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A historical analysis and performer's guide to Sergei Prokofiev's Sonata for Solo or Unison Violins, Op.115

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A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS AND PERFORMER'S GUIDE TO
SERGEI PROKOFIEV'S
SONATA FOR SOLO OR UNISON VIOLINS, OP.115

A Written Document

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
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in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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in

The School of Music

by
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ABSTRACT

Sergei Prokofiev composed his last work for violin in 1947, the *Sonata for Solo or Unison Violins, Op. 115*. This work stands apart from Prokofiev's other works because it serves the dual purpose of both solo or unison sonata, and is the least performed or recorded work among the violin repertoire of Prokofiev. This work was written exactly at the point in Soviet history when its government launched official attacks on many composers including Prokofiev, and was never performed during Prokofiev's lifetime. Nevertheless, the work represents an important point in Prokofiev's career, during the final stages of his Soviet period, when Prokofiev tried to appeal musically to the masses, but was instead blacklisted.

Chapter 1 will contain biographical information and will discuss Prokofiev in historical context. In Chapter 2, Prokofiev's varying compositional periods will be defined and explored, the issue of politics will be discussed, and will include a discussion of how Prokofiev was believed to be influenced by the state of affairs in the Soviet Union. It will also be pointed out how Prokofiev's permanent relocation to the Soviet Union in 1935 had great implications for his career and personal life. Chapter 3 delves deeper into the *Solo Sonata*, its history and performance practice, as well as specific characteristics of Prokofiev's late style, including his treatment of melody, lyricism, rhythm and form. The *Solo Sonata* proves to be an excellent example of Prokofiev's late compositional style, which strove for a more direct and simple musical language. Finally, Chapter 4 will contain a detailed theoretical analysis and suggestions for performers. More specifically, it will show how Prokofiev used Classical forms in the *Sonata* and the methods he used to expand or manipulate these traditional boundaries. In addition, the harmonic analysis will expose chromatic displacement when used, as well as a varied and interesting manipulation of hypermeter, and how this can be interpreted in performance.

The *Sonata* is distinctive from other violin sonatas in the repertoire not only because it reflects an intriguing and unique performance practice in its double purpose as a unison or solo piece, but also because it was composed in perhaps the most tumultuous period of both Prokofiev's career and the history of Soviet music. In conclusion, the paper is intended to present and untangle the array of opinions regarding Prokofiev's Soviet period, in order to better understand what motivated him to write the *Sonata for Solo or Unison Violins*, and why he never heard it performed during his lifetime.

INTRODUCTION

In 1935, having established a name for himself abroad in the United States and Europe, Sergei Prokofiev surprised the musical world by relocating to his homeland during perhaps one of its most tumultuous periods in history. Wooed by promises of work and special treatment, his relocation became permanent and is now the topic of great debate. It is believed by scholars that Prokofiev's compositional styles are largely defined by: first his influence from living abroad, then later by his relocating back to the Soviet Union. In Stalinist Soviet Union, the Arts were controlled by the government; composers worked for and were paid by the State, and Stalin exerted artistic control over the general musical taste.¹

In 1947 Prokofiev composed the *Sonata for Solo or Unison Violins, Op.115*, which is not only one of the few unaccompanied violin sonata that exists in the Russian repertoire, but is the only sonata written to serve a dual function as both solo or unison, and indeed there is no other work ever written with the intention of being performed by unison violins. The work was never performed during Prokofiev's lifetime, however. Only months after the *Sonata* was written, the Soviet government launched an ideological attack on progressive Soviet composers; Prokofiev's stipend was taken away and his first wife was arrested.²

Prokofiev is the subject of great debate in part because after the events in 1948, he wrote a famous apologetic letter that was published by the government.³ Although his life and career were dramatically changed by these events, he kept composing. His late compositional style, defined by the time he lived in the Soviet Union, is thought to be dramatically different from his music

¹ See Robinson 1987, 462: Robinson discusses "the government's (or at least Stalin's) obsession to exert control over all Soviet artists, no matter how famous or respected."

² For concise chronology of Prokofiev's life, see Robinson 1987, 531.

³ This letter was seen by many in the Western world as pandering to the Soviet regime. For the original letter, see Prokofiev 1948, 233-24.

composed while abroad, and strongly influenced by the tastes of the regime. It is the purpose of this paper to investigate Prokofiev's late style of composition and how it was affected by his relocation to the Soviet Union. An analysis of the *Solo Sonata* will examine this work both in the context of Prokofiev's political and personal world and in the context of his other violin music.

Sergei Prokofiev contributed several important works to the violin repertoire, including two Concertos and two Sonatas for violin and piano. The *Sonata for Solo or Unison Violins, Op. 115* is a unique piece, both musically and within the context of Prokofiev's career during Stalinist Soviet Union. To this day it is the least performed and recorded of his violin works. There is very little existing information specifically about the *Sonata*, for the most part because until fifty years after Prokofiev's death, many important documents and letters were still in Russian possession, unavailable to the public. In addition, "sophisticated and detailed analytical work on Prokofiev's music is scarce...in large part owing to the central position held by biography in Prokofiev scholarship."⁴ It is also unclear why David Oistrakh, violinist, friend and champion of Prokofiev's other violin works, never performed or recorded this *Sonata*.

Because the *Sonata* was written at a crucial turning point in Prokofiev's career, the paper will assert that the work is both an intriguing reflection of political and musical practices in Stalinist Soviet Union, as well as a representation of Prokofiev's attempts to succeed in and/or conform to the Soviet musical tastes of the time, called socialist realism. An examination of various perspectives about the nature of the change in Prokofiev's compositional creativity will create a framework in which to analyze the *Sonata*, ultimately showing its important place in both the violin repertoire and Prokofiev's late style of composition.

⁴ Minturn 1997, 3.

CHAPTER 1. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Sergei Prokofiev was a prolific composer whose career was largely defined by his relationship with his native country; the development of his creative output is closely linked to where he lived at a specific time, having spent many of his formative years living abroad, then having returned to the Soviet Union for the last twenty years of his life. Sometimes accused of being a slave only to his music, Prokofiev's geographical journey reflects the inevitable influence of politics and mass opinion on his music. His travels correspond very closely to major world events: World War I and the 1917 October Revolution mark his move to the United States; he moved back to the Soviet Union in 1935, four years before World War II began.⁵

Born in April 11/23, 1891⁶ in what is now the Ukraine, Prokofiev, an only child, showed musical talent at a very young age. When he was a mere 12 years old, his mother moved with him to St. Petersburg to enroll him in the Conservatory where he studied until 1914. At the conservatory he studied piano and composition primarily with Liadov and Tcherepnin,⁷ but also had other theory classes and contact with Rimsky-Korsakov and Glazunov.⁸ Prokofiev completed undergraduate and graduate studies at the conservatory in St. Petersburg, graduating the same year World War I began in 1914 with the honor of also winning the conservatory piano competition with his *Second Piano*

⁵ Ho and Feofanov 1989, 416-21.

⁶ Denotes Old Style and New Style. In 1918 Russia adopted the Gregorian calendar that was 13 days different than the original Julian calendar dates. For a period of time, dates were expressed in both ways.

⁷ Anatoly Liadov (1855-1914); Alexander Tcherepnin (1899-1977); Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908); Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936).

⁸ McAllister 1980a, 289.

Concerto. That year, Prokofiev was also commissioned by Diaghilev to write a ballet,⁹ starting a long relationship with the famous ballet impresario.

One can infer from Prokofiev's memoirs that Prokofiev was by far the youngest member of his class in the conservatory. He was a very talented boy who sometimes seemed overconfident to his classmates, and who obviously surpassed his much older colleagues who thought he was arrogant. In adulthood, many accounts portray Prokofiev to be a somewhat cold or distant but driven person, always driven primarily by his work and composition.¹⁰ When he graduated from the conservatory in 1914, Prokofiev had already been traveling abroad in Europe and had established contacts with such giants as Diaghilev, whose early ballet collaborations with Prokofiev include *Ala and Lolly* and *The Buffoon* (Chout, 1922).

In 1918, only several months after the Soviet state established itself and withdrew from World War I, Prokofiev also left Petrograd and relocated to the United States, where he quickly met Carolina (Lina) Codina, the woman who would eventually become his first wife and mother of his two sons. In 1922 he left the United States for Europe, touring frequently, supporting himself more with his piano performances than with commissions for compositions. Nevertheless his output was prolific and generally well received throughout Europe and the United States.

⁹ *Ala and Lolly*, "The Scythian Suite" (1914-15). Prokofiev had a close working relationship with Diaghilev from 1915 to 1929 and "welcomed Diaghilev's suggestions as eagerly as he did his friendship" (Press 2001, 75). Diaghilev encouraged Prokofiev to write more Russian-sounding music and even enlisted Stravinsky to influence him; in a letter Diaghilev wrote to Stravinsky about helping and changing the talented Prokofiev, "otherwise we will lose him forever." (51-2). (For the letter, see Stravinsky and Craft 1959, 68.) Furthermore, Prokofiev defends Diaghilev against Stalinist Russia in his autobiography (Prokofiev 1979, 288) saying, his "influence on art and service to popularizing Russian art cannot be overestimated" (Press 2001, 74-5).

¹⁰ Accounts portray Prokofiev as a sometimes unsympathetic person and always unhappy when not working. See G.A. 1961, 72.

In 1927, for the first time since he had left in 1918, Prokofiev returned to the Soviet Union for a short three-month concert tour.¹¹ This visit sparked Prokofiev's desire to return to his homeland to settle down and reestablish a career. He was a coveted superstar, a native Russian, yet considered a foreigner both abroad and in his homeland. By 1935, he had moved permanently to Moscow, to be joined a few months later by his wife Lina and their two sons.

It is at this juncture, in 1935 that the music of Prokofiev broke with his previous style and a second stylistic period began to evolve. During the Foreign period, when he lived abroad in the United States and Europe, his music tended to be more dissonant and experimental. However, during the Soviet period, after 1935, his music reflected the Soviet rejection of formalism and avant-garde music that was popular in the West at the time. During the Soviet period, his personal life drastically changed when marital problems separated Sergei and Lina, and he moved in with Mira Mendelson.¹² In 1941, only a few months after Mira and Sergei moved in together, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. They were forced to move away from Moscow during the war, where they lived in exile in Tbilisi.¹³ Four years later, in 1945 Prokofiev suffered a fall, which caused a concussion and hospitalization, and ultimately resulted in chronic health problems for the remainder

¹¹ He kept a journal of this trip, published later by his son, which proves to be an invaluable resource for understanding Prokofiev's attitude towards his career and the Soviet Union, at least in 1927. Prokofiev returned to Europe with the diary, thus it was available to be published when many other materials remained in Soviet possession. See Prokofiev 1991.

