PASC161

PROKOFIEV

Symphonies Nos 5 and 6

Symphony No. 5 in B flat, Op. 100

1. 1st mvt. - Andante (12:09)
2. 2nd mvt. - Allegro marcato (8:06)
3. 3rd mvt. - Adagio (12:08)
4. 4th mvt. - Allegro giocoso (9:20)

USSR Radio Symphony Orchestra
conducted by Leopold Stokowski, Tchaikovsky Hall, Moscow, 15th June 1958, issused as Melodya MK 1551
Recorded by Melodya during Stokowski's 1958 Russian tour, early summer, 1958, this was his only recording for the label and his only studio recording of any symphony by Prokofiev. Following this tour he was to conduct this symphony one more time only, in a 1967 concert with the American Symphony Orchestra.
Transfer of original LP disc from the collection of Edward Johnson.

Symphony No. 6 in E flat minor, Op. 111

5. 1st mvt. - Allegro moderato (12:24)
6. 2nd mvt. - Largo (13:07)
7. 3rd mvt. - Vivace (11:37)

New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra
conducted by Leopold Stokowski, Carnegie Hall, New York, 4th December, 1949
First US broadcast of this work, its fourth performance in the US - Stokowski had conducted its US première on 24th November 1949, and programmed it again on 25th and 26th November. There are no other recordings of Stokowski conducting this piece - this was his final performance of it.
Reel-to-reel tape copy of original acetates from the collection of Edward Johnson, transfer by Andrew Rose

XR remastering by Andrew Rose at Pristine Audio, May 2009
Cover artwork based on a photograph of Leopold Stokowski

Total duration: 78:51 ©2009 Pristine Audio.

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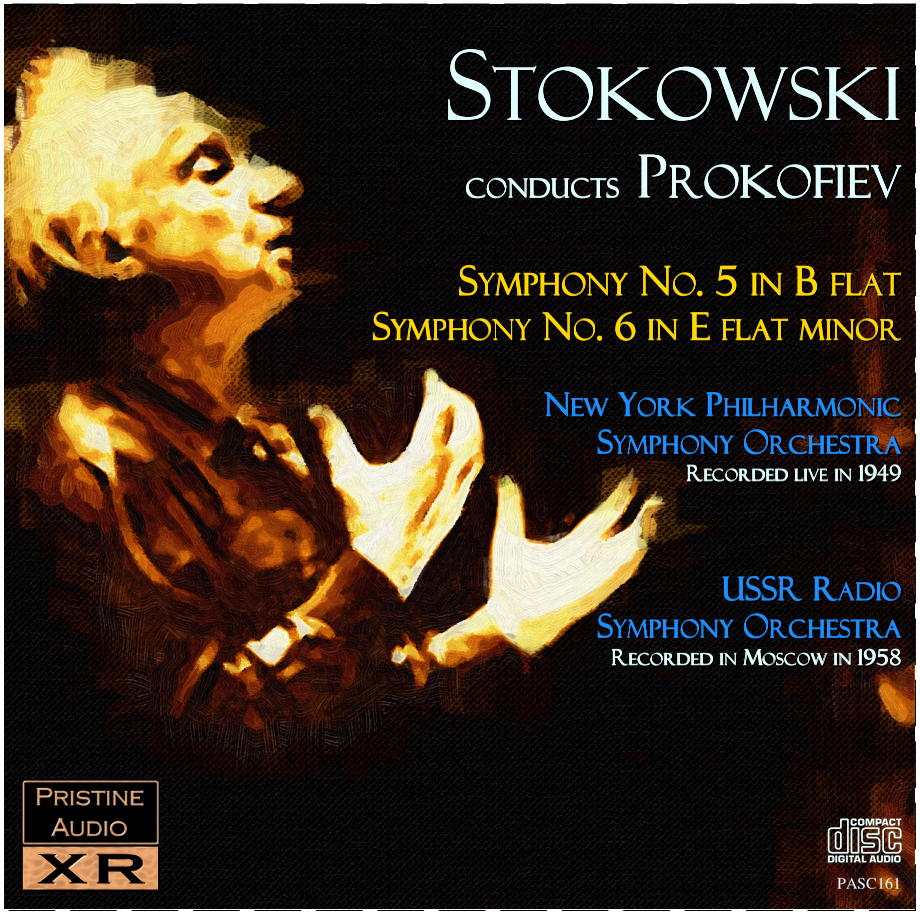

