to communicate directly with universal feelings then he is no longer an artist' (Konstantin Stanislavsky).<sup>1</sup> For Russian composers, writing for children was a *sine qua non*. Tchaikovsky wrote an *Album pour enfants* (à la Schumann). Musorgsky composed a song cycle, *The Nursery*. Borodin, Cui and Lyadov all produced popular contributions to the piano repertoire for children. Anton Arensky wrote suites for piano and Aleksandr Grechaninov became known in particular through his piano pieces for children. During the decades following the October Revolution this didactic side of musical creation was not only furthered, but also consciously strengthened. An early artistic training was to become one of the premises of Soviet upbringing, which accounts for the fact that relevant compositions regularly reveal traces of ideology or even have an ideological tendency. An indication of such a criterion can be found in the Russian name of the title role of this score, 'Pioneer Petya', and in the fact that he is a registered member of the Communist Youth Movement!

In June 1935 the singer Yekaterina Dershanovskaya took the composer and his family to the Moscow Children's Theatre, which was directed at that time by Natalia Saz. 'He looked like the fourth of his three oranges', said a young girl when she saw Prokofiev in the flesh

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Sergej Prokofjew. Dokumente, Briefe, Erinnerungen*, ed. S.I.Schlifstein, translated into German by Felix Loesch (Leipzig, [1965]), 485

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for the first time<sup>2</sup> – smooth, redcheeked, a sandy-coloured reddish suit, an alternately cold and profound expression in the eyes. Of course, the maestro had a sense of humour even if he liked to speak in curt, occasionally arrogant, phrases.

In February 1936 a new ‘Central Children’s Theatre’ was opened in Sverdlov Square. (The building had a history: in the one-time Nesoblin Theatre, Sunday matinées were given under Sergey Koussevitsky – mostly with works by Rachmaninov and in which the composer played an active part.) For the first show Natalia Saz was looking for some music that would familiarize the children with the sound-resources of the symphony orchestra by means of an easily remembered plot.

In 1935, while working on *Romeo and Juliet*, Prokofiev had composed some simple piano pieces for children, based on the Sonatina form (*Music for Children* Op.65). As a result of this the idea began to take root in his mind for a symphonic fairytale, for which he wanted to write the text himself.

Material of childlike appeal runs right through his output. One thinks not only of *The Ugly Duckling* (1914), based on the story by Hans Christian Andersen, or the above-mentioned *Music for Children* for piano and its orchestral version, *Summer Day* (1941), the various fairytale themes such as the opera *The Love for Three Oranges* (1919), the ballets *Cinderella* (1940–44) and *The Tale of the Stone Flower* (1948–53), but also of the compositions written in accordance with the system, compositions which fitted in with the ideology of everyday life under Stalin and Zhdanov – and later under the influence of the general wave of patriotism during the Second World War – like the Pioneer Suite *Winter Bonfire* (1949–50), the song for schoolchildren *We Don’t Need a War* or the ‘Song of the dove of peace’ from the oratorio *On Guard of Peace* (1950).

When Natalia Saz consulted the composer, she found the ground already well prepared so

to speak. Even the idea of the plot came from him: The young Pioneer Petya catches a wolf.

We came to the conclusion that we had to find characters that could be easily associated with the concrete sound of different musical instruments. The first thing that came into my head was the flute as a little bird. As soon as I had said it I was shocked. What if Prokofiev dismissed such a suggestion as kitsch? But in fact he said ‘Of course we shall have the flute as a little bird. It is not a question of influencing the simple ideas of the children. The main thing is to find a common language’.<sup>3</sup>

Then he began to wonder whether the human, as opposed to the individual animals, should be symbolised not by a single melody, by an instrument, but, on the basis of his complex nature, needed a string quartet.

‘Yes, it must all arise from the concrete, from opposites and from impressions: wolf – bird, bad – good, big – small. Sharply contrasting characters must have correspondingly contrasting sound-colours, and every role must have its leitmotiv.’<sup>4</sup>

The drawing up of a rough sketch of the text under the original title of *How Peter Outwitted the Wolf* was entrusted to an acquaintance of Natalia Saz. The lyricist drafted a scenario in rhyming couplets, which Prokofiev was against because he felt it detracted from the music. ‘I will try it myself ...’<sup>5</sup> In barely a week the music was finished and it took another week for the orchestration. After only a few days Prokofiev turned up at the theatre with the piano score and sat down at the piano. The children were very attentive and he had to perform the final march three times, right through.