¹² Information varies regarding the Prokofiev - Mendelson relationship. She is often called his wife, and Robinson even gives a marriage date in his biography: January 13, 1948 (Robinson 1987, 531). However, McAllister states, "The details of the matter are complicated, and it has been suggested that political dealings were involved...Mira Mendelson had strong party ties and, as Seroff has aptly put it, the years 1939-41 were 'less conducive to romance than they were to survival. What is clear about the affair is that until his wife's arrest Prokofiev was never completely estranged from her, and Mira Mendelson, though she lived with the composer until his death, was not, as Soviet sources state, his second wife." See McAllister 1980a, 297.

¹³ Ibid., 296. Large numbers of artists were evacuated from the capitol by the Soviet government to the safer southern republics during the outbreak of World War II.

of his life. Only a few months following Prokofiev's injurious fall, in May 1945, the Germans surrendered, World War II ended and his ballet *Cinderella* (1940-44) premiered in Moscow at the Bolshoi Theater.

By the year 1947, the first part of Prokofiev's *War and Peace* had premiered in Leningrad, and became a signal of the changing Soviet climate. Although Prokofiev's music was generally very popular, during the writing of the *Solo Violin Sonata*, the premiere of the second part of *War and Peace* was cancelled and, in early 1948, Prokofiev was among the composers included in a harsh ideological attack by the Soviet government. To make matters worse, Lina was arrested no more than a month after Serge moved in with Mira. Because Serge and Lina's marriage license was not from Russia, the government found a loophole which no longer gave her protection as a citizen, leaving her open to be persecuted for years because of her ex-husband.¹⁴

Despite the personal struggles, continuing health issues, and pressures from the government, Prokofiev continued composing until the end of his life. His death, on March 5, 1953, was ironically announced a day later because the Soviets did not want anything to overshadow the importance of Stalin's death on the same date.

¹⁴ A February 15, 1937 decree forbade Soviet citizens to marry foreigners, and also worked retroactively so that Prokofiev's marriage was illegal and his children illegitimate. See Seroff 1968, 292.

CHAPTER 2. PROKOFIEV AND POLITICS: THE SOVIET UNION IN 1947

2.1 THE FOREIGN AND SOVIET PERIODS

Much of the scholarship regarding Prokofiev's music involves the comparison of his music between his Foreign and Soviet periods. Before moving back to the Soviet Union in 1935, Prokofiev followed a more experimental vein than he did in the Soviet Union; the music composed during the Soviet period attempted to appeal to the musical tastes of the broader Soviet masses. Scholarly opinions vary about Prokofiev's compositional periods, and seem to be influenced largely by Western or Soviet perspective.¹⁵

Nestyev's two biographies reveal that even for years after Prokofiev's death, the government still censored and controlled everything that was published. Nestyev discusses Prokofiev's compositional periods in detail, favoring the music he composed during the Soviet period. Krebs comments this perspective falls in line with Soviet thinking, and that Nestyev would not have been able to publish a biography about Prokofiev in 1946 or 1957 without this point of view.¹⁶ Minturn goes even further to say that Nestyev's second biography was written to correct the overly neutral tone of the first:

For an illustration we have only to turn to Nestyev, whose two biographies of Prokofiev differ in how they assess Western and Soviet influences on the quality of his music. Nestyev, in his first biography, published seven years before Prokofiev's death, avoids focusing on the salutary or deleterious effects of Western or Soviet influence on Prokofiev. The book was deemed unfit by Soviet censors precisely because of its political neutrality. In Nestyev's second biography the extent to which political pressures motivate the "revised" judgments is painfully transparent.¹⁷

¹⁵ Israel V. Nestyev was Prokofiev's first biographer and a Russian colleague, representing Soviet perspective. He wrote two biographies of Prokofiev, the first in 1946, the second in 1957; some biographers from the Western perspective and at times critical of Nestyev's portrayal of Prokofiev include David Nice, Harlow Robinson, Claude Samuel, and Simon Morrison.

¹⁶ Krebs 1961, 580.

¹⁷ Minturn 1997, 3.

Nestyev expresses in the second biography that Prokofiev's most productive years occurred when he lived in the Soviet Union, and that the music written abroad, a generally less productive and fruitful period, was negatively influenced by Western art music.¹⁸ Krebs argues that Nestyev's point of view is highly Russian and subjective, and that the biography "shows [the] bewildering problem of Soviet musical historiography."¹⁹ Samuel goes further to say, that although Nestyev was originally in favor of the Soviet period of Prokofiev's style, he later admitted this was an error and that "the music critic, by approving all the work of these years, was exercising a bad influence on the development of Prokofiev during the period 1942-1947!"²⁰ Nestyev eventually accused several works of that period of having "artificial complexity," even though he had earlier defended Prokofiev's quest for greater simplicity in music.²¹ Nevertheless, Krebs insists that both biographies of 1946 and 1957 were written "under the same thumb,"²² implying that it was very difficult during the Stalin years for any person not to be influenced by the regime because all Soviet musical affairs were controlled by the government.

Not only does Nestyev value the Soviet compositions as more in quantity and therefore better, but he also favors Prokofiev's compositional technique and style during this period. For example, according to Nestyev, Prokofiev neglected the "orthodox" sonata form during his foreign years and it was a positive step when he revived his neoclassical tendencies, particularly his use of sonata form.²³

¹⁸ Nestyev 1960, 119.

¹⁹ Krebs 1961, 580.

²⁰ Samuel 2000, 151.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Krebs 1961, 580. In fact, Prokofiev's autobiography was even subdued and influenced by Stalinist Russia during the years 1937-49. See McAllister 1980b, 631.

²³ This is mentioned by Elston 1947, 232; also see Nestyev 1960, 484-5. Nestyev's support of Prokofiev's so-called revival of neo-classical tendencies is an indication of Soviet taste of the time and socialist realism. Discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

Prokofiev's biographers were the first of many to view his career as a conflict between Western and Soviet influences in his music, and their opinions about the nature of his creative change often depend on Western or Soviet perspective. The issue of censorship in the Soviet Union makes even some primary sources (i.e. Nestyev and Prokofiev's *Memoirs*) worthy of questioning as to their bias. In addition, much information and many documents are either still under government protection or are being only recently disclosed after the fiftieth anniversary of Prokofiev's death. Materials which might enlighten scholars about his life and music are still unavailable to the public, and therefore leave a lot of room for conjecture.

2.2 POLITICS IN THE SOVIET UNION AND SOCIALIST REALISM

Nestyev's change of opinion shows how music and scholarship was influenced by the Soviet regime during this time. In the 1930s, Soviet musical life was defined by the conflict between socialist realism and European modernism, and Prokofiev's return to the Soviet Union coincided with a critical period for Soviet music.²⁴ Seroff describes the political and social context of the Soviet Union regarding Stalin's musical taste and the control he had over popular opinion:

This unprecedented interest on the part of Comrade Stalin in music and particularly in opera was part of the posthumously termed "personality cult." Stalin was the supreme judge of all matters, and no one was to doubt his competence, even in such a special field as music in which a more sensitive ear than his was required...Stalin's standard was absolutely primitive.

According to those who were able to observe him at official gatherings in which musical programs were performed, Stalin never enjoyed the beauty of serious music...Stalin liked vocal music because he could follow the text, and he preferred to the concert hall a more intimate atmosphere in which the music was an accompaniment to eating and drinking. He was bored by symphonic and chamber music. He disapproved of such long compositions for solo instruments as concertos and sonatas, so that these particular forms of compositions were designated as being "anti-democratic." He was against "modern music" in all its forms, including popular music that originated in the West, Viennese operettas, American jazz, French songs, and Argentine tangos.

²⁴ According to Nestyev, socialist realism attempted to revitalize musical creativity in the Soviet Union by opting for a more classical expression and contemporary Soviet themes. See Nestyev 1960, 245.

There was no reason why anyone should have objected to his taste, actually, except that it was rather obvious that Stalin was no music critic and that his omnipotent opinion could bring only disaster to the development of a Soviet musical culture; his influence was far worse than Prokofiev's.²⁵

In 1932, the formation of the Union of Soviet Composers established an official anti-European stance. McAllister elaborates:

With the dissolution of the RAPM [Russian Associate of Proletariat Musicians] in 1932 and the subsequent establishment of the Union of Soviet Composers, the administration of musical affairs throughout the country was, in effect, subject to government control. The Party Central Committee had also recommended general guidelines for composers and these, on the surface at least, probably seemed not unreasonable to Prokofiev. Composers were advised to pay heed to the social context of their music and its appeal to the people at large...²⁶

Prokofiev's relocation to the Soviet Union during this time was not only a surprise to many, especially in the West, but incited questions and debate for many years to come. Morrison says,

Prokofiev perplexed his anti-Soviet Parisian colleagues by migrating to a totalitarian state whose artists were obliged to curtail experimentation in support of official doctrine. And indeed, though valued by the regime and supported by its institutions, he suffered correction and censorship, the eventual result being a gradual sapping of his creative energies. He sought to influence Soviet cultural policy, but instead it influenced him. Prokofiev revised and re-revised his late ballets and operas in an effort to see them staged, but more often than not, his labors went to waste...

The reasons for his relocation are complicated and, in their own way, frightening. It emerges that the steel-willed composer never intended to remain in the Soviet Union. The regime needed celebrities, and he was lured into becoming one of them on the premise that nothing would change in his international career and that Moscow would simply replace Paris as the center of his operations.²⁷

McAllister says,

Certainly, perhaps naively, he disregarded the political implications of such a move. Prokofiev had never held any strong political views; he may well have assumed that the Soviet authorities would respect this, and that if any pressures were being brought to bear on

²⁵ Seroff 1968, 190-1.

²⁶ McAllister 1980a, 295.

²⁷ Morrison 2009, 2-3.

composers, of all people, they somehow would not apply to him. Quite simply, he wanted to go home.²⁸

After living abroad in the United States and Europe and absent from his homeland for nine years, in 1927, Prokofiev visited the Soviet Union while on a short concert tour. During this concert tour he kept a diary, which was later edited and published by his son, Oleg Prokofiev. Although Prokofiev moved to the Soviet Union permanently in 1935, almost ten years after this first visit, it is very likely that his decision to reestablish himself in the homeland was in part because of his reception there in 1927.²⁹ Morrison says,

...he conceived it less as repatriation than relocation. He tried, as long as he could to keep his options open. Committed to sustaining a positive outlook that denied any finality or legitimacy to evil, he could not have imagined that his future career would be immortalized- and trivialized- in history textbooks as a parable about the traumatic upheavals of twentieth-century life.³⁰

In addition, Morrison suggests that Prokofiev returned to the Soviet Union partly because of his rivalry with Stravinsky: “how unhappy he was living in Stravinsky’s shadow, a factor in his decision to leave Europe for Russia.”³¹ Furthermore, he says there is no way Prokofiev wouldn’t have been aware of the situation in the Soviet Union before he moved back. Prokofiev kept in good touch with his friends Asafiev and Miaskovsky,³² and if they were not informing him of the situation there before his arrival, he should have already been informed from his own issues of censorship and difficulties while traveling abroad during his 1927 tour in Moscow and St.

