

A STUDY OF PROKOFIEFF'S NINE PIANO SONATAS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Music
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Music

by
Karen M. Haverlah

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ABSTRACT

Prokofieff created a piano style decidedly different from that of his predecessors. He constantly strove for perfection and individuality in his works. In this study I propose to concentrate on the technical elements of style in Prokofieff's piano sonatas-- discussing their common traits and their differences. The first chapter discusses the traits that are common to all of the piano sonatas. In the second chapter I explore in detail the formal construction of each of the first and last sonata movements, preceded by a brief historical setting. The middle movements are mentioned briefly in some of the sonatas in order to give a general idea of their construction. The third chapter summarizes the style of the sonatas in regard to form, discusses their evolution of style, and states the four main contributions that Prokofieff's music has made to the art of music.

This study shows that even though there are common stylistic traits in the piano sonatas, there was an evolution of change which covers three periods. This evolution places the first four sonatas in the first period, the Fifth Sonata in the second period, and the remaining sonatas in the third period. In regard to form, Prokofieff basically followed the traditional paths, finding his innovations through different means. These means include the development of his own harmonic idiom, the element of the toccata, or motorism, the

revitalizing of melody, and the introduction of the grotesque element, or to use Prokofieff's word--scherziness. Through these innovations, Prokofieff, indeed, made valuable contributions to the field of music.

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I

CHARACTERISTICS OF PROKOFIEFF'S PIANO STYLE

Throughout his life as an artist, Prokofieff's taste and artistic tendencies followed an evolution closely related to changes in his personal life and the changing social conditions of the era in which he lived. In tracing his development as a composer, his creative life is generally divided into three periods: the years of his youth (1907-1918), the foreign period (1923-1933), and the Soviet period (1933-1953). Many of the works composed between 1918 and 1923 originated while Prokofieff was still in Russia.

While there are differences in these three periods there are many common stylistic features distinguishable throughout his career. The elements of his style which are characteristic of all the piano works are perhaps described best by the composer himself. He lists five traits:

1. "Neoclassicism." Prokofieff remarks that his classicism assumes a neoclassical aspect in the sonatas and the concertos, or imitates the classical style of the 18th century, as in the Gavottes, the Classical Symphony.¹

Prokofieff particularly esteemed Beethoven as a bold innovator

¹Quoted in Nicolas Slonimsky, "Prokofieff," International Encyclopedia of Music and Musicians, 5th Edition, 1949, p. 2286.

who revitalized musical forms. His admiration of Haydn, Mozart, and Scarlatti is apparent time and again in his works which display features of eighteenth century classicism.² Nestyev states that in regard to imitation Prokofieff was "willing to question the validity of his own very successful experiment in the Classical Symphony, which was a deliberate stylization of Haydn."³

2. "Innovation." Prokofieff remarked,

[This] I trace to my meeting with Taneieff, when he taunted me for my rather 'elementary' harmony. At first this innovation consisted in the search for an individual harmonic language, but later was transformed into a desire to find a medium for the expression of strong emotion.⁴

One of his most remarkable innovations is the personal harmonic idiom which he developed. Added tones, the major-minor chord, consecutive major thirds, and whole-tone melodic progressions were not original with Prokofieff, but they were contemporary. He abruptly uses foreign harmony, introduces distant chords and displaced tonality. He was among the first to use melodic "distortion" such as unexpected wide leaps and foreign tones.⁵ With respect to the purely coloristic aspect of Prokofieff's harmony, of interest is his frequently unusual placement of the tones in a chord. "Open chords,

²Israel V. Nestyev, Prokofiev, trans. by Florence Jonas (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1960), p. 461.

³Nestyev, p. 467.

⁴Slonimsky, p. 2286.

⁵David Leslie Kinsey, The Piano Sonatas of Serge Prokofieff: A Critical Study of the Elements of Their Style (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1959), p. 269.

made up of widely spaced intervals, with a vast expanse between the lower and upper voices, create a somber, desolate atmosphere." ⁶
 When the tones of a chord are very close together a ringing, metallic effect results.

Also in this category are the special textures, particularly in the low register, which are characteristic of his piano works. ⁷

The freshness and dynamic optimism of his music are important innovations as they came at a time when music was threatened with "stagnation from religious, programatic, psychological, mystical, and impressionistic cultism." ⁸

3. "Element of the Toccata, or Motor Element." This motor element is found frequently in the Sonatas, both in short spans, as well as in entire movements. ⁹ Prokofieff thought the motor element "was probably influenced by Schumann's Toccata, which impressed me greatly at one time." ¹⁰

4. "The Lyrical Element."

