

By Richard Freed © 2017

Richard Freed, now in his twenty-sixth season as program annotator for the Flint Symphony Orchestra, is a former music critic for *The New York Times* and *Saturday Review*. His credentials include service as assistant to the director of the University of Rochester's Eastman School of Music, executive director of the Music Critics Association, record critic for *The Washington Star* and *The Washington Post*, and program annotator for the St. Louis Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Houston Symphony, National Symphony (Washington, D.C.) and Philadelphia Orchestras. He has received two ASCAP-Deems Taylor Awards for his concert and record annotations, and a Grammy Award for the latter. In 2003, the President of Finland awarded him the medal of Knight First Class in the Order of the Lion of Finland.

## Lieutenant Kizheh, Symphonic Suite, Op. 60

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Born April 23, 1891, Sontzovka, Ukraine

Died March 5, 1953, Moscow

The sound film made its début toward the end of Prokofiev's 15-year sojourn in the West, between the time he took out papers for Soviet citizenship during a concert tour of his native land (1927) and the time he returned to settle permanently in Moscow (1933); he was one of the first composers to be fascinated by the possibilities he recognized in writing music for the movies. Two of his collaborations with the great director Sergei Eisenstein yielded material for large-scale choral works: the score for *Alexander Nevsky* was transformed into a large-scale cantata, and the one for *Ivan the Terrible* was drawn upon for an even larger-scaled oratorio, though in this case not by Prokofiev himself: it was shaped by the conductor Abram Stassevich after the composer's death. The association with Eisenstein followed Prokofiev's final visit to the United States (1937-38), during which he spent some time at Hollywood studios, but he had begun writing film scores a bit earlier: one of his first projects after his voluntary repatriation, in fact, was a score for Alexander Feinzimmer's film *Lieutenant Kizheh*, and this effort, too, led to one of his most durably popular concert works.

This earlier cinematic effort represents a more modest approach than the subsequent epics cited above, and was derived from music for a satirical work, in contradistinction to a historical epic. There was no attempt at integrating the music with the action, as there would be with Eisenstein: here the approach was more in the tradition of conventional "incidental" or "background" music—but even so, Prokofiev's gift for pointed delineation of character and mood is brilliantly apparent. The film *Lieutenant Kizheh*, based on a story by Prokofiev's contemporary Yuri Tynyanov, was produced in 1933. In his autobiography, Prokofiev recalled that he enjoyed the assignment and journeyed from Moscow to Leningrad (as St. Petersburg was called then) to be present at the recording of his music, conducted by Isaak Dunayevsky, at the Belgokino studio. "Unfortunately," Prokofiev noted, "the dénouement of the plot was repeatedly changed, which made the film confusing and sluggish. In the following year I wrote a symphonic suite, on which I spent considerably more time than I had on the film score, since I had to work out the form, reorchestrate, add finishing touches and even combine themes." The suite was introduced in Moscow on December 31, 1934, with the composer conducting.

For one reason or another, the French transliteration of the title

character's name—"Kijé"—has persisted in very wide usage, causing some confusion as to the proper pronunciation, which after all represents the basis of the plot. The pronunciation of this name, rendered phonetically for Anglophones as "Kizheh" (with emphasis on the second syllable), is essential to the story. It is in fact the very basis of the plot, which itself may be regarded as prototypic of numerous films which followed from other sources. One such was *The Man Who Never Was*, a Clifton Webb vehicle directed by Alfred Hitchcock in 1956; the Hitchcock title would fit Prokofiev's fictional lieutenant (Prokofiev's creature, one feels now, more than Feinzimmer's or even Tynyanov's) splendidly, for Kizheh, too, never existed: he was only a figure of speech.

His career, such as it was, came about through a misunderstanding of a report presented to Tsar Nicholas I, early in the 19th century, in which the Tsar took the words "parootchiki, zheh" ("the lieutenants, however"—the Russian word "zheh," roughly equivalent to the German "doch," having no real equivalent in English) for "Parootchik Kizheh" ("Lieutenant Kizheh"). When the Tsar remarks on the unusual name, no one dares tell him he has made a mistake; the lieutenant thus created must be provided with a curriculum vitae and his file must be closed as quickly and neatly as possible.

The five-movement suite chronicles the major events in the personal life and unfortunate death of the tale's nonexistent hero, and the music shows, as clearly as anything Prokofiev composed later, how much he had mellowed since his departure from the U.S.S.R. in 1918, when he was known for the barbaric rhythms and colors of the *Scythian Suite*, the biting irony of the music for the ballet *Chout*, and the audacious vigor of his first two piano concertos. In his music for *Lieutenant Kizheh* he revealed the warm heart of a true Romantic; he dealt with his subject on the gentle level of an old Russian fairy tale instead of barbed satire. As his biographer Israel Nestyev observed, the assignment "offered rich possibilities for grotesque effects, but Prokofiev resisted the temptation and gave instead an almost realistic reproduction of the epoch, complete with Russian snows, the dull parade-ground ceremonies, the sentimental ditty with its faint flavor of parody, and the tinkling sleigh bells."