²⁸ McAllister 1980a, 294-5.

²⁹ Ibid., 293: “Everywhere he was received as a celebrity; indeed the great success of the tour, along with his renewal of personal friendships, must have made the prospect of a permanent return very attractive.”

³⁰ Morrison 2009, 27.

³¹ See Morrison 1999, 671.

³² Both were composers as well: Boris Asafiev (1884-1949); Nikolai Myaskovsky (1881-1950).

Petersburg.³³ Morrison says, “Tragically, he thought (or was careerist enough to convince himself) that his artistic reputation would permit him to transcend Soviet political realities.”³⁴ This suggests that Prokofiev was driven not only by his love of music, but also by the desire to have a successful career and to be accepted by his audience. However, this desire to be accepted by his Soviet audience is why he was criticized in the West, so it seems that he would inevitably be cut by this double-edged sword.

2.3 THE IMPLICATIONS OF PROKOFIEV’S RELOCATION TO THE SOVIET UNION

Once he moved back to the Soviet Union, Prokofiev made great attempts to write music that people would embrace, sometimes taking the form of overtly political works, Russian themes, or simply embodying the musical taste of socialist realism. Nestyev believes that perhaps due to the great success of the *Alexander Nevsky Cantata* (1939), as a result, all of Prokofiev’s compositions written that year were dedicated to Soviet themes.³⁵ Similarly, in 1947, Prokofiev also composed two conspicuously political works for the thirtieth anniversary of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution: *Flourish, O Mighty Land* and *Festive Poem*.³⁶ Nestyev says, that already in late November of 1932 when still living in Europe, “in conversations with leaders of the Union of Soviet Composers, he expressed a deep desire to settle permanently in the Soviet Union and to participate actively in

³³ A reading of Prokofiev’s 1927 *Soviet Diary* also illustrates several examples in which Prokofiev comments about the state of the Soviet Union, often critically or sarcastically. For example, he says, “They asked me for my impressions of the USSR and other countries. So I criticized what was bad abroad and praised what was good in the USSR, keeping everything, needless to say, within reason” (Prokofiev 1991, 54-5). And later, “I obviously did have to reply, and the sooner I got it over and done with the better. So I stood up and, remembering my Moscow speech, drank this time to Leningrad and the musicians of Leningrad and talked quite a bit of noncommittal nonsense” (Ibid., 72).

³⁴ Morrison 1999, 671.

³⁵ Nestyev 1960, 306.

³⁶ Other works written in 1947: Prokofiev finished revising his *Symphony No. 4*, orchestrated the *Symphony No. 6* and completed his last and *Piano Sonata No. 9*. Like the *Solo Sonata, op. 115*, the premiere of the *Piano Sonata No. 9* was also postponed. See Robinson 1987, 458.

building its musical culture.”³⁷ But despite his attempts to stay on the good side of the regime, Prokofiev was also eventually blacklisted. Morrison explains,

For elite artists living under Stalin, official approbation tended to alternate with official condemnation. The specific reasons for the changes in their fortunes are difficult to rationalize. Vacillations in cultural policies affected their careers, but so, too, did disputes within the cultural agencies, miscommunications between those agencies and other tiers of government, and personal rivalries. Prokofiev’s standing declined radically in 1948, owing less to ideological considerations than the vagaries of policymakers, factionalism in the bureaucracy, and financial crises. The power of the regime was absolute in the sense that it followed no consistent rules.³⁸

There is, consequently, a great debate surrounding Prokofiev’s music and to what extent he appealed to the regime and the masses. Criticized by some and praised by others, from his music to politics, Prokofiev proves to be the focus of much controversy. Fitzpatrick says it is not strange that a supposedly apolitical man would so readily accept the government’s control over musical affairs:

It may best be understood if one sees Prokofiev as the 20th-century equivalent of an 18th-century composer working for noble or ecclesiastical patrons and doing his best to satisfy their requirements. Like his 18th-century counterparts, but in sharp contrast to the Romantics, he was willing to hack his work around, if that was necessary to get it performed, to recycle parts of earlier works, and do all kinds of cutting and pasting.³⁹

In a more abrasive tone, Montgomery suggests that Prokofiev was not at all unaware of politics and perhaps even benefited from the situation; he was “an artist who not only existed but thrived in conflicting political and cultural realities.”⁴⁰ Furthermore,

As a consummate performer and world-renowned composer he returned the prodigal son... It is evident from these memoirs that Prokofiev at least partially understood the reality of his position and his value to the Soviet Union as a cultural delegate... Prokofiev was a self-

³⁷ Nestyev 1960, 244.

³⁸ Morrison 2009, 295-6. Also see McAllister 1980a, 289: “During the war, in the face of more pressing matters, the party’s concern for the arts had been relaxed; now state intervention was felt necessary to rectify the unhealthy state of musical affairs. A decree of the party central committee was published on 10 February which declared the works of most prominent Soviet composers, Prokofiev among them, ‘marked with formalist perversions...alien to the Soviet people.’ *War and Peace* came under special fire, and many of Prokofiev’s earlier works were banned from performance.”

³⁹ Fitzpatrick 2009, 27.

⁴⁰ Montgomery 1994, 577.

interested man - that much is plain in these daily entries. Consequently, the integrity of his often amusing and anecdotal prose results from his egocentricity and unwavering artistic conviction.”⁴¹

Nestyev addresses the popular opinion that Prokofiev wrote lyrical music in order to “comply with the Party resolution,” arguing, “the absurdity and falseness of this opinion is obvious... that it is clear that Prokofiev was interested in melody and lyricism for its own sake with no political agenda.”⁴² Even though this argument may seem fallacious coming from Nestyev, considering he is also accused of ‘toeing the party line,’⁴³ there are several accounts that support his claims. For example, Schwarz says Prokofiev expressed a commitment to the new music of the people as early as 1930, before he moved back to the Soviet Union and the “Association for Contemporary Music disintegrated and was replaced by socialist realism.” This new music stressed simplicity and tonal lyricism. Prokofiev said,

I strive for greater simplicity and more melody... There has been too much dissonance... We want a simpler and more melodic style for music, a simpler, less complicated emotional state, and dissonance once again relegated to its proper place as one element in music, contingent principally upon the meeting of melodic lines.⁴⁴

Several years later, in 1937, Prokofiev went further to say that though music should evolve towards the direction of simplicity, over-simplification in general for the sake of the listener, or in particular the Soviet masses, makes music seem insincere. This opinion shows that during his

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Nestyev 1960, 408. To defend this idea, he quotes Prokofiev’s famous letter published in a 1948 issue of *The Musical Times* which states, “I was on the wrong path before but now am cured...” and that “one must be especially careful to keep the melody simple and at the same time not cheap, or over-sweet, or derivative.” He later goes on to say that “atonality is a building on sand.” See Prokofiev 1948, 234.

⁴³ ⁴³ See Krebs 1961, 581. Krebs criticizes Nestyev for the use of this “pathetic letter” that pandered to the regime. In fact, Seroff also suggests Prokofiev wrote this letter at the behest of Mira who tried to use her family connection with Stalin to improve Prokofiev’s standing (Seroff 1968, 290).

⁴⁴ Schwarz 1961, 266-67.

Soviet period, Prokofiev indeed made public statements that were, perhaps not blatantly critical of, but frequently had an underlying attitude of displeasure with the Soviet agenda. Prokofiev said:

The search for a musical language in keeping with the epoch of socialism is a difficult but able task for the composer. In our country music has come to belong to the masses of people. Their artistic taste, the demands they place upon art, are growing with incredible speed, and the Soviet composer must take this into account in each new work... For this reason I consider it a mistake for a composer to strive for over-simplification. Any attempt to 'play down' to the listener represents a subconscious underestimation of his cultural maturity and developing tastes. Such an attempt always has an element of insincerity. And music that is insincere cannot endure.⁴⁵

In moving back to the Soviet Union, Prokofiev also discarded his experimental, Western ways and traded them for a simpler, more tonal style rampant with Russian themes. Fitzpatrick remarks that, in such works as *Peter and the Wolf* (1936) and *Alexander Nevsky* (1939), that were very well-received by the Soviets:

Sometimes Prokofiev's way of doing things fit perfectly in the Soviet context. On other occasions his sincere attempts to fit the requirements of his patrons worked less well: the problem was that Soviet-flavored simplicity, coming from a sophisticated European like Prokofiev, could look like sarcasm or parody.⁴⁶

It is unclear, however, whether or not Prokofiev catered to the taste of the masses willingly and to what extent, or if he was caught in the same trap as Russian composers accused of formalism.

Sabaanev wrote in 1927:

Prokofiev was welcomed so cordially because his music is essentially simpler beyond comparison than that of the preceding epoch; before all things psychologically simpler, and

⁴⁵ Nestyev 1960, 293. Nestyev adds, "It was not condescension to the "poor" tastes of Soviet listeners but rather confidence in their continuing artistic growth that ensured the success of his works." Because Nestyev's views are pro-Soviet and perhaps suspect, it is possible that this vision of Prokofiev's musical tastes is as equally influenced by the regime; Nestyev may have kowtowed to the regime as much as any other. In later years, Nestyev changed his public opinion about Prokofiev upon a falling out. Also see Morrison 2009, 291: "In later years, he and the musicologist would have a terrible falling out, owing to [Nestyev's] negative reevaluation of [the *Sixth Symphony*], along with Prokofiev's entire operatic output, for its supposedly modernist decadence."

⁴⁶ Fitzpatrick 2009, 28.

hence its resonance on the masses is more powerful... Prokofiev provided this simple rustic fare after the too elaborate cookery of the impressionists and the sacred feasts of Scriabin.⁴⁷

Nestyev continues the assertion that the Soviet years represent Prokofiev's best work, when he truly came into his own as a composer, fitting into Soviet socialist realism. He says, "This turning toward new themes and a new style did not proceed without serious contradictions, however; more time was needed for Prokofiev to overcome completely the enthusiasms he had developed during his foreign period."⁴⁸ Perhaps one of the 'enthusiasms' Nestyev refers to is Prokofiev's reputation for being arrogant, which also makes it seem unlikely that Prokofiev would have submitted to the tastes of the regime without some resistance. He self-criticized and fixed his work, but only to the point of admitting possible errors in musical judgment, i.e. "a preponderance of recitative over cantilena in his operas."⁴⁹

McQuere believes that Prokofiev attempted but failed to prove his loyalty to the regime, despite the several conspicuously Soviet compositions mentioned earlier. He also states that after World War II, while the Western world "took on a renewed complexity...Prokofiev was responding to a different set of forces, those of the Soviet Union."⁵⁰ Morrison says,

February 10, 1948 was also the day that finishing touches were put on a Central Committee Resolution that would, once it had been published, discussed, and enacted, abruptly curtail his creative plans. For unexplained, perhaps unexplainable reasons, the regime almost simultaneously lauded and condemned him, branding him and Shostakovich...both a People's Artist and anti-People Formalist.⁵¹

Whether or not Prokofiev's music might have gone in the direction of socialist realism on its own, it is unlikely that he was not influenced by the Soviet regime on some level, particularly by the time the *Solo Sonata* was written. While McQuere suggests that Prokofiev was trying to prove his

⁴⁷ Sabaanev 1927, 426-7.