Commenting on the long melodic phrase, as in the slow movement of the Fourth Sonata, Prokofieff says:

⁶Nestyev, p. 481.

⁷Kinsey, p. 269.

⁸Kinsey, p. 269.

⁹See, for example, Sonata 2, Scherzo; Sonata 2, Finale, theme 2; Sonata 3, Introduction, Coda; Sonata 6, Finale.

¹⁰Slonimsky, p. 2286.

This lyric strain has for long remained in obscurity, or if it is noticed at all, then only in retrospection. And since my lyricism has for a long time been denied appreciation, it has grown but slowly. But at later stages, I paid more and more attention to lyrical expression.¹¹

Prokofieff worked hard to revitalize the melodic structure of contemporary music. "I love melody very much. I consider it the most important element in music, and I have been striving to improve its quality in my works for many years."¹² It was particularly in the realm of melody that he had a fear of banality and passive imitation. "A composer must be careful to keep the melody simple and comprehensible without permitting it to become imitative or trivial."¹³

Prokofieff's lyricism has a completely different character from that of the nineteenth century romantics, such as Liszt and Wagner. Prokofieff's lyricism is restrained, pure, and devoid of excess sentimentality.¹⁴

5. "Grotesquerie "

Here Prokofieff rejects what some writers have found grotesque in his music.

Too much has been said about the 'grotesque' in my music. It's the talk of ignoramuses with untrained ears. They did not realize that there was a strong

¹¹Slonimsky, p. 2286.

¹²Nestyev, p. 474.

¹³Nestyev, p. 474.

¹⁴Nestyev, pp. 469-470.

lyrical strain in my first period, as well as later.¹⁵

I should like to limit myself to the four elements, and to regard the fifth element, that of the grotesque, which some critics try to foist on me, as merely a variation of the other characteristics. In application to my music, I should like to replace the word grotesque by scherziness, or by the three words giving its gradations: jest, laughter, mockery.¹⁶

Prokofieff's piano writing seems to reveal a strong reaction against the refinements of impressionism. After the delicate, hazy timbres which characterize certain pieces by Debussy, Prokofieff returned to the piano style of the classical epoch, accentuating the instrument's percussive qualities. In comparison to the richly ornamented and sumptuous piano style of Rachmaninoff, Prokofieff's piano style is spare and economical. Prokofieff's texture is usually simple and pure, often with only two or three voices or parallel movement in octaves.¹⁷

The technique of skips and hand-crossings in his pieces is reminiscent of the tradition of Domenico Scarlatti and his light scale passages spring from the piano style of Haydn and the early Beethoven. Prokofieff often used such toccata-like effects as alternating chords between the right and left hand, and accentuated non-legato passages. In contrast to the typically pianistic motoristic

¹⁵Quoted in Alexander Werth, "The Real Prokofieff," Nation, April, 1953, p. 236.

¹⁶Slonimsky, p. 2286.

¹⁷Nestyev, p. 486.

elements of his style, there are also beautiful and natural lyrical lines.¹⁸

¹⁸Nestyev, p. 436.

II

A STUDY OF PROKOFIEFF'S NINE PIANO SONATAS

Sonata No. 1 in F Minor, Op. 1

The First Sonata was one of Prokofieff's earliest works, composed in 1909. Originally this was the Second Sonata from Prokofieff's Conservatory years and was in three movements. Prokofieff made this a one-movement sonata in 1909 by reworking and polishing the first movement and discarding the second and third movements. It is generally agreed that this sonata more than any other shows the strong influence of Rachmaninoff and remnants of the Romantic school. Although there are neither sarcastic grimaces nor jarring harmonies in this sonata, the dynamism and energetic quality clearly break through as Prokofieff's own style.

This one-movement sonata follows the basic classical sonata form and begins with a four measure introduction. The tempo is allegro, the time signature $\frac{12}{8}$, and the phrases vary from four measures to twelve measures in length. The first subject is presented in the second phrase and is six measures long. Phrase three repeats the first subject in a slightly modified and shortened version, while the third statement is extended and cadences in the tonic key (mm. 16-25).

