

Athletic Proportions

The Golandsky Institute International Piano Festival will premiere a restored Prokofiev composition

By Megan Sullivan

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DURING Joseph Stalin's reign of the Soviet Union, cultural policy stifled the creativity and experimentation of artists, from painters to poets. The government-imposed style of socialist realism became the official standard in all fields of the arts. For musicians, this meant composing patriotic, elevating works that were supportive of Communist ideology and simple and accessible to the masses.

When Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev returned to his homeland in 1936, after living and working abroad in the United States and France, he soon suffered official correction and censorship. Both Prokofiev and fellow Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich fell under particular scrutiny for "formalist" tendencies. Although Prokofiev wrote and revised his late ballets and operas to appease his bureaucratic overseers, his labors often came to naught. Following his official condemnation in 1948, many of his compositions were withdrawn from performance.



Russian pianist Ilya Itin will premiere Prokofiev's "Music for Athletes" in Princeton.

On July 17, Prokofiev's "Music for Athletes" will receive its long-deserved world premiere during the Golandsky Institute International Piano Festival at Princeton University. Simon Morrison, professor of music at the university and an expert in Russian and French music, restored the score with permission of the Sergei Prokofiev Estate and the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art. The "Music for Athletes" is one of several unknown Prokofiev scores, works that have yet to be recorded or performed intact. Russian pianist Ilya Itin will perform the piece, with choreography for dance ensemble by Jennie Scholick.

Other highlights of this year's piano festival include an 80th birthday celebration for distinguished Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Yehudi Wyner, who will be performing July 16, and a concert by 14-year-old Panamanian jazz prodigy Antonio Madrugá July 18. The festival coincides with the Golandsky Institute's annual summer symposium, a training institute established at Princeton University in 2003.

During the program "Prokofiev Old and New: From Beloved to Unknown," Mr. Itin will follow his performance of "Music for Athletes" with Prokofiev's original piano version of "Peter and the Wolf," featuring narration by Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Paul Muldoon. Mr. Itin will conclude the evening with Prokofiev's Seventh Piano Sonata, incorporating new details from the original manuscript.

More than half of the Prokofiev documents at the Russian State Archive have been sealed since their deposit there in 1955, two years after Prokofiev's premature death. "A good part of the Prokofiev archive in Moscow remains closed," writes Mr. Morrison, during an e-mail interview from Moscow. "I've been given access by the Prokofiev family, but that only came after many years of service on behalf of the composer and remains a delicate matter, owing to the sensitivity of the personal materials in the archive."

Mr. Morrison has been studying Prokofiev intensely for seven years, producing a book on the composer's Soviet years for Oxford University Press in 2008 titled *The People's Artist*. He also edited a collection of essays about Prokofiev and oversaw the performance of several of his works, both known and unknown. While pouring over Prokofiev's wholly or partly unknown score

materials, never-seen journals and diaries, official speeches and correspondence, Mr. Morrison experienced a wide range of emotions.

"I was naturally excited, though occasionally anxious, fretful," Mr. Morrison recalls. "Owing to the access I was given I recognized that I could retell the story of Prokofiev's Soviet years, but I also knew that, for every question I answered, another would arise. Such is the nature of historical inquiry. I continue to uncover new information about Prokofiev's career in the Russian federal archives."

With the assistance of a Princeton graduate student, Mr. Morrison converted the messy manuscript of "Music for Athletes," which was stored in the Prokofiev archive, into a playable score and translated the performance indications from Russian into English. Mr. Morrison says Prokofiev also left instructions in the manuscript for its brass band scoring, but he has yet to undertake the instrumentation.

"The work is playful, mixing small dance forms with fanfares and marches," Mr. Morrison says. "It's short and sweet, intended as a true divertissement, background music for outdoor demonstrations of the physical prowess of Soviet youth."

In a pre-concert lecture, Mr. Morrison will provide the historical context for the composition of the score and discuss its original propagandistic purpose. "I will address the politics of the 'Music for Athletes,' noting the grimly ironic contrast between the cheerfulness of the music and the dreadfulness of the circumstances of its commission and (non) realization."

Mr. Morrison says the withdrawal of "Music for Athletes" from performance in 1939 is tragic, since it occurred immediately following the arrest of Prokofiev's mentor Vsevolod Meyerhold, an eminent theater director who had been commissioned to choreograph the performance. "Meyerhold was a victim of the Stalinist purges of the intelligentsia," Mr. Morrison says. "Following his arrest, he was interrogated (tortured) and then shot."

Numerous compositions were suppressed under Stalin, "Music for Athletes" being one of many that merit recovery and performance, Mr. Morrison says. "I should qualify this remark by noting that not all of the works that did not see the light of day merit resurrecting," he adds. "Some of Shostakovich's unknown compositions, for example, were composed for the song and dance ensemble of the NKVD, the Stalinist secret police. The music is weak, the cause deplorable."

Ilya Itin will perform Prokofiev Old and New: From Beloved to Unknown as part of the Golandsky Institute International Piano Festival at Richardson Auditorium, Princeton University, July 17, 7:30 p.m. Tickets cost \$35, \$30 each for two or more adults, \$15 children. For a complete festival schedule, visit www.golandskyinstitute.org

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