⁴⁸ Nestyev 1960, 254.

⁴⁹ Fitzpatrick 2009, 29.

⁵⁰ McQuere 1988, 488.

⁵¹ Morrison 2009, 296.

loyalty to the regime by writing certain compositions, Morrison expresses harsher criticisms of Prokofiev “for his creative service to Soviet power and for squandering his talents.”⁵² He also criticizes Harlow Robinson’s assertion that Prokofiev was apolitical and his only god was his music. Nestyev similarly describes Prokofiev’s political views:

He flatly disagreed with the pseudo-Marxist position of certain theoreticians of the Association for Contemporary Music, who maintained that the socialist revolution was supposed to bring about a complete change in the contemporary musical idiom. He considered this leftist thesis “unconvincing and unscientific.”

“There is no causal relationship between musical techniques and a world war or labor’s struggle against capitalism,” [Prokofiev] asserted. “War can produce a revolution in surgery or revolution can start a war over factory architecture, but neither war nor revolution will overthrow the subject of a fugue or overturn harmonic structure.”⁵³

Contrary to Nestyev’s statement about Prokofiev’s attitude towards political affairs, Morrison argues that believing that politics should not affect music was not enough to change the reality of Prokofiev’s situation.⁵⁴ Morrison also disagrees with Schnittke’s statement that Prokofiev was somehow above political influence, saying that during this period, and consequently including the year the *Solo Violin Sonata* was written, his music was inevitably defined by the expectations the regime had of composers, or by the fear of not meeting those expectations:

In his last years, Prokofiev was obliged to compose optimistic works in accord with the official Soviet arts policy of socialist realism. He retreated to themes of youth not as a reflection of his sunny disposition, but out of a desperate need to conform. Following his denunciation for formalism in 1948 in an ignoble music show trial, the Stalinist regime banned performances of his music and took away his stipend. Prokofiev lived his last five years in fear; the *Seventh Symphony* was an effort to win redemption.⁵⁵

⁵² Morrison 1999, 671.

⁵³ Nestyev 1960, 467.

⁵⁴ See Morrison 1999, 671: “Alfred Schnittke, who, despite emphasizing Prokofiev’s sunny disposition, stressed that he “had to know the terrible truth of his time.” In a 1990 lecture, Schnittke stated that Prokofiev “saw and heard the world differently: nature evidently granted him an outlook and a way of dealing with things different from the majority. The dark abysses of the present were never devoid of the all encompassing sun-light remained over everything! This is entirely amazing: to whom can one compare him? His last composition, the *Seventh Symphony*, is as though written by a young man.”

⁵⁵ Ibid.

In an article called “The Paths of Soviet Music” dating from November 16, 1934, Prokofiev wrote about his perspective on the Soviet need for great music, saying,

I believe the type of music needed is what one might call “light-serious” or “serious-light” music. It is by no means easy to find the right idiom for such music. It should be primarily melodious, and the melody should be clear and simple without, however, becoming repetitive or trivial. Many composers find it difficult enough to compose any sort of melody, let alone a melody having some definite function to perform. The same applies to the technique, the form – it too must be clear and simple, but not stereotyped. It is not the old simplicity that is needed but a new kind of simplicity. And this can be achieved only after the composer has mastered the art of composing serious, significant music, thereby acquiring the technique of expressing himself in simple, yet original terms.⁵⁶

Morrison adds, that “‘The Paths of Soviet Music’ marked the beginning of Prokofiev’s absorption into Soviet cultural and political affairs. He remained, however, more a spectator of than a participant in those affairs, reacting to what he saw on the streets and read in the newspapers of Moscow and Leningrad with tourist-like wonder.”⁵⁷ Particularly in the last half of his Soviet period, the rules and mentality of the Soviet regime must have contributed greatly to the music Prokofiev wrote, including the *Solo Sonata*, written in 1947. Only months later, after Prokofiev was blacklisted, his famous letter apologized for any past musical mistakes. Seroff says,

In his long description of his former mistakes Prokofiev blamed the Western influence and promised not to regard the decree as merely another “prescription,” but actually to endeavor to fulfill it in his future work. He closed his apologia with a cliché: “I would like to express my gratitude to our Communist Party for the concrete directives of its decree which are helpful in my search for a musical language worthy of our people and of our great country.” Shocked by the chastisement of Prokofiev, everyone who ever heard of him in the Western world was even more bewildered by his apologia, which the Soviets published for everyone to see.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Sergei Prokofiev “The Path of Soviet Music” *S. Prokofiev: Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences*, 99-100; Nice 2003, *Prokofiev: From Russia to the West 1891-1935*, 320-21.

⁵⁷ Morrison 2009, 26.

⁵⁸ Seroff 1968, 290.

Seroff suggests that Prokofiev's situation might have been much worse, had his second wife Mira not had a family connection to Stalin himself. Prokofiev's apologia was needed in order to save him from perhaps even worse condemnation. Seroff says,

It would not be too farfetched to presume that under the circumstances Mira Mendelson, through her family relationship with Stalin, had managed to wrangle a promise of rehabilitation for an ill man whose years were numbered. She might have been assured that he would be awarded the Stalin Prize if he would publicly acknowledge his "mistakes" and promise to "behave" accordingly to the wisdom of the decree... Prokofiev realized only too well that not merely was he being handed a criticism, which in Soviet Russia does not necessarily hold up indefinitely, but that this time, by one stroke from the Communist Party, most of his lifelong work was being condemned to oblivion.⁵⁹

Therefore, despite criticisms of Prokofiev's actions, it is clear that the issue is complex and he, like so many others, danced the dance, trying to survive and save his dignity. Prokofiev's published statements frequently reveal subtle criticism or a divergence from the approved line of thought. Fitzpatrick remarks that in April, 1939 Prokofiev wrote an undelivered speech which began very differently than his 1948 *The Musical Times* article: "Soviet art, despite its enormous breadth, is declining in quality..." because "the official directive concerning the struggle against formalism has been carried out too zealously."⁶⁰ He was faced with difficult choices, but the fact is that though blacklisted, he was able to compose and hear his works performed until the end of his life.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 290-1.

⁶⁰ Fitzpatrick 2009, 28.

CHAPTER 3. THE *SOLO SONATA* AND PROKOFIEV'S COMPOSITIONAL STYLE

3.1 HISTORY OF THE *SONATA* AND ITS PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

Written in 1947, the *Sonata for Solo or Unison Violins, Op.115* was the last of several works Prokofiev wrote for violin. Because he was a pianist, Prokofiev's writing for the violin often imitates pianistic percussive and rhythmic qualities, yet it also exploits and highlights the lyrical, singing qualities of the violin. In particular, his two violin concertos and two violin sonatas were very well received by both Soviet and foreign audiences and have become standards of the violin repertoire.⁶¹

The *Solo Sonata* is one of the few solo violin pieces ever written by a Russian composer, and more importantly, is the only work written for unison violins, or with the double possibility of being performed as solo or unison. This detail reveals much about how politics affected music in the Soviet Union. A solo sonata requires one solo performer, rather than a group of egalitarian performers, or a group being led by one person, i.e. the conductor of an orchestra. In other words, the nature of the solo sonata requires one person to be the star, and this performance practice did not exist in the Soviet Union, or would have been frowned upon.⁶²

The *Solo Sonata* is a unique work for several reasons and is very important to the violin repertoire. It was written with a dual purpose in mind, and can be played as a solo sonata by a

⁶¹ For a more extensive list of works, see Sadie 2001, 418-421. The Concertos and Sonatas are: *Violin Concerto No.1 in D, Op.19* (1916-17); *Violin Concerto No. 2 in g, Op.63* (1935); *Sonata no.1 in f, Op.80* (1938-46); *Sonata no.2 in D, Op.94bis* (1943, 1944).

⁶² Stravinsky says, the conductor-less orchestra was founded in the Soviet Union "which somewhat naïvely symbolized the collective principle which requires the aid of a conductor" (Stravinsky 1970, 139). Prokofiev wrote 9 *Piano Sonatas*, (the 9th was also completed in 1947 but not performed, see Note 36, p. 14) and a Piano Sonata would, by definition, be in the same category as the *Solo Violin Sonata*. However I would argue that, perhaps the last *Piano Sonata* was not performed for the same reason; or the piano might have been treated differently because it most often plays multiple voices while the violin is primarily a melodic instrument.

single performer or by multiple unison violins. There is no other existing work in the repertoire written for unison violins, and the practice of performing the sonatas of J.S. Bach and George Frederic Handel as a unison group of student violinists, was, at that time and to the best of my knowledge, unique to the communist Soviet Union.

The *Solo Sonata* was first premiered in Moscow, on July 10, 1959 by Ruggiero Ricci, more than six years after Prokofiev's death. It is unclear whether or not the Sonata was ever performed in the Soviet Union as a unison sonata. This practice does not seem to be common and, perhaps, is used mostly for historical or pedagogical purposes.⁶³ The practice of performing a sonata in unison, extremely difficult in its own rite, is unique to the Soviet Union and serves to reflect the political and musical climate of the time. In addition, the *Sonata* was a commissioned work and therefore very likely needed to fit a certain mold and appeal to the tastes of socialist realism. Morrison discusses the *Sonata* stating: "It could be argued that, in the immediate postwar period, official artistic doctrine itself became his muse. He accepted, for example, a commission from the Committee on Arts Affairs to write a pedagogical work for talented children, the most privileged class of the Soviet Union, to perform in recitals and competitions."⁶⁴

The *Solo Sonata* is musically charming, sonorous, and challenging, yet remains the least recorded or performed of all of Prokofiev's violin works. David Oistrakh (1908-1974), a close friend and champion of Prokofiev's music, performed and recorded all Prokofiev's violin works throughout his career, except the *Solo Sonata*. This fact contributes to the mystery surrounding the *Sonata* because it suggests that the *Sonata* is infrequently played or less popular for a reason. The *Sonata* is musically less complex than much of Prokofiev's other works, partly due to its dual purpose as a *Unison* or *Solo Sonata*, and might not present the same challenges or satisfaction as the

⁶³ There are about 12 recordings available on the market of the *Solo Sonata*, out of which I have found only one recording of the unison version, recorded by the *London Musici* in 1991.

