



Diaries 1915-1923: Behind the Mask

Sergey Prokofiev

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"'To go to America!' Here was wretchedness; there life brimming over. . . . Such was the flag under which I greeted the New Year. Surely it will not disappoint my hopes'"With these words Sergey Prokofiev closed his diary for the revolutionary year 1917. He would not be disappointed by 1918. On August 24, after an epic trek that carried him across strife-torn Russia to the Pacific and the breadth of North America, he stepped from a stifling Grand Central Terminal onto the streets of New York. This marked the beginning of his exile, which would last?with one brief exception?until 1934. This second volume of Prokofiev's diary records an astonishing record of artistic accomplishment against a backdrop of cataclysmic change. The composer dodges gunfire in Petrograd during the February Revolution, but as a rule pays attention to political events only as they affect him personally. Composition and performance are the main concerns, along with the persistent and ultimately failed struggle to arrange a performance of his opera *The Gambler*. As in his Conservatory years, he also reveals his own aesthetic principles as he reacts to the work of others, sometimes with dark humor ("bored out of my life" by Mahler's 7th Symphony, "it is like kissing a still-born child."). The years in America were difficult. Always in the shadow of Rachmaninoff, he struggled to establish himself as composer and piano virtuoso. He details the seemingly endless but finally successful battle with the Chicago Civic Opera to mount *Love for the Three Oranges*, falls in love with the young Stella Adler, and begins work on his third opera, *The Fiery Angel*. Two years later he is in Paris, where his music is more warmly received than in Russia or America. Here the galaxy of connections grows exponentially as his fame expands. As always, he documents his encounters with sharp, often sardonic insight. The pages of the diary teem with the names of the period's most celebrated artists. There are the Russians Diaghilev, Chaliapin, Kossevitzy, Stravinsky, Mayakovsky ("a fearsome apache"), Meyerhold, and Bakst. But Prokofiev's world now expands to include Ravel, Szymanowski, Marinetti, Mary Garden, Cocteau, Artur Rubenstein, and many others.

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