

The two recordings presented here, both set down in 1952 at Columbia's famed 30th Street Studio, capture the dynamic partnership between Dimitri Mitropoulos and the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York during a period of remarkable artistic vitality.

By 1952, Mitropoulos was in his fourth season as the orchestra's music director, a post he had assumed in 1949 following a distinguished decade with the Minneapolis Symphony. His conducting combined fierce intellectual clarity with an almost mystical intensity of expression. Critics sometimes found his approach overwhelming; musicians, while challenged, often spoke of the profound sense of involvement he drew from them. Columbia Records, meanwhile, was keen to document his work in both the concert hall and the studio, making the present recordings valuable documents of his New York tenure.

Prokofiev's Second Violin Concerto dates from 1935, a period of stylistic consolidation just before his final return to Soviet Russia. In contrast to the glittering modernism of his First Concerto and the ironic brilliance of the *Classical* Symphony, the Second reveals a new lyricism and warmth — a neoclassical clarity tinged with wistfulness. Its themes are simple but haunting, its orchestration transparent, its harmonies tinged with a bittersweet ambiguity that would colour much of Prokofiev's later work.

Zino Francescatti was one of the most refined violinists of his generation, admired for the silken beauty of his tone and the effortless grace of his phrasing. His collaboration here with Mitropoulos is a meeting of two strong musical personalities perfectly attuned to the work's contrasting moods. The opening movement's restless oscillation between melancholy and animation is shaped with a keen sense of line and structure. Francescatti's playing combines elegance with steel, the cadenza integrated seamlessly into the musical argument.

In the central Andante assai, one of Prokofiev's most memorable slow movements, the soloist's lyrical eloquence finds an ideal partner in Mitropoulos's sensitive support — the orchestral textures finely balanced, the phrases breathing with unforced naturalness. The finale, with its rhythmic drive and hints of Spanish colour (the concerto was composed for the Franco-Belgian violinist Robert Soetens, and premiered in Madrid), is propelled with irresistible energy. Francescatti's virtuosity remains poised and crystalline even in the most fiery passages, while Mitropoulos ensures that the orchestral motor never loses its taut precision.

If Prokofiev's concerto suggests an artist reconciling personal expression with public expectation, Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony represents that struggle on an epic scale. Written in 1937 in the shadow of official condemnation for his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, the symphony was presented as "a Soviet artist's creative reply to just criticism". Yet its apparent compliance with socialist-realist ideals — the triumphal finale, the clear tonal framework — conceals a far deeper and more tragic narrative. Beneath the outward heroism lies a sense of anguish and ironic defiance that has continued to provoke debate for decades.

Mitropoulos was one of the first Western conductors to grasp the symphony's dual nature. His performances, whether in New York, Minneapolis or abroad, were renowned for their visceral intensity and moral conviction. The 1952 recording presented here — made just four years after his famous Carnegie Hall account that electrified American audiences — captures that fervour in concentrated form.

From the opening's jagged ostinato and bleakly rising string lines, the music unfolds with grim inevitability. Mitropoulos emphasises the symphony's architectural cohesion, binding its four movements into a single arc of tension and release. The scherzo's sardonic waltz rhythms bite sharply, yet are never caricatured; the Largo that follows is profoundly moving, the conductor drawing an almost vocal quality from the strings and woodwinds.

The finale's march to "victory" is delivered with blazing intensity, but Mitropoulos resists empty bombast. His tempo broadens at the close, revealing not triumph but exhaustion — a shattering vision of forced jubilation that anticipates later readings by Bernstein and Mravinsky. The Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra plays magnificently throughout, its brass section resplendent, its strings united in passionate unanimity.

A black and white portrait of Dimitri Mitropoulos, a man with a receding hairline, looking slightly to the right. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt.

mitropoulos
prokofiev & shostakovich

PASC 754

prokofiev
violin concerto no. 2
zino francescatti, violin

shostakovich
symphony no. 5

philharmonic-symphony
orchestra of new york

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PROKOFIEV Violin Concerto No. 2 - SHOSTAKOVICH Symphony No. 5
FRANCESCATTI, PHILHARMONIC-SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK, MITROPoulos

mitropoulos

prokofiev & shostakovich

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XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Mitropoulos

Recorded at Columbia 30th Street
Studios, New York City

Total duration: 70:53

PROKOFIEV Violin Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op. 63

1. 1st mvt. - Allegro moderato (10:17)
2. 2nd mvt. - Andante assai (8:48)
3. 3rd mvt. - Allegro ben marcato (6:23)

Recorded 27 October, 1952

Zino Francescatti, violin

SHOSTAKOVICH Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Op. 47

4. 1st mvt. - Allegro con fuoco (16:52)
5. 2nd mvt. - Grave (5:13)
6. 3rd mvt. - Intermezzo (14:32)
7. 4th mvt. - Finale (Allegro molto) (8:48)

Recorded 1 December, 1952

Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York
conducted by Dmitri Mitropoulos

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