The first performance took place on the stage of the Central Children’s Theatre on 2 May 1936, conducted by Natalia Saz, who also narrated the text. Before it started the children were shown the instruments and the individual themes were played through. The first important performance, in the presence of foreign guests, followed in July of the same year in the

<sup>2</sup> Natalia Saz: ‘Wie das Märchen “Peter und der Wolf” entstand’, in *Sergej Prokofjew*, *ibid.*, 478

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 480

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 482

Central House of the Pioneers; also present were Sergey Prokofiev's wife and children who had just returned for good from abroad.

Success was immediately apparent. Applause was accorded, not only at the performance, but also in letters. Ten-year-old Volodya wrote to the theatre:

I liked the music of Peter, the bird and the wolf very much. As I listened I could recognize it all. The cat was beautiful and walked quite softly in order not to be heard, she was cunning. The duck waddled and was stupid. I was very sorry when the wolf gobbled her up. I was happy when I heard her voice again afterwards. What I liked best was the way Peter struggled with the wolf and the way all the instruments played as the wolf was beaten and led away to the zoo [...] Do write if you give another concert!<sup>6</sup>

There was, incidentally, further collaboration between the Children's Theatre and the composer. Anastas Mikoyan, who was at that time People's Commissar for the Food Industry, had the idea of giving the packaging of confectionary a didactic and artistic form. Here was the possibility of 'reaching' children and young people with a circulation of millions. For this scheme a 'Sweet Song' was devised, the text for which was commissioned by Prokofiev from the poet he had not used for *Peter and the Wolf*.

*Peter and the Wolf* is not a melodrama; rather, it allows an interplay of declamatory speech and orchestral passages. The score divides into three loosely connected sections which lead from one into the other. In the exposition the themes are presented broadly, each having its own instrument – the duck is portrayed by the oboe, the grandfather by the bassoon, etc. Peter's theme functions as a kind of refrain and is presented in a discursive, leisurely fashion (*Andantino*). The exposition sees the appearance of the following: Peter, bird, duck, cat, and grandfather. Even at this stage there is a dramatic climax: the cat is trying to catch the little bird.

In the development, dramatic episodes follow in succession: now the wolf appears, he hunts and devours the duck; Peter and the bird catch the wolf. The 'March of the Hunter' is heard as another new theme in the development.

The triumphant procession follows as recapitulation. All themes pass by the listener; Peter's tune becomes a sharply defined, proud march.

## Notes on performance

For this score, the original Russian has been newly translated into German and English. In so doing, particular care has been taken with regard to the significance of the pronunciation. Two points should be added.

1. In the Russian, the hero of the story is called 'Pétja' (short 'e') and not 'Peter' which is completely different phonetically. One cannot actually write 'Peter Tchaikovsky' rather than Pyotr, or Peter for Pétja, the diminutive of Pyotr, any more than one would allow 'Peter' Boulez or 'Moritz' Ravel. Nevertheless traditional performance practice demanded that we keep the name in its familiar form in the main text of the score. The author of the German text, however, would like to stimulate interest by putting the name into its original form in performance.

2. An opportunity arises here of recommending a second version of the text, which opts for the use of present tense throughout. This has a more lively effect and makes a more immediate impression, especially on children. To the ears of the young listener the event is set musically in the present, it can thus also be commented on verbally in the present. As a stimulus we print this present-tense variation in the Appendix.

Christoph Rueger  
Translation: Penelope Souster



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# VORWORT

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Die zwei Jahrzehnte zwischen 1918 und 1938 bieten für die schöpferische Entwicklung Sergej Prokofjews vielfältige Anhaltspunkte, ohne die die Konzeption und Realisierung von *Peter und der Wolf* kaum denkbar wären.