The episode (mm. 25-41), following a similar pattern as the first subject, consists of three phrases which are similar to one an-

other. The third phrase is extended and concludes the modulation in the key of the second subject--A-flat major.

The second subject, beginning in measure 42, has an almost identical melodic contour to that of the first theme and is a four measure motive stated three times in a sequential pattern in the first period (mm. 42-57). In measure 58 the second period of this section begins and is almost parallel to the first period. In the third period (mm. 74-81) there appears a contrasting idea in a smooth, flowing rhythm. Although the closing material for the exposition (mm. 82-92) is chordal and chromatic, it does end in A-flat major with an authentic cadence.

The development section begins (m. 94) with the closing material and then takes up the episode theme (m. 106). Modulating through many keys, including F minor, D minor, E minor, and A-flat major, the development then employs the second subject, which is succeeded by the closing material.

The recapitulation begins in measure 146 in the tonic key, with only one statement of the first subject. Following this, the episode material appears first in C minor and then in F minor, the latter as it is in the exposition. The tonic key is maintained for the subordinate themes (mm. 174-203), then modulates to A-flat major for the repeat of the smooth second subordinate theme. Measures 204 through 217 are exactly the same as measures 74 through 87 in the exposition, including the closing material.

The coda is twenty-six measures long and alternates between the

tonic key and its relative major, employing in part the closing material. The final phrase reinstates the F minor harmony.

Sonata No. 2 in D Minor, Op. 14

The Second Sonata, written in 1912, marks a great step forward in terms of Prokofieff's ability to create his own personal style. Although this sonata is quite long, the four movements differ sharply in mood leaving no boring moments. The first movement is in sonata form, but contains many little themes which serve as episodes or transition passages.

From its first measure, the First Movement, Allegro ma non troppo, is captivating with its intense forward drive. The first subject contains a small ABA form within its three large phrases (mm. 1-31). The "B" theme appears almost as an abrupt interruption with its sharp percussive dissonances (mm. 8-19).

An episode section follows (mm. 32-63), which might be considered a second theme, comprised of four phrases which are used extensively in the development. The last two phrases of the episode discreetly emphasize two important notes in the second subject--E and D-sharp. This period also prepares the way for the new tonality of E minor (mm. 48-63). At measure 64 the flat is dropped from the key signature and the time signature changes from $\frac{2}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$.

The tender wistful melody of the second subject appears at the Tempo primo (m. 64) in an eight measure theme. This subject is repeated with chromatic figures against the melody in the next phrase

(mm. 72-81). The exposition is brought to a close in the E minor tonality with two phrases which employ the descending motive of the episode passage in diminution (mm. 84-103).

The first four phrases of the development section present the second subject and its closing material in a new harmonic background (mm. 104-127). The time signature changes back to $\frac{2}{4}$ in measure 128 and takes up the material from the second half of the episode. In this development Prokofieff begins to show his contrapuntal skill in combining themes. By measure 160 the second subject is in irregular augmentation in the soprano, the B phrase of the first subject is an inner voice, and the descending motive of the episode serves as the bass line. This contrapuntal continuity is maintained through three sequential statements of the second subject in augmentation (mm. 144-183). The last two phrases of the development are built mainly on episode material (mm. 184-205).

The recapitulation states the first subject as it is in the exposition but now the melody is played an octave lower in the left hand (mm. 206-216). Measures 224 through 225 repeat the episode section which begins in A minor and then modulates to the tonic key. The repetition of the second subject and its closing material is in the tonic key (mm. 256-295).

The coda is only nineteen measures long (mm. 296-314) but it is most effective. It begins pianissimo, restates the first subject and gradually builds in intensity to end in a fortissimo D minor cadence.

The last movement of Op. 14 is in sonata form and in D minor.

In some ways it resembles the first movement--the character of the first theme is similar to that of the first movement, and it employs the same theme for both developments. An introduction (mm. 1-13) sets the mood for the lively, playful melody of the first theme and the repetitive pattern of its accompaniment. While the accompaniment rotates over a small range, the theme skips merrily over the keyboard taking in over three octaves, above and below the accompaniment. A rarity in Prokofieff's piano sonatas is the use of repeat signs which are used here for the first subject (mm. 18-34).

Consisting mainly of a series of major and minor sixth chords, the episode races along and modulates freely, with the second phase sequential to the first (mm. 35-50).

