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Sergey Prokofiev (20th Century Composers)



Synopsis

Because of the nature of Soviet society, Prokofiev's life has received little attention from biographers. This survey of his life and work contains several hitherto unpublished illustrations of him and much essential reference material.

Book Information

Series: 20th Century Composers

Paperback: 240 pages

Publisher: Phaidon Press (April 23, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0714847747

ISBN-13: 978-0714847740

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.6 x 8.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (8 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

This is another solid entry in Phaidon's 20th Century Composers series -- heavy-stock paper and great photos (including one of his first performance of "Peter and the Wolf" for a group of children) add to Jaffe's text. Jaffe offers the best answer I've found (searching through several books) to the question of why Prokofiev returned to Russia at the height of Stalin's terror. Apparently it was a combination of homesickness, vanity, political naivete, and aesthetic theory. The Soviet regime promised Prokofiev an exceptional privileged status, which appealed to his vanity -- he was overshadowed by Stravinsky in the West, where he never felt he was properly appreciated. And the turn to "social realism," forced on Soviet artists by Stalin, coincided with Prokofiev's voluntary turn away from modernism toward simplicity, melody, and populist narratives. I enjoy both the early and late Prokofiev, but I can see the point of those who claim that his later works are more accomplished. While his music is not on the cutting edge, and thus he was never a critics' darling, Prokofiev's music is marvelous. This is the best single book available at the moment for anyone who wants to know more about one of the greatest early 20th century composers!

I must admit that this is the first biography of Prokofiev that I have ever read. Jaffe must have been mindful of the book's length. I would guess that the good folks at Phaidon told him to 'keep it short.' As such, he moves rather quickly through the events of Prokofiev's life, with occasional commentary on important works and insight into Prokofiev's character and personality. With that in mind I would say that it is a great first Prokofiev bio to read. Having read it I would now like to read more of the details and the personal accounts of what happened. Jaffe writes with authority, I can tell he has really done his research!

Along with Rachmaninoff, Stravinsky and Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev is one of the 20th century's greatest Russian composers. His seven symphonies, works for piano and his ballets (most notably "Romeo and Juliet") are widely well known alongside his immortal children's classic "Peter and The Wolf". In this biography, part of Phaidon Press's 20th Century Composers series, author Daniel Jaffe not only digs deep into Prokofiev's creative genius but also gives detailed annotations on the composer's personal life and his surroundings in communist Russia. It is written in such a way that it's like getting to meet Prokofiev in a very personal manner. This book is definitely a must-read on one of Russia's greatest masterminds. It is very well-written and packed with detail as well as some great photos (one of which depicts Prokofiev at the piano surrounded by children as he was giving a first-reading of "Peter and The Wolf" in 1936). A Must for any Prokofiev fan!!

This is an accurate, clear and very well documented Biography that is worth for everyone who is interested in the composer and accessible to the uninitiated. The requirement for brevity compelled the author to fly rather fast over Prokofiev childhood. The best and most amazing source for this period is the composer's own autobiography "Prokofiev" by Prokofiev now unavailable. I suggest to read both if you can find Prokofiev's own autobiography used or in a public library. The early years are very essential and enlightening even if not from a strict musicologist point of view. The photos in this book are very beautiful and well coupled with the text. In some cases they speak alone. For example the very expressing '46 photo with other Soviet composers included Shostakovich is worth the price of the book for an almost fanatic Prokofiev (& Shostakovich) lover. Personally I would have preferred a less fastened and concise overview. Such a life deserves a narration that leaves you breathless. This is not achieved by Jaffe's biography. He gives well structured information but he doesn't pretend to offer good literature. I would have both, but maybe I ask too much and the alternatives aren't better

written, for what I know (they're only less concise and more approximate). Probably only the massive Dorign's Biography (available only in French) can stand up. So I strongly suggest this book.

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