⁶⁴ Morrison 2008, 283.

other violin works when played as a solo piece. It is thought that perhaps Oistrakh did not perform the *Sonata* because its original commissioned intent as a student composition made it too inferior for him. Or, additional possible reasons for the lack of performance opportunities it received may be because of the political and personal events in Prokofiev's life directly following its conception. The *Sonata* may simply have 'fallen into the cracks.' Despite differing opinions regarding Oistrakh's decision not to perform the *Sonata*, the reasons will remain a mystery and the outcome unchanged.

According to Nestyev, Prokofiev possessed a special ability for violinistic expression. Nevertheless, after writing the *Violin Concerto No. 1* in 1917, he did not write another violin work for almost twenty years, until in 1935, the *Violin Concerto No. 2* was written.⁶⁵ Nestyev believes that Prokofiev's returning to the violin as a solo instrument, along with the writing of his famous ballet *Romeo and Juliet* (1935-6), marks a turning point in his career of creative activity.⁶⁶ His statement that *Romeo and Juliet* marks "a leap from cold experimentation to a consistent affirmation of realism"⁶⁷ exposes his preference for that period in Prokofiev's career. Nestyev goes on to say,

It was significant that he should return, after so many years, to writing for the solo violin; seemingly unconvinced of the utter futility of formalist experimentation, he renewed his youthful striving to express genuine human emotions, choosing for this effort one of the most singing of all musical instruments.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ This refers specifically to solo violin works. Prokofiev also composed 2 chamber pieces using violins between 1917 and 1935 when the First and Second *Violin Concertos* were written: *String Quartet No. 1 in b, Op. 50* (1930) and *Sonata for 2 Violins in C, Op. 56* (1932). See Sadie 2001, 420.

⁶⁶ Nestyev 1960, 264. Of course, Nestyev's biased perspective and preference for the second *Violin Concerto* must again be noted, as this concerto was written at the beginning of the Soviet period.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 266.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 264.

In two letters to his long-time friend, Nikolai Miaskovsky, Prokofiev confides about writing for the *Duo Violin Sonata* and first *Violin Sonata*. On October 5, 1932 he wrote, “And so as to annoy you completely with my “lenten vertical style,” I have written a sonata for two violins, which has hardly any double stops or chords.”⁶⁹ More than ten years later in a letter from June 12, 1943, Prokofiev again mentioned his violin projects: “It will be interesting to see how you will deal with the sonorities of a violin sonata; I began one a long time ago already, but cannot seem to figure out how to continue—it’s hard.”⁷⁰ These letters reveal how Prokofiev was skillful at creating compositions for the violin in contrast to the vertical, rhythmic style he employed when writing for the piano. Like the *Duo Sonata*, the *Solo Sonata* employs fewer chordal and double-stopped passages than typically found in solo violin writing, but when played as a unison piece, the thinness of the solo version is filled out by multiple instruments.

3.2 PROKOFIEV’S LATE COMPOSITIONAL STYLE: MELODY, LYRICISM, RHYTHM, AND FORM

In the *Solo Sonata*, Prokofiev does not achieve his most virtuosic violin writing or most profound composition, largely explained by the fact that the same score serves to be interpreted in two opposing styles and timbres. The *Sonata*, nevertheless, offers great musical satisfaction and pedagogical value, clearly reflecting Prokofiev’s late compositional style in its form, melody and harmony. As seen in the *Solo Sonata* and throughout the Soviet period, melody and lyricism became the most important aspects of his music.

Typical solo violin pieces, such as those of Bach or Ysaÿe, often utilize chords and double-stops to exploit the violin’s ability to play multiple voices at once. Prokofiev’s *Solo Sonata*, on the other hand, is mostly single-voiced, often employing compound melody, but is seldom enriched by

⁶⁹ Robinson 1998, 305.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 330.

chords, ornamentation or countervoices. In a period in the Soviet Union when the regime and socialist realism called for greater simplicity, lyricism and melody in music, it is noteworthy that Prokofiev wrote such a sonata for the violin. Nestyev says, “this sonata bespeaks Prokofiev’s intense quests in the realm of pure melody, his search for lyricism strong enough to stand without complex harmonic support” as well as his desire for “clarity and expressiveness of modest, single-voiced melodies.”⁷¹ If melody and lyricism were Prokofiev’s primary focus during the Soviet years, then the violin was the perfect instrument to prove his capabilities of melodic writing.

Nestyev says,

As the melodic element became more important, the composer’s interest in vertical harmony waned. His richly tonal melodies no longer needed complicated chordal support. The texture was reduced to unisons, to modest two-voice writing, or to a transparent, freely interwoven polyphony...⁷²

In conjunction with a growing focus on melody, Prokofiev’s harmonic language also changed during the Soviet years. Nestyev believed that during this period, Prokofiev developed a lighter harmonic style, using contrasting harmonies for descriptive purposes, and “different types of dramatic action, different aspects of life are expressed by different harmonic means.”⁷³ Prokofiev often begins in a tonic key, then incorporates splashes of very distant chords or unexpected modulations, increasing the satisfaction of the return to the tonic. Nestyev says Prokofiev’s harmonic language captures its roots in Russian folk song: “side by side with the course-sounding harmonic clusters, we find pure diatonic harmonies, which are refined in sonority but which have their deepest roots in Russian folk song.”⁷⁴ In addition,

⁷¹ Nestyev 1960, 397.

⁷² Ibid., 479.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid. Though it should be noted that Prokofiev was encouraged to explore his roots and incorporate Russian themes into his music well before his Soviet period, by Diaghilev and Stravinsky (see Note 9, p.5).

After the unprecedented, complex harmonies of the impressionists, Prokofiev demonstratively returned to the simplest and clearest tonalities, to the transparent C major (one of his most frequently used keys), to B-flat major, D major, and the commonest minor keys. But these clear and simple basic tonalities are always combined with strikingly unusual incidental and transitional chord combinations, and given rich modulatory development.⁷⁵

Regarding rhythm, Prokofiev was always known for his taste for fast, insistent, sharp rhythms and tempos. He was also well known for his use of “stock-devices of the classical period” such as marches and gavottes in 4/4 meter, tarantella-like themes in 6/8 and various triple-meter and basic rhythms.⁷⁶ Nestyev says that “his love for rectilinear, rough-hewn rhythms and chiseled march time was particularly noted by his contemporaries,” and though more true of the younger Prokofiev than the Soviet Prokofiev, he believed that “modern music could best express the spirit of the times in vigorous rhythms and fast tempos.”⁷⁷ In general, during the last twenty years of his life, rhythm played a less important role in his music than did lyricism and melody, however Prokofiev used rhythm for a specific purpose or effect by way of incisive rhythms, sudden motion and sharply accentuated figures.⁷⁸

Written in standard classical forms, the *Sonata* shows typical characteristics embraced by Prokofiev and socialist realism. Sometimes considered a neoclassical composer, Prokofiev frequently combined classical forms with modern techniques. Interestingly, it took Prokofiev a few years of maturity to come around to appreciating neoclassicism. In the conservatory, he was not intrigued by music from the Classical style period, but under the tutelage of Tcherepnin Prokofiev studied Beethoven symphonies through arrangements for piano and “gradually developed a taste for

⁷⁵ Ibid., 478.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 482

⁷⁷ Ibid., 481-82.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 482.

the scores of Haydn and Mozart.”⁷⁹ It is the use of form that precisely exposes the classical quality in Prokofiev’s music. Nestyev says that Prokofiev “persistently attempted to enrich traditional forms in his use of descriptive devices, sounds, percussive or pure color/timbre.” Prokofiev believed the sonata form to be “the most flexible musical form” and, Nestyev states, “the best of Prokofiev’s later works reveal an organic formal unity based on the principle of development rather than the mechanical combination of contrasting fragments.”⁸⁰

In the *Solo Sonata* Prokofiev uses a Classical model which fit into the tastes of socialist realism, but maintains his own unique style and voice, explained by the fact that, according to Nestyev, he hated imitation and conformity. Nestyev says that Prokofiev strove throughout his life for the expressivity in music and, even though the ever-popular *Classical Symphony* “was deliberately modeled after Haydn, he later in life questioned the validity of the *Symphony* and works by other composers who were ‘imitators.’”⁸¹ In a 1925 letter to his friend Asafiev, Prokofiev’s comments about neoclassicism, saying:

Stravinsky’s concerto (for Piano and Wind Instruments) is a continuation of the line he adopted in the finale of his *Octet*—that is, a stylization in imitation of Bach—which I don’t approve of, because even though I love Bach and think it’s not a bad idea to compose according to his principles, it’s not a good idea to produce a stylized version of his style. Therefore, I don’t regard this concerto as highly as, say, *Les Noces* or *The Rite of Spring*; and in general, I don’t think very highly of things like *Pulcinella* or even my own *Classical Symphony* (sorry I wasn’t thinking of this when I dedicated it to you), which are written “under the influence” of something else.⁸²

In using the Classical sonata form, Prokofiev maintains the basic properties of the standard form, yet his own voice stands out, appearing in the form’s alterations and manipulations. For example, in the *Solo Sonata* and many other compositions, the recapitulation is

⁷⁹ Prokofiev 1979, 275.

⁸⁰ Nestyev 1960, 484-5.

⁸¹ Ibid., 466-7.

⁸² Robinson 1998, 94-5.

altered and sharply condensed, then combined with a short coda to make one complete section. He also applies unusual tonal relationships such as the tritone or minor-second, and combines themes contrapuntally. The *Solo Sonata* lacks counterpoint because it is mostly single-voiced, however interesting tonal relationships are implied, often through compound melody. The sonata embodies a Viennese classical style, but its melody, lyricism, modulations and alterations in form are typical of Prokofiev's late style.

CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS AND PERFORMANCE SUGGESTIONS

The *Solo Sonata* embodies many characteristics of Prokofiev's late compositional style and particularly those of Soviet socialist realism. The composition very clearly shows a style dominated by traditional, straightforward form; clear, simple melody; and a more traditional, tonal harmonic language which incorporates dissonance sparingly and for a specific purpose. The *Sonata* is not complex in comparison to Prokofiev's other works and reveals the different directions his composition took during his Soviet period.

4.1 FORM

The *Sonata*, in three movements, is in the form of a traditional baroque or classical sonata, likely in keeping with the existing practice at the Bolshoi Theater of large groups of student violinists who performed Bach and Handel sonatas in unison. The first movement is in sonata form, the second theme and variations, the third a brisk dance movement.

FIRST MOVEMENT

The first movement is in standard sonata form, although Prokofiev manipulates the form to make it his own. What makes the first movement most interesting is how Prokofiev manipulates the themes and harmonic language within the confines of a seemingly simple piece of music. The exposition consists of a primary theme (PT), a modulating transition (Trans), the secondary theme (ST), and the closing theme (CT). The motives and harmonic movement in the primary theme foreshadow the musical tension of the entire movement, resulting from a strong emphasis on dominant harmonies that only fully resolve to D major at the end of the movement. Figure 1 shows an analysis of the sonata form of the first movement, which serves as a guide to understanding the different sections in the movement and how they are unified by the different themes.

