



S. Prokofiev: Symphony No. 5 & P. Tchaikovsky: Romeo and Juliet

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To say that Thomas Sanderling's new Prokofiev Symphony No. 5 recording is totally unnecessary would be an understatement--it's so frustrating that it borders on effrontery. I'm not talking about incompetence--Sanderling and the Novosibirsk Philharmonic Symphony's professionalism assures that all the notes are properly played, even as these performers completely miss the spirit of the music in a rendition that's utterly devoid of tension, accent, and dynamic contrast. The first sign of trouble is the brief trumpet passages at the end of the first subject--nearly all other performances create an exciting close with a sudden crescendo. Not so in Sanderling's, where the trumpet is just another orchestra color.

It's this same follow-the-floorplan approach that makes the entire performance so boring--so much so that you can't imagine how this work could have roused the Soviet people's spirit at its premiere during World War II. I'd hoped that the first-movement coda would be a bright spot, but I've never heard a tam-tam so dully played. The following scherzo is bogged down by limp rhythms and neutered accents. The poignant adagio is devoid of feeling, even in the normally tortured climax. Sanderling's thankfully light-footed finale doesn't generate enough energy to relieve the torpor brought on by the prior three movements.

Prokofiev's own Romeo and Juliet probably would have made a more suitable coupling than Tchaikovsky's, especially as Sanderling's restrained style is inappropriate for this dramatic, emotionally intense work. The battle sequences are bloodless, and as for the love scenes, Romeo & Juliet's parents need not be concerned.

Bottoming-out this project is a dynamically restricted recording that places the brass weakly in the distance. Maybe this sounds good in the multi-channel version, but this stereo SACD does little to show off the purportedly advanced technology. Stick with the reference recordings.