

Prokofiev - Piano Concerto no. 2 (Kissin) [1998]

Written by bluesever

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1. Andantino – Allegro 2. Scherzo: Vivace 3. Intermezzo: Allegro Moderato 4. Allegro Tempestoso Evgeny Kissin - piano Bayerisches Radiosinfonieorchester Lorin Maazel – conductor Live, January 1998, Munich

There are in fact two versions of this concerto, the first written during the years 1912-1913, the second written in 1923. During the Russian Civil War, the original manuscript score of the Concerto was destroyed in a fire in Prokofiev's St. Petersburg apartment; in 1923, he recreated the score from memory. According to the composer, the two versions of the work are very different; Prokofiev wrote to a friend that "I have so completely rewritten the Second Concerto that it might be considered the Fourth."

The original version of the Second Concerto was dedicated to the memory of a pianist and close friend of Prokofiev's, Maximilian Schmidt. Schmidt committed suicide in 1913, and left a note to Prokofiev that read, in part, "I am reporting the latest news to you. I have shot myself. Don't grieve overmuch. The reasons were not important." The Concerto is a challenging, virtuosic vehicle for pianistic display. It is a work of some excess, as Philip Ramey has noted, with perhaps the "longest, most demanding cadenza (post-Lisztian in its pyrotechnics) in the literature." It looks forward, according to Ramey, to the neo-primitivism of Prokofiev's works of 1915-1918 (including the Scythian Suite and the cantata Seven, They are Seven), and probably, given the years of its genesis, owes something to Stravinsky as well. After being harshly criticized for the superficiality of his First Concerto, Prokofiev sought to create a work of greater substance and depth. The audience at the premiere was, as became usual for this composer, sharply divided between supporters who applauded and detractors who hissed. The Russian critics were vigorous in attacking this work: after the premiere, Prokofiev was vilified in the press as an uncivilized "futurist" who had created a "Babel of insane sounds." The work, typical of Prokofiev, is a forthright, uncompromising piece, with its bombast and "cacophony" tempered by the pervasive lyricism found in most of his music.

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It is cast in four movements. The first movement, Andantino, utilizes sonata form, with two contrasting themes stated in the opening exposition. The development section consists entirely of the grand cadenza described above, and also spills over into the beginning of the recapitulation, where the opening theme is finally heard again. The second movement, Scherzo: Vivace, is very short, with a driving, mechanistic character. The third movement is slow, though it is called Intermezzo: Allegro moderato. There is a darkness and malevolence to this movement (another common trait of Prokofiev's music), and it may be the noisiest and least melodic movement of the whole work. The lyricism of the opening movement returns in the finale, an Allegro tempestoso. This lives up to its title with sharply contrasting themes, some widely spaced, angular melodies, pounding octave passages in the piano, and a second bravura cadenza. The work ends, after a sudden, unexpected false ending, with a brilliant tutti restatement of the opening theme. --- Alexander Carpenter, Rovi

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