Exposition mm. 1-38	Development mm. 39-67	Recapitulation mm. 68-99	Coda mm. 100-117
PT (I): mm. 1-10 Trans.: mm. 10-17 ST (V): mm. 18-30 CT (V): mm. 31-38	V-[Bb-F]-V	PT (V): mm. 68-77 Trans.: mm. 77-87 ST (I): mm. 88-95 CT (I): mm. 96-99	D major

Figure 1. Diagram of 1st movement, Sonata Form.

Transition material in faster sixteenth notes from mm. 10-17 leads to the contrasting, more lyrical second theme at m. 18, very clearly presented in the dominant. The second theme is a sentence (2+2+4 measures) in A major. In mm. 26-30 the second theme melody is repeated an octave lower, however an abrupt interruption of *forte* chords at m. 28 foreshadows new material, which materializes into the closing theme at m. 31. While the primary theme has a strong harmonic motion from the opening measure emphasizing the dominant all the way to the resolution at m. 10, the second and closing themes' stasis on the dominant key also adds a strong feeling of harmonic tension to the exposition. As seen in Figure 2, for example, the first motive in m. 1 is an arpeggiated dominant chord, which reaches the tonic in m. 3 and only fully resolves in m. 10 at the beginning of the transition.




Figure 2. First movement, mm. 1-9. SONATA FOR SOLO VIOLIN IN D MAJOR, OP. 115 By Sergei Prokofiev. Copyright © 1952 (Renewed) by G. Schirmer, Inc. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission.

The development section is the most exploratory regarding harmony, and Prokofiev develops motives in a very straightforward manner. The sixteenth note passage in mm. 39-40 comes from the transition at m. 10, whereupon the first and second themes are developed starting at m. 41 (see Figure 3). The dotted-eighth and sixteenth-note gesture at m. 41 is a rhythmic motive derived from m. 3, but rhythmically and in contour is more like the consequent phrase of the second theme in mm. 22-23. In the development this phrase unfolds differently, and a more persistent


rhythm in m. 43 drives the phrase to a bVI harmony in m. 44. This material is clearly derived from mm. 8-9, but is transposed a perfect fifth higher. Figure 3 shows that the motives from the second theme and development are very similar to m. 3 but slightly modified. In addition, one can see that Prokofiev's employment of motivic development is straightforward and without complexity.

3a. m. 3




I (D)

3b. m. 22-23



F#M--Bm

3c. m. 41-43



DM

Both 3b and 3c are derived from the 3rd measure of the PT. 3b comes from the ST, 3c from the development section.

Figure 3. First movement, m. 3, mm. 22-23, and mm. 41-43. SONATA FOR SOLO VIOLIN IN D MAJOR, OP. 115 By Sergei Prokofiev. Copyright © 1952 (Renewed) by G. Schirmer, Inc. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission.

Mm. 46-56 contain the most harmonically ambiguous and chromatic activity in the entire first movement which might be approached in several ways. Figure 4 shows that if the grace notes in mm. 46-49 are separated harmonically from the eighth notes, the harmonies spell out an Eb7 chord against a DbM7 in m. 46 and a DbM7 against a Cm7 in m. 47. This type of chromatic descent is continued in the compound melody in mm. 50-52, starting with the D# and D in m. 50, Db and C in m. 51, Cb and Bb in m. 52. While the sequence changes at m. 53, the Bb-B-C gesture over a D-pedal begins four measures in the dominant key, now Bb or V/F.

Chords arpeggiated on strong beats:

G^{°7} Fm Em⁷ F[°]/⁷

[F Db Bb G] [Ab C Ab F] [G D G E] [A E A F]

[C Ab F Db] [Bb G Eb C] [F# .C F# .D] [D B G E]

Chords arpeggiated on weak beats:

DbM⁷ Cm⁷ D⁷ Em⁷

Chords arpeggiated by grace notes:

Ebm⁷ Db⁷ B[°] .Am

Figure 4. First movement, mm. 46-49. SONATA FOR SOLO VIOLIN IN D MAJOR, OP. 115 By Sergei Prokofiev. Copyright © 1952 (Renewed) by G. Schirmer, Inc. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission.

Although the F major development of the second theme at m. 57 is reached via a chromatic ascent within a V-I motion, the D-pedal in mm. 53 - 56 leading to F major at m. 57 could also be heard as a deceptive cadence. Therefore, despite the V-I cadential motion leading into m. 57, the arrival in F major is surprising. The performer can exaggerate the tension and chromaticism of the measures leading into m. 57, but at the same time should take care to keep the line moving while bringing out the harmonies at m. 46. The F major theme is quickly interrupted after only four measures by material derived from mm. 8-9, also signaling the Retransition. At m. 61, the bVI harmony leads to the highest note (A) in the piece, occurring in m. 64, whereupon Prokofiev locks into the home dominant of A major, which is sustained for the next four bars. The bVI acts as the Neapolitan of A, a harmonic relationship seen throughout this movement.

It is important how one decides to play the measures leading into the Recapitulation because of the dominant lock in the previous measures. The strong emphasis on A in m. 64-67, and

particularly the repetition of A quarter-notes in m. 67, should be given close attention because the primary theme appears in the recapitulation exactly like in the exposition. That is to say, the opening motive is again an arpeggiation of a dominant chord, rather than an expected arrival on the tonic at the start of the recapitulation, so there is no harmony change or resolution at the start of the recapitulation. Furthermore, except the grace notes in m. 68, the A melodic notes continue in the same register as in m. 67. Therefore, the performer should consider how to play the Retransition and how to bring out the recapitulation at m. 68 without redundancy because of the passage's lack of harmonic motion.

Mm. 68-76 are identical to the primary theme in the exposition, however the transition section (mm. 77- 87) is modified in that the harmonic progression ultimately drives towards the alternation between a D-augmented chord and Neapolitan in m. 85. The harmonic progression of V in m. 86 leading to the second theme in D major at m. 88 is offset by an unexpected shift in meter at m. 86. The single measure of 2/4 (and the only meter shift in the first movement) is perhaps explained by the fact that, unlike the exposition wherein the transitional material is eight measures long, in the recapitulation Prokofiev extends the transition by several bars. An accent on the downbeat of m. 86 signals the low A as an important arrival on the dominant. In addition, the change to a longer line of eighth notes leading to the entry of the second theme further contributes to a more audible contrast to the sixteenth-note scale of the exposition. A *diminuendo* and change in articulation over the last two beats of m. 87 also suggest the performer can take some time getting into the second theme with this chromatic scale. After a strong emphasis on the dominant key throughout the exposition and development, it is notable that D major is thereafter emphasized strongly from m. 88 until the end of the movement, without the presence of the normal dominant-tonic function in the last few measures. It is not until mm. 113-117 that the first perfect-authentic cadence occurs in the tonic key.

As in the exposition, the recapitulation's second theme is eight measures long, however the closing material occurs 2 measures earlier than expected at m. 96 and lasts for only four measures, thus resulting in a shortened recapitulation/coda in one. The recapitulation and coda are condensed into one section in the sense that both are shortened and are not sections contained within themselves ending with cadences. The coda begins at m. 100 with new musical material, an accented Eb and change in dynamic and expression. Here, a compound melody outlines the chromatic descent from Eb against an ostinato figure focused around D. The coda is characterized by linear chromatic descent to the perfect arrival on D major, using chromatic rather than V-I cadential motion. The opening arpeggio motive appears in m. 113 for the third and last time of the movement; although here the motive is repeated for three measures, first as a closed D major triad (I-V-I), the third and last as a sort of PAC with D in the outer voices.

SECOND MOVEMENT

Like the first movement, which also uses a traditional form, the second movement is a theme and variations. The theme is a simple 8-measure phrase, which exemplifies Prokofiev's goal of simple, clear melody and lyricism. The theme and all variations but the third are in Bb major, a key not closely related to the *Sonata's* overall key of D major. Both D and Bb major were keys that Prokofiev liked and employed often.⁸³ In each of the five variations, the melody is relatively unaltered, transparent and recognizable, staying within an 8-measure frame.⁸⁴

THIRD MOVEMENT

The third movement is a lively dance movement marked *Con brio*, again in the home key of D major. Several sources suggest that the third movement is a mazurka,⁸⁵ but while both a mazurka and the third movement of the *Sonata* have the form A-B-A'-B' in $\frac{3}{4}$ meter, there is no further

⁸³ Robinson 1987, 430.

⁸⁴ Two exceptions are the second and fifth variations, having 11 and 9 measures, respectively.

⁸⁵ Shaham 1996; Stephenson 1991.

evidence that the movement should be called so. The changes in tempo and strong accents on beats two and three that often characterize a mazurka can hardly be argued for in the *Con brio*; Prokofiev often displaces the accents within the phrase, or as seen in the opening three measures, places accents on every beat (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. Third movement, mm. 1-3. SONATA FOR SOLO VIOLIN IN D MAJOR, OP. 115 By Sergei Prokofiev. Copyright © 1952 (Renewed) by G. Schirmer, Inc. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission.

Two themes are presented in the first A section: the primary theme in D major m. 1-8 and the lyrical contrasting second theme at mm. 52-61. The B section at m. 76 is signaled by a change of meter to 2/2 and a tempo change marked *Allegro precipitato*.

The return to *Tempo I* and the original triple meter at m. 111 is a false recapitulation, occurring ten measures before the real recapitulation at m. 121, or the return of the A material. In the A' section, both themes are presented again in the keys as heard before, with slightly altered phrase lengths and are more harmonically ambiguous. A second change to duple meter and return to *Allegro precipitato* marks the B' section in m. 179, which also acts as a coda. While the eighth-note passages stem from the B section, the material starting at m. 179 is new. The D major declamatory chords, interspersed with alternating D minor chords and material from the B section, are a marked change in character and make a good case for the coda starting in m. 179. The B' section contains the most chordal writing in the entire piece, culminating with a triplet scale ascending to a high D and the concluding D major cadence. As in the first movement, the coda prolongs the tonic and ends with a dramatic confirmation.

Each of the three movements of the *Sonata* utilizes traditional forms, however one can see how Prokofiev manipulated these forms to make them unique. Through this analysis the performer will recognize the important and hidden intricacies in the form of the *Sonata*. It remains within limited confines of form, harmony, range, and technique, yet maintains interest through slight alterations and development.