A distant fanfare introduces THE BIRTH OF KIZHEH, an event further heralded by a march rhythm, with ruffles and flourishes and eventually simulated cannon fire. Kizheh himself is introduced as a full-grown lieutenant, more whimsical than dashing, and once he has made his bow he is ushered off unceremoniously by the opening music.

The second part of the suite, ROMANCE, describes Kizheh's courtship. He sings a folk song, *The Little Gray Dove Is Cooing* (his voice represented by the double bass, but Prokofiev provided alternative versions of this movement on the TROIKA which call for a baritone to sing the actual words, as in the film).

KIZHEH'S WEDDING is a pompous ceremony, a grand gesture by the brass and cymbals, followed by a mindless little gallop representing the festivities for the guests. TROIKA, a humorous evocation of the post-nuptial sleigh ride, makes use of an animated tavern song, sung to the young couple by the driver as his whip cracks and the sleigh bells jingle.

Kizheh's failure to make an appearance incurs the Tsar's displeasure, but tales of his exploits earn him the position of imperial favorite. For his final act of valor he is buried with a general's honors. THE BURIAL OF KIZHEH is introduced with the same distant fanfare that announced his birth, and the events of his life are recalled briefly before his own theme is heard for the last time, from the solo flute, and the distant fanfare, more distant than before, ends the suite as if substituting for *Taps*. ■

**Concerto for Flute and Orchestra**

CARL NIELSEN

*Born June 9, 1965, Nørre-Lyndelse, Denmark**Died October 2, 1931, Copenhagen*

In 1922 Carl Nielsen composed his Wind Quintet, Op. 44, for the Copenhagen Wind Quintet. He had come to know the members of that group quite well, and in his Quintet he sought to tailor each part to the character of the respective performer. The work came off so well that Nielsen decided to compose a concerto for each of the five wind players, these concertos to be even more individually fitted to the personal characteristics of the individuals who would perform them. That very thought indicated Nielsen's exceptional regard for these musicians, for he had produced only a single concerto before (the Violin Concerto, in 1912) and considered his own temperament unsuited to writing concertos.

Before he began his five-part concerto project, Nielsen composed the last of his six symphonies (the *Sinfonia semplice*, 1924-25); he then lived long enough to complete only two of his full-length portraits: those of Holger Gilbert Jespersen in the Flute Concerto of 1926 and of the clarinetist Aage Oxenvad, who received his concerto two years later. The Flute Concerto was composed in Italy, where Nielsen created numerous earlier works, and was introduced in Paris on October 21, 1926, with Jespersen as soloist.

The locale of the premiere had a certain aptness, for Jespersen has been described, by Nielsen's biographer Robert Simpson, as "a person of fine taste and discrimination, master of an exquisitely refined style of flute-playing, whose inclination, perhaps, lay towards French music and who certainly found vulgarity an anathema." This fastidiousness is represented by the solo part throughout the Concerto, though much of the orchestral writing is in a conspicuously more earthy vein, producing some good-naturedly humorous contrasts.

The already quoted Simpson observed that "Nielsen was never interested in the thought of writing a concerto on the heroic scale; he put into his symphonies most of his weightier substance, and the concertos are all more intimate in character. Each has its own individual form, and it is significant that the biggest and most imposing of the three, the Violin Concerto, is in many ways the least important." The Violin Concerto is cast in the conventional three movements; the valedictory Clarinet Concerto is in an extended single movement; the Flute Concerto (which, like the final symphony, bears no opus number) is in two movements: an expansive *Allegro moderato* and a somewhat more concise *Allegretto*. The texture throughout is light and clear, the orchestration unusually transparent.

Like several of Nielsen's other works, this one begins and ends in different keys and incorporates a bit of a game or puzzle concerned with a search for the "right" key. The prominence of the trombone is Nielsen's little joke on his friend Jespersen: while the flute remains at all times poised and fastidious, the trombone seems to be thrashing about playfully in the search, and in fact comes up with the elusive key more or less accidentally before the flute can discover it.

The first movement opens vigorously and discordantly, the flute taking part after a few bars, and a naïve, more affable tune makes its appearance, in F. The trombone has its own first episode, which is in turn followed by a more restrained, contemplative passage in E, and the movement ends quietly in G-flat.