1918 verlässt der Komponist Russland und begibt sich über den Fernen Osten in die USA; im Jahr darauf vollendet er in Chicago die Märchenoper *Die Liebe zu den drei Orangen* nach einem Stoff von Carlo Graf Gozzi, die 1921 ebenda Premiere hat – im selben Jahr wie sein Ballett *Der Narr* in Paris. Obwohl er sich jetzt in Paris niederlässt, wird Prokofjew von der dortigen Avantgarde abgelehnt.

Nach mehrfacher Kontaktaufnahme über russische Freunde und Kollegen und nach der Leningrader Inszenierung der *Liebe zu den drei Orangen* unternimmt er 1927 eine Tournee durch russische Städte; 1929 folgt eine zweite Russlandtournee, und die Kontakte mit dem Schriftsteller Wladimir Majakowskij und dem Schauspieler, Regisseur und Theaterleiter Wsewolod Meyerhold werden erneuert. 1930/31 konzertiert Prokofjew in den USA und in Europa. In Berlin spielt er 1932 den Solopart bei der Uraufführung seines 3. Klavierkonzertes unter Wilhelm Furtwängler. Nach einer weiteren Russlandtournee entschließt sich der Komponist, in seine Heimat zurückzukehren.

1933–1937 ist er dann als Konsultant am Moskauer Konservatorium tätig. Ansonsten genießt Prokofjew einen Sonderstatus und kann weiterhin ins westliche Ausland reisen: etwa um Urlaub am Mittelmeer zu machen, zu Konzertreisen durch Spanien und Nordafrika (1935) sowie die USA (1936). Für Moskauer Ensembles komponiert er jetzt die Bühnenmusik *Ägyptische Nächte* (1934 für das Kammertheater) und das Sinfonische Märchen *Peter und der Wolf* (1936 für das Zentrale Kindertheater). Im Entstehungsjahr 1936 wird *Peter und der Wolf* auch uraufgeführt, ebenso wie die Sinfonische Suite aus *Romeo und Julia*. Prokofjews letzte Auslands-

gastspiele datieren von 1938, als er sich in Hollywood mit den spezifischen Bedingungen der Filmmusik vertraut macht und mit Sergej Eisenstein zusammenarbeitet (Filmmusik und Kantate *Alexander Newski*). Ebenfalls 1938 gelangt sein Ballett *Romeo und Julia* in Brünn (Brno) zur Uraufführung.

## Die Entstehung

„Der schöpferische Mensch bleibt bis zum Ende seiner Tage ein großes Kind, und wenn er die kindliche Unmittelbarkeit seines Weltgefühls verliert, ist er kein Künstler mehr“ (Konstantin Stanislawskij)<sup>1</sup>. Musik für Kinder gehört bei den russischen Komponisten zu den Obligatorien. Deutlich von Schumann angeregt, schreibt Peter Tschaikowsky ein *Kinderalbum* und das *Album für die Jugend*. Modest Mussorgskij komponiert einen Lieder-Zyklus *Kinderstube*, populäre Beiträge zur Klaviermusik für Kinder stammen von Alexander Borodin, César Cui und Anatol Ljadow. Anton Arenskij hat für junge Interpreten Klavier-Suiten zu vier Händen geschrieben, und ein Komponist wie Alexander Gretschaninow ist besonders durch seine Klavierstücke für Kinder bekannt geworden. Dieser pädagogische Aspekt des Musikschaffens wurde in den Jahrzehnten nach der Oktoberrevolution in Russland nicht nur weitergeführt, sondern auch bewusst verstärkt. Schließlich gehört eine frühzeitige musische Anleitung zu den Prämissen sowjetischer Erziehung, was wiederum erklärt, dass entsprechende Kompositionen häufig einen ideologischen Anflug oder sogar Tenor haben. Beiläufig sei hier auf das Kuriosum hingewiesen, dass die Titelgestalt der vorliegenden Partitur im Russischen „Pionier Petja“ heißt, dass Peter also ein eingetragenes Mitglied der kommunistischen Jugendbewegung ist!

<sup>1</sup> Zitiert nach *Sergej Prokofjew. Dokumente, Briefe, Erinnerungen*, hg. v. S. I. Schlifstein, ins Deutsche übertragen von Felix Loesch, Leipzig [1965], S. 485.