4.2 HARMONIC ANALYSIS: MELODY AND HARMONY

An analysis of melody and harmony in the *Sonata* reveals devices Prokofiev used within the scope of traditional form and socialist realism, as well as an effort to compose in a simple, more accessible style. All movements stay within a narrow key area, and harmonies are clearly implied by arpeggiation and compound melody. In the first movement, the primary theme is fragmentary and march-like, which contrasts the more lyrical second theme. Motives are minimally developed throughout, in that the rhythmic and melodic patterns have very little variety within the movement. The development reveals the greatest harmonic interest of the movement, laying the foundation for excursions to areas that seem like “wrong notes,” such as the Eb in m. 100 and 109, or even the Db development material seen in Figure 3.⁸⁶ In fact, the focus on Eb in the coda derives from the use of the Neapolitan harmony in mm. 8-9, and what seems to be a small chromatic gesture relates motivically to the entire structure.⁸⁷ Bass explains that wrong notes have a dual function and force the listener to “rationalize the displaced note in a diatonic framework while at the same time laying

⁸⁶ See Minturn 1997, 1, 60; also see Bass 1988, 199: wrong notes replace the correct notes of the chord and are treated exactly as diatonic counterpoints, without preparation or resolution, “as if nothing were wrong in the first place.”

⁸⁷ Also see Rifkin 2004, 270, who says: “In order to invoke motivic meaning, a progression of pitch classes must be marked as a salient and memorable melodic event, which, when repeated, is recollected as a version of the original statement. Because of their anomalous character, Prokofiev’s quirky chromatic motions are well suited for motivic associations. The very quality that makes them conspicuous in diatonic contexts also makes them recognizable motivically. Pitch-class motives associate such chromatic melodic gestures across structural levels.”

the foundation for a subsequent structural event.”⁸⁸ The Eb major triad first found in m. 7 is first within a diatonic framework, and the coda beginning with Eb is the subsequent structural event. In the coda, C# and Eb resolve to D just as in the approach to the retransition (mm. 61-62), Bb and G# resolve to A.

The second movement perfectly reflects the simple, lyrical melody that socialist realism called for. The theme is a single-voiced melody reminiscent of a song one might sing, perhaps a folk-song. In each variation thereafter, the melody is explicitly signaled by accents or double-stems: In the first variation, the melody is decorated by sixteenth-note arpeggios, which both imply harmony and weave texture into the melody. The second variation is the first sharp change in character. Marked *Scherzando*, the humor lies in the change of meter from the previous variations in 4/4 to 12/8 and 6/8. The melodic notes are again marked by accents with the exception of a few notes, this time often metrically displaced or with sudden register transfers. The third variation changes again drastically in character, this time to the somber parallel key of Bb-minor, the only variation in another key. The melody is very similar to the original theme and has the same phrase rhythm,⁸⁹ though with a louder dynamic, an octave lower and several parts of the melody appearing in inversion. In the fourth variation, the phrase rhythm is again maintained and the melodic notes are marked by double-stems. The character is lighter and faster with triplet-sixteenth notes reminiscent of a legato *scherzando*. The fifth and final variation is the most similar to the theme in contour and register, this time supported in harmony by many double-stops, while an extra measure of pizzicato chords concludes the movement. Therefore, in its understated and straightforward beauty, the second movement reflects a simple and clear-cut style of composition.

⁸⁸ Bass 1988, 200.

⁸⁹ Rothstein 1989, 12: defines *phrase rhythm* as “the whole range of rhythmic phenomena involving phrases and hypermeasures... Hypermeter refers to the combination of measures on a metrical basis.”

The third movement is the liveliest of the three and has the most variety of melodic and thematic character. The espressivo second theme of sections A (m. 52) and A' (m. 160) begins by arpeggiating a D major triad, but by the second measure of the phrase arpeggiates an Eb major triad. This movement by semitone to the Neapolitan harmony is familiar from the first movement, and again has harmonic implications later in the coda, both at m. 199 and m. 203 (See Figure 6).⁹⁰ This contrasts with the more bombastic, accented primary theme (mm. 1-16), as well as the fast eighth-note passages in *Allegro precipitato* of sections B and B'. In the primary theme at mm. 1-16, the first four measures are strongly accented with a characteristic sixteenth-note quintuplet in the first beat. The theme is then restated a step higher beginning in m. 9, but cadences on G at m. 16 and gives way to transition material above a G-pedal in m. 17. Prokofiev uses the subdominant G-pedal to lead to a restatement of the primary theme in the upbeat to m. 33, this time in C major.

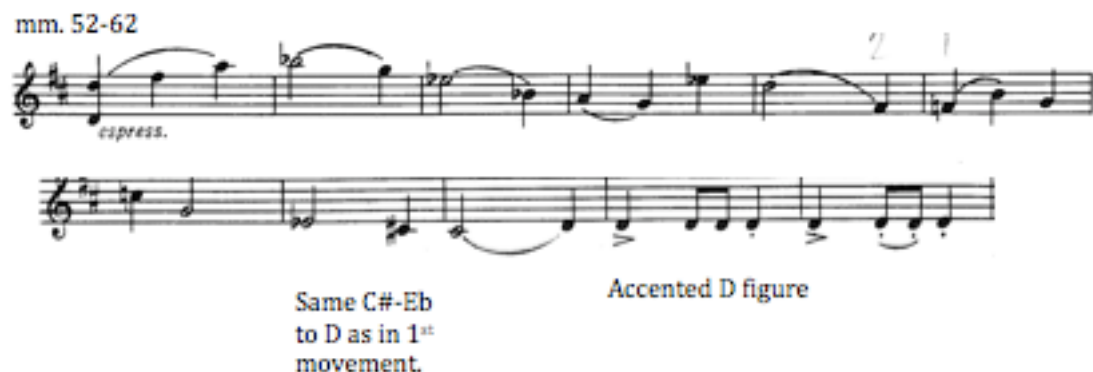


Figure 6. Third movement, mm. 52-62. SONATA FOR SOLO VIOLIN IN D MAJOR, OP. 115 By Sergei Prokofiev. Copyright © 1952 (Renewed) by G. Schirmer, Inc. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission.

The *Sonata's* simple, often single-voiced texture and limited use of range clearly show Prokofiev's focus on melody and lyricism. Furthermore, the lack of violinistic virtuosity and simple texture support the *Sonata's* dual purpose in being both a solo violin sonata and for many

⁹⁰ Also see Bass 1988, 202: discusses chromatic neighbors that have a function at a deeper structural level, and such as in this case, chromatic displacements which later resolve.

unison violins. Particularly for less advanced students, it is challenging to play in unison perfectly or even well, a fact reflected in the level of difficulty of the *Sonata*. Daniel Jaffé says,

This *Sonata* bespeaks Prokofiev's intense quests in the realm of pure melody, his search for lyricism strong enough to stand without complex harmonic support. Here the composer seems to delight in the clarity and expressiveness of modest, single-voiced melodies. Examples of this are the already mentioned second theme of the first movement, the bright flowing Russian theme of the variations of the second movement, and the pensive second theme of the finale. This concentration on melody as the basic component of music is quite characteristic of Prokofiev's last works. In this *Sonata* the melodies are seldom adorned with countervoices, ornaments, or full chords, but the composer enriched his themes by employing novel tonal digressions and skillfully making use of concealed two-part writing.⁹¹

4.3 PHRASE ANALYSIS AND PERFORMANCE SUGGESTIONS

In preparing the sonata for performance, performers would benefit from a careful phrase analysis in order to fully realize the subtle ways in which Prokofiev treats rhythm and hypermeter throughout the *Sonata*. In addition, one should bear in mind that the same score serves a dual purpose and adjustments in sound and interpretation should thus be made. A unison performance requires that individual expression be stifled because the most effective performance would sound the most unified. On the other hand, a single violinist interpreting the same score would have greater musical freedom, but should strive for the sound and grand character of several violins. When played in unison as originally intended, the seemingly thin texture is filled out by many instruments, but the liberties that can be taken as a soloist disappear. When played in unison, any fault in intonation or difference in articulation between players stands out drastically. Furthermore, the very act of several violins playing one part in unison conflicts with the ideas of individual interpretation and musical freedom. If every performer does not interpret the score in exactly the same way, even slight differences would be audible, disrupting the effectiveness of the performance and the overall unison sound. The *Sonata* played in unison, thus poses its own challenges, quite

⁹¹ Jaffé 1998, 397-8.

different than those encountered in its performance as a *Solo Sonata*. Therefore, despite its uniquely thin texture and simplicity in melody, the *Sonata* proves to be more complex to analyze for performance than one might first think.

The first and third movements show an interesting and irregular phrase structure, exhibiting how Prokofiev manipulated hypermeter for musical interest. In these movements, the manipulation of hypermeter is significant because of the limited motivic development, and narrow dynamic and registral ranges. Particularly in the third movement, sharp metrical shifts call for some sort of hypermetrical reinterpretation.⁹² In addition, the first movement is filled with phrase overlaps, perhaps the most significant cause of forward motion in the movement.

Lerdahl and Jackendoff's discussion about rhythmic structure and metrical hierarchy concerning the issue of phrasing and grouping, serves as an excellent aid in the phrase analysis of the first and third movements of the *Sonata*.⁹³ The first movement is in a 4/4 march-like time, but the tactus should feel in two; or rather, one would tap one's foot twice per measure rather than four times per measure. The first cadence at m. 10 concludes the primary theme and the first phrase. A phrase overlap occurs at m. 10 because the cadence is also the beginning of transition material. A phrase extension at m. 9 results from the exact repetition of m. 8, creating an increase of tension by repeating the unstable harmonies, magnified by the lack of cadential pause at m. 10.

Figure 7 shows a detailed chart of the themes and measure groupings in the first movement. Sub-phrases are indicated by Arabic numerals within the parentheses. Each cadence involves a phrase overlap; for example, in the cadence at m. 10, the resolution to the tonic is also the beginning of the new material, allowing no sense of pause or slowing down. A rhythmic slowing down from sixteenth notes to eighth notes in m. 17, perhaps inviting some *rubato*, approaches the second

⁹² Lerdahl and Jackendoff 1983, 23.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 13-33.

theme. Since there is already a natural rhythmic relaxation into the second theme accompanied by a diminuendo and the aforementioned phrase overlap, the performer should carefully decide how much and if the tempo should relax slightly into the second theme. In the recapitulation's approach to the second theme, the longer string of eighth notes in m. 87 would then invite even more *rubato* than in the exposition.

Exposition mm. 1-38	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Primary Theme - mm. 1-10 (4+5) ○ Transition Material - mm. 10-17 (4+4) m. 17= V/V, chromatic ascent to Second Theme ○ Second Theme - mm.18-25 (4+4) ○ mm. 26-30 - Second Theme 8ve. lower, split in half by measure of <i>forte</i> chords (2+1+2) ○ Closing Theme – mm. 31-38 (<i>forte</i> chords from m. 28 becomes 4+4 phrase)
Development mm. 39-67	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ mm. 39-45= V - bVI (material from first transition and 2nd theme in V, end of first theme – bVI) (2+3+2) ○ mm. 46-56= material from m. 2 and first transition (4+3+4) ○ mm. 57-67= Second Theme developed in F major, then bVi - V/V - V (4+4+3)
Recapitulation mm. 68-99	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ mm. 68-76 = Exact restatement of First Theme (4+5) ○ mm. 77-87 = Transition material, slightly different, extra measures (4+4+3) ○ mm. 88-95 = Restatement of Second Theme in D major, only 8 measures (4+4) ○ mm. 96- 99 = Closing Theme, only 4 measures
Coda mm. 100-117	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (4+5+4+5), D major

Figure 7. Phrase Analysis of First Movement.