The second movement's agreeable opening tune eventually alternates with a slower, more inward motif, and then is altered rhythmically in a *Tempo di marcia*, whereupon the trombone bumbles in,

with all the grace of Peter Falk as Lieutenant Columbo (in the television series now circulating in reruns). It becomes clear that this theme is derived from the contemplative material in E major in the preceding movement. Following this demonstration, or "solution," the flute, still maintaining its dignity, expresses its displeasure, with the drums providing emphasis, but is not about to hold a grudge, and, as Simpson summed it up, "everything ends in irresistible gaiety."■

**Symphony No. 1 in G minor,  
Winter Daydreams, Op. 13**

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

*Born May 7, 1840, Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia**Died November 6, 1893, St. Petersburg*

Tchaikovsky received no special encouragement toward a musical career when he was a youngster, but followed the wishes of his father, an inspector of mines, to study law and prepare himself for government service. He became a clerk in the Ministry of Justice at the age of 19, and was well into his 22nd year when he recognized music as his true vocation and entered the St. Petersburg Conservatory in the fall of 1861. He was graduated in 1866 and, on the recommendation of the conservatory's director, Anton Rubinstein, immediately joined the faculty of the new conservatory in Moscow (which now bears Tchaikovsky's name), whose director was Rubinstein's brother Nikolai. A close relationship was established, and Nikolai Rubinstein, who like his brother was a noted pianist and conductor, eventually conducted the premieres of no fewer than fifteen of Tchaikovsky's orchestral works as well as that of the opera *Evgeny Onegin*, and also introduced several of his young colleague's piano works. It was to Nikolai Rubinstein that Tchaikovsky dedicated his First Symphony, shortly after he arrived in Moscow, and it was Rubinstein who conducted the first complete performance of the work there, on February 15, 1868. (The scherzo was actually performed there on its own some fourteen months earlier, and the two inner movements were given in St. Petersburg a year before the work's Moscow premiere.)

The premiere was quite successful, but the persistently self-critical Tchaikovsky revised the score in 1874, making substantial cuts. The final version waited until October 1886 for its first hearing, and waited much longer—actually until the second half of the twentieth century—to make its way into general circulation. Tchaikovsky retained a special fondness for the work to the end of his life, even while blowing hot and cold over such mature works as the Fifth Symphony and the substantial, four-movement tone poem *Manfred*, a symphony in everything but name. As late as 1885, with four of his symphonies, the masterly Serenade for String Orchestra, most of his concertos and chamber music, several operas and the ballet *Swan Lake* already under his belt, he wrote of this early symphony, "Although it is immature in many respects, it is essentially better and richer in content than many other, more mature works."

The title *Winter Daydreams* is Tchaikovsky's own; he also affixed subtitles to the symphony's first two movements, designating the opening one DAYDREAMS OF A WINTER JOURNEY and the slow movement DESOLATE LAND, LAND OF MISTS. This work and its subtitles, however, are not so much descriptive in the "programmatic" sense, as the composer's last three symphonies are, but are simply evocative of certain general moods. The journey in the opening movement is surely one that would have taken place in a *northern* winter, amid deep snow glistening in the

starlight of the long nights. The movement is in sonata form, opening with a sinuous theme which instantly betrays an undercurrent of mystery and excitement (solo flute and bassoon against a tremolo in the violins). The imaginative writing for the orchestra, in the final version, shows the hand of a master, with superbly built and always effective climaxes.

The second movement is a large-scale nocturne, songful and gently brooding. Much of its material was recycled from Tchaikovsky's early Overture to Ostrovsky's play *The Storm* (the source also for Janáček's opera *Kát'a Kabanová*). Muted violins and violas set the scene, in which the oboe sings a plaintive theme that is taken up by the cellos and then by the horns. A climax is swiftly reached, and the movement winds down, fading away much as it began.

The scherzo, in a Mendelssohnian vein, represents another recycling, this time a direct borrowing from the Piano Sonata in C-sharp minor which Tchaikovsky composed a year before the First Symphony, and was eventually published as Op. 80. Fetching as the scherzo proper is, with its darting strings and burbling winds, the trio is more striking

still: it is nothing less than the first of Tchaikovsky's grand and distinctive orchestral waltzes, and its particular contours seem to suit the wintertime context, evoking a skating scene perhaps more readily than a ballroom.

Very much in the Russian symphony tradition and perhaps a bit less distinctly Tchaikovskian than the preceding movements, is the grandly proportioned finale, whose theme is that of a folk song called "The Garden Blossomed." This theme is the basis for the slow and solemn introduction as well as the exuberant main section in which Tchaikovsky felt obliged to insert a fugue. He provided no subtitle for this movement, but might well have labeled it WINTER CARNIVAL. Once the solemnity of the introduction is shaken off, the music becomes more and more energetic, and amid the infectious rhythmic play the folk song theme returns in high-spirited, dancelike transformation. The momentum never slackens, building to an exultant conclusion, with some audaciously accented episodes along the way. ■