



Sergei Prokofiev: Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution

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STUDIO FOCUS Kirill Karabits

The conductor on his live recording of Prokofiev’s Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution

The 20th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1937 triggered many patriotic works, including this one...

One could say this is a propaganda piece but at the same time there’s truth in it. While Prokofiev had to make compromises – he originally used only text by Lenin, but was then told to add words by Stalin too – he still remained true to himself. He is praising a new type of man born after the revolution, and he is saying that society will be forever changed. He really believes this, and you can hear it in the music.



But the work wasn’t performed as part of the celebrations...

The authorities wanted something straightforward and secure, and this wasn’t – no one could predict how people would react to it. It’s so overwhelming and strong – it’s a masterpiece rather than something that praises the Communist Party.

How did you come to record it?

It wasn’t planned as a recording. My main motivation was to perform it. With 2017 being the 100th anniversary of the October Revolution, I said to myself, if I were ever to conduct it, now is the moment. The Kunstfest Weimar like unusual projects so I had the idea to present two Prokofievs in one of their concerts last summer – this work, alongside Gabriel Prokofiev’s Concerto for Turntables. Then Deutschlandradio in Berlin heard about it and wanted to do a broadcast. So then we talked to audite and they said they’d love to release the recording.

How challenging was it to perform/record?

The selection of voices and instruments Prokofiev uses is extraordinary – there’s a huge orchestra, an accordion ensemble, a large choir, a military band with extra percussion... With around 200 performers in total, we couldn’t all fit on the stage so we had to use part of the hall as well. It was also an extraordinary task for the radio people to record it. They recorded our first rehearsal and also the general rehearsal so, while most of the material on the recording is from the live performance, they had enough extra material to choose from.

Tell us about the gunshots and the megaphone...

It wasn’t a real gun but it looked like one, so we had to warn the audience to stay calm. And I got to imitate Lenin by speaking his words into a megaphone... It wasn’t

easy to do because I had to turn to the audience while carrying on conducting! It was all very theatrical, but that's what Prokofiev wanted.

How involved were you in the editing?

They sent me the final edit, I listened carefully and gave back my comments. I'm very pleased with the end result. I wasn't compromising as a conductor just because I knew it was being recorded. It's a fantastic document of an extraordinary concert – we'll probably have to wait another 100 years for another performance!

The recording, on audite, is released in the UK on February 16 and will be reviewed next issue.

IN THE STUDIO

Pianist **Nicholas Angelich** will venture to La Seine Musicale, Paris, in March 2018 to record Beethoven piano concertos for Warner Classics. He'll be joined by Laurence Equilbey and her Insula Orchestra, and the result will be released in September • **Kyung Wha Chung** heads to Rome in February for a live recording of Brahms's Violin Concerto with

Sir Antonio Pappano and his Santa Cecilia orchestra. The recording will be released later in 2018, again on Warner Classics • **Sakari Oramo** and the BBC Symphony Orchestra were at the Watford Colosseum in October for Oramo's first Chandos recording: the First and Second Suites from Florent Schmitt's *Antoine et Cléopâtre* (due out in March).

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Multi-talented: Karabits conducts and declaims on his new Prokofiev recording

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