In the third movement, hypermeter also plays an important role in creating interest and variety within recurring themes. Throughout the first A section until three measures before the second theme, the hypermeter could be interpreted in groups of four measures, creating a total of six 8-measure phrases. Starting at m. 49, three measures of repeated D quarter-notes signal a need for hypermetrical reinterpretation. After only three measures of repeated Ds, a hypermetrical downbeat falls again on the downbeat of m. 52 where the second theme begins, continuing the irregular

feeling of hypermeter until the meter change at m. 76. The second theme is first stated in 9 measures (5+4) succeeded by 2 measures of D declamations in mm. 61-62. At m. 63 the consequent phrase begins the same as before but traverses broader harmonic territory and one added measure, creating a phrase of 10 measures (5+5) which resolves to D at m. 73. This time succeeded by 3 measures of declamatory Ds, the second theme, that was a strange combination of D major and Eb major harmonies, reaches its goal as the passage takes off into D minor at m. 76.

In the *Allegro precipitato* B section, the hypermeter returns to groups of four measures in which there are four 8-measure bars from mm. 76-107. An odd group of three measures (mm. 108-110) are the transition to the key change and return to *Tempo I* at m. 111. The A' section actually begins in m. 121, so the return to Tempo I at m. 111, though the beginning of a new section, is a false recapitulation. This idea is reinforced by the *fortissimo* at m. 121.

The material in the A' section is identical to the principle themes presented in A section, however slightly metrically changed. The primary theme from mm. 121-136 is identical to the beginning, but thereafter similar material is hypermetrically manipulated. Starting at m. 145 the ostinato figure is identical to that in mm. 17-27, however is then developed as a sequence for twelve measures and leads straight into the restatement of the second theme at m. 160. A repetition of the note D again introduces the theme for two measures at mm. 158-159, though here concealed within the ostinato figure. In m. 160, the second theme is stated in a contrasting *forte* dynamic for nine measures (5+4) and without the intervening measures of D declamations. Then the consequent phrase begins at m. 169, lasting ten measures (5+5). The *Allegro precipitato* section (m. 179) emphasizes D major in full chords, again without being introduced by several measures of repeated Ds.

The B' section can be interpreted as two long phrases, both headed off by two measures of D major *fortissimo* chords. The first phrase, from mm. 179-195 has a prominent V-I cadence at m.

195-6. At m. 179 the hypermeter again should be grouped into four measures, but the 2/4 measure at m. 189 comes at the end of an odd group of three measures. A *tenuto* marking on the A and registral transfer suggests that this should be a hypermetrical downbeat. While the resolution to D chords at m. 196 might also necessitate a new start or hypermetrical downbeat, Prokofiev places accents over the chords at mm. 198, 200, 202, and 204 suggesting that the arrival to D major chords at m. 196 is not as important as the forward propulsion of this passage.

The phrase analysis of the *Solo Sonata* shows how Prokofiev created musical interest through hidden or less conspicuous methods. It is important to pay close attention to how passages might be organized and interpreted, in particular the passages in which slight variations in meter or rhythm occur. The second movement is a straightforward theme and variations in which each variation except the second stays within the confines of the original 8-measure theme. Prokofiev also punctuates the statement and answer of the theme with dynamic contrasts. In general, there is less information on the page regarding dynamics and articulations than found in other works by Prokofiev, most of which often have very detailed performance directions. It is not clear whether the few bowing directions (i.e. downbow and upbow) are added by the editor or Prokofiev, however are a good indication of character, direction and note-weight, even if the performer decides to change bowings for physical or musical concerns. There is enough in the score of the *Sonata* to imply character and tempo, overall dynamics, and some articulation, but the rest is left to the discretion of the performer.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ According to Beck 1955, 142, American violinist Louis Persinger (1887-1966) edited an edition with extra fingerings and dynamics to help guide the performer in character and mood. This is a fact I have not been able to verify, if this edition is still used or who published it.

4.4 PROKOFIEV'S STYLE IN OTHER VIOLIN WORKS AND CONCLUSIONS

Since the line of thought in this paper has been to analyze the *Solo Sonata* in the context of Prokofiev's late style, it is important to note that the *Sonata* is not the only violin piece written during his Soviet period, although it captures the ideals of socialist realism far more than the other violin works. Furthermore, most of Prokofiev's violin works have become standards in the violin repertoire, except for the *Solo Sonata*: the violin *Sonatas* and *Concertos* are some of the most played twentieth-century violin pieces, and Prokofiev remains one of the most popular twentieth-century composers. In addition, the *Solo Sonata* is the last piece Prokofiev wrote for the solo violin and the only violin piece neither performed during his lifetime, nor embraced by David Oistrakh. The first *Violin Concerto* and *Duo Sonata* were both written during his Foreign period, as was the *Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano*, originally for flute and piano and transcribed for violin in 1944 at the behest of Oistrakh.⁹⁵ The *Second Violin Concerto*, written some 20 years later than the first is darker in character than the first, but both concertos exhibit a strong sense of melody and lyricism while exploiting the capabilities of the instrument. David Oistrakh wrote about Prokofiev's music:

The tempestuous, defiant Prokofiev at such moments became as touching as a child. The fact that Prokofiev could be poetic and moving came as a surprise to many who, until they heard his music performed by himself, had refused to believe that it could have any emotional warmth.

In this connection I should like to touch briefly on some of the difficulties of Prokofiev's music, and specifically his violin music, from the standpoint of the performer. It is music in which nothing can be omitted, not a single turn of the melody, not a single modulation. It requires the strictest attention to every detail of expression, a fine, but not over-refined, execution of each individual intonation, as in the case of well-enunciated singing. The chief thing is not to permit oneself any artistic liberties. The best performance of Prokofiev's music, or of any other good music for that matter, is one in which the personality of the performer does not obtrude in any way. That is precisely what one could say of Prokofiev's playing.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Robinson 1987, 587.

⁹⁶ Prokofiev 1991, 163.

The question has been, why the *Solo Sonata* was conceived and received so differently than Prokofiev's other violin music, when in fact his very popular *Sonata No.1 in F minor* was completed shortly before, in 1946.⁹⁷ Why then are the styles of composition so different? Is the answer simply musical, in that the *Solo Sonata* was a sort of experimental student composition, or perhaps Prokofiev was experimenting with a Soviet genre he thought would be well received? If not for musical reasons, it is possible that by this point in his career, Prokofiev was overwhelmed by the political and personal events in his life, writing music that attempted but failed to appease the Soviet government. There were probably many larger or more important works that he was worried about getting performed in 1948.

It has been the position of the author to present the questions scholars have raised about Prokofiev's career, outlining possible political and personal explanations for his creative development, and ultimately the conception of the *Sonata for Solo or Unison Violins*. It is difficult to prove to what extent this development played into the composition of the *Sonata*. On one hand, its dual purpose as unison or solo sonata, and its original conception as a student piece, may explain why it was not embraced like Prokofiev's other violin works. On the other hand, the issue of Prokofiev's Foreign and Soviet identity is inevitably very complex. It is difficult to say, especially from a culturally subjective Western perspective regarding communism, what it meant for Prokofiev to be living abroad for so many years, then to return to a very changed homeland. It is also impossible to know the extent to which he wished to fit in and repatriate himself in the Soviet Union, or if he was indeed controlled and creatively manipulated by the Soviet regime and its standards of socialist realism. Seroff says,

⁹⁷ Though Prokofiev started composition in 1938. Morrison says of this *Sonata*, "The dark mood of the work cannot be explained by the sources, although the political climate of the 1930s could be one cause" (Morrison 2009, 277).

Prokofiev's "executioners" showed the Russian people not the true Prokofiev but their own concocted image of him. They, who prided themselves on being the masters of the only country in which artists are treated as aristocratic members of society, had robbed their most eminent member of his wife and two sons, and were slowly destroying him... he was less influenced by the accepted formulas of what was right, than he was guided by a sense of justice. Still, Prokofiev was not simply a victim of the commissars but also the victim of a servile Soviet society. There was no sound of protest – either then or later.⁹⁸

In any scenario, the *Solo Sonata* is an intriguing and mysterious piece of music, musically and historically unique, and a valuable example of Prokofiev's late compositional style for the violin. The score's function in serving two different performance options is completely distinctive, yet also can present challenges and musical limitations to the performer. *Morrison* says that what makes Prokofiev's music special is:

the formalist estrangement of classical syntax, the unexpected modulations (these positing the existence of secondary tonalities behind the surface tonality), and the elasticity of the phrasing, which enabled the composer to transplant melodic and rhythmic material from work to work, form to form while avoiding redundancy.⁹⁹

It has been the goal of this paper to untangle various debates and opinions about the works of Prokofiev, particularly those written during his Soviet period, in order to understand what compelled him to write his most unique violin work in 1947. While the philosophical and political principles of the composer have been briefly presented in this paper, it is my purpose neither to defend nor judge Prokofiev. Furthermore, the fact that Oistrakh never performed the piece, though a curious and unsolved mystery, does not necessarily disprove the merits of the piece. As Taruskin points out, the artist's intent is not the most important facet of a work, but rather how that work functions in the world.¹⁰⁰ In the case of the *Solo Sonata*, it functions as a unique work, both

⁹⁸ Seroff 1968, 297.

⁹⁹ Morrison 2003, 521.

¹⁰⁰ Zimmerman 2009, 52.

historically and musically, exposing the late style of Prokofiev and the difficulties he faced, no matter what his personality.

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VITA

Joanna Helen Steinhauser, a native of Michigan, began her violin studies at the age of five. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree at Kalamazoo College, graduating *cum laude* and With Honors, and a Master of Music degree at Michigan State University where she studied with Dmitri Berlinsky. In 2005 she began her doctoral studies at Louisiana State University, awarded a graduate assistantship to study with Kevork Mardirossian. Currently a student of Espen Lillenslatten and a regular member of the Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra and Louisiana Sinfonietta, she has held title positions such as Associate Concertmaster and Associate Principal Second Violin. In 2009 she was also a soloist with the Louisiana Sinfonietta.

Ms. Steinhauser is committed to bringing music to the greater community by teaching students of many ages in her private studio. In July 2009 she founded the “Baton Rouge Summer Strings Jam,” a summer musical festival for young string players in Baton Rouge. In addition, she has most recently become a founding instructor of the Alvin Batiste Conservatory in collaboration with the Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra and Children's Charter School, in efforts to expose more children in Baton Rouge to classical music. In January 2010 she will begin her first appointment as professor of violin at her alma mater, Kalamazoo College, substituting for its violin professor on sabbatical.