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SYMPHONIES NOS 5 AND 6

COMPACT DISC DIGITAL AUDIO

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Sergei Prokofiev wrote his Symphony No. 5 in B-flat major (Op. 100) in 1944. Fourteen years had passed since Prokofiev's last symphony. World War II was still raging during the symphony's gestation, and Prokofiev composed the symphony in a safe haven run by the Soviet Union.

The first movement embodies what Prokofiev envisioned as the glory of the human spirit. In a tightly argued sonata form, there is an elaborate and climactic development of the two themes - one calm and sustained, the other soaring with tremolo accompaniment from strings - after the exposition section. It represents the pinnacle in Prokofiev's symphonic thought. The movement is wrapped up with an electrifying coda, punctuated by a roaring tam-tam and low piano tremolos.

The second movement is an insistent scherzo in Prokofiev's typical toccata mode, framing a central country dance in triple time. The third movement is a dreamy slow movement, full of nostalgia, which nevertheless builds up to a tortured climax, before receding back to dreaminess.

The finale starts with a cello choir playing a slow introduction containing elements from the first theme of the first movement, which then launches into the movement proper, a rondo. The playful ("giocoso") main theme is contrasted with two calmer episodes, one played by the flute, the other a chorale on strings. At the end, just as the movement is striving to end in a victorious tone, the music unexpectedly degenerates into a manic frenzy (rehearsal mark 111), which is then interrupted by a string quartet playing staccato "wrong notes" (rehearsal mark 113) with rude interjections from low trumpets, making the ultimate B-flat major chord sound all the more ironic.

Prokofiev wrote his Symphony No. 6 in E-flat minor (Op. 111) in 1947. The symphony, written as an elegy of the tragedies of World War II, has often been regarded as the darker twin to the victorious Symphony No. 5 in B-flat major. The symphony was condemned by the Stalinist regime in 1948 for not conforming to party lines, but it was favourably received among critics.

The first movement is characterized by an overall sombre mood, which Prokofiev described as "the painful results of war". It contains three themes: The first, on 1st violins and violas, is like the winds of a graveyard; the second, played by oboes, is slower and more melancholic; the third theme is played by the cor anglais accompanied by a lugubrious marching rhythm. The ensuing development section builds up tension using elements from the first theme before reaching an excruciating climax, the aftermath of which is the ghostly pulsating echoes on horns. The recapitulation only consists of the second and third themes, while the coda contains a final struggle, eventually to recede into silent despair.

The second movement, a slow threnody in arch form, opens with clangorous sonorities, before revealing a main theme full of noble character. After the thunderous climax in the central section, reflective horns call out a nostalgic melody, later to be accompanied by the music-box sounds of the celesta and harp. The noble melody returns and the movement ends with the same clangorous sonorities as it had begun with.

The finale, although having switched to the key of E-flat major (a supposedly "happy" key), is actually ambiguous in character: the lively main theme, initially carried by the violins, is answered by pounding timpani and brass, as if to threaten it back. A subsidiary theme follows on woodwinds and is accompanied by a chugging rhythm on strings. The two themes are subsequently developed and eventually combined. However, a mournful bassoon then winds down the previous activity and there is a thought-provoking reappearance of the melancholic oboe theme from the first movement, as if to remind us again of the pains of war. After the meditation, there is a resumption of the threatening poundings of timpani and brass, this time accentuated with "wrong notes", and the symphony ends with a sardonic cry from high brass, juxtaposing F major with D major before the ultimate E-flat major chord, stripping the symphony of any possible victory.

NOTES FROM WIKIPEDIA - FULL NOTES ON THIS RECORDING CAN BE FOUND AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM

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