A change of time and key signatures notes the beginning of the second subject. This theme is presented in three contrasting phrases in C and the first phrase serves as an introduction which emphasizes the minor 6th, augmented 4th, and perfect 5th tones (mm. 51-59). The melody itself contains Prokofieff's unusual and unexpected inflections (mm. 59-74). Prokofieff creates a different effect in the recurrence of the introductory phrase (mm. 75-81) by placing it an octave lower. Consequently the following two phrases are also slightly modified (mm. 82-97).

Closing the exposition is a coda in C major, containing the episode theme accompanied by the bass of the second subject and followed by the material from the first phrase of the second subject. While the bass continues in $\frac{2}{4}$ the episode material enters in $\frac{6}{8}$ in the

treble (mm. 98-113). When the second subject takes over, the time signature changes again to $\frac{2}{4}$ in both parts, and the music gradually decrescendos to close on a very soft C unison (mm. 114-132).

Beginning the development section is the tender melody from the first movement to be played "dolcissimo e molto espressivo" (mm. 133-144). These first two phrases are identical to those opening the development of the first movement. Changing pace slightly and picking up the tempo, the next two phrases of new material are sequential to each other (mm. 145-160). At the *Allegro* the first subject appears with a different slant due to the time change from $\frac{6}{8}$ to $\frac{2}{4}$ and the full chords in the accompaniment (mm. 161-176). Extending this gay theme, the next two phrases find both hands in the treble (mm. 176-192) to be succeeded by two statements of the second phrase of the second subject (mm. 193-208). After four brief measures (mm. 205-208) the episode material appears to be interrupted by the opening strains of the exposition. This introductory passage is expounded upon from measures 209 to 224. However, the last phrases of the development (mm. 225-233) are only slightly modified from the opening phrases of this movement, thus ending the development in the tonic.

The recapitulation restates the first subject as it was in the exposition but leaves out the repeats (mm. 233-257). True to form the episode material begins in the tonic key with the second phrase starting on an E major chord sequential to the first phrase (mm. 258-273). Returning in the tonic key the first phrase group of the second subject appears as it did in the exposition (mm. 274-296). In the repetition the

composer contrapuntally fuses the first subject with the second subject (mm. 297-319). Pulling together fragments and motives, the coda also begins as it did in the exposition (mm. 320-335), but adds traces of the first subject (mm. 335-343) and introductory material to end the composition firmly in D (mm. 344-351).

Sonata No. 3 in A Minor, Op. 28

The Third Sonata was originally composed in 1917 as one of the six student sonatas written at the Conservatory. Like the First Sonata, this work is a one-movement composition and it also shows the influence of Rachmaninoff. In 1917 Prokofieff completed his revision of the Third Sonata. He retained the general construction and basic thematic material of the piece but he sharpened the harmonic details and made some revisions in the development and recapitulation. This sonata has become one of the most popular of Prokofieff's piano pieces due to its variety of moods. It is also an excellent example of the composer's concise style of writing.

Nestyev states that in its thematic material and in the character of its exposition the Third Sonata resembles the Second. It shows the same predilection for agitated triplet rhythms and has the same expressive virtuoso devices of wide leaps, strong accents, toccata-like figures alternating with energetic passage work, and pages of beautiful cantilena. He also notes, however, that the Third Sonata is more unified in character and that its dramatic impact is achieved through the complicated development of two or three basic themes.¹

¹Nestyev, pp. 137-138.

The sonata opens with a tempo marking of *Allegro tempestoso* and the time signature is $\frac{4}{4}$ ($\frac{12}{8}$). Each of the first three phrases of the exposition is introduced by two measures of rapid, toccata-like motion on an E major triad. This makes the first subject only four measures long (mm. 3-6). The second phrase is slightly modified by the addition of parallel thirds above the melody (mm. 7-12), and the third phrase introduces new material. In the fourth phrase the theme is stated in irregular diminution (mm. 20-26). The design of the first theme is broad with its wide leaps, and in this phrase its rhythm is disturbed and uneven, owing to rests and sharp dotted figures.

The transition passage (mm. 27-53) consists of three phrases which contain material that is treated sequentially. This agitated passage begins *pianissimo* with each phrase increasing in dynamics to the third phrase which is *forte*.

At the *Moderato* the mood is changed to one of tranquility and the second theme appears after the four measure modulation from C-sharp minor to C major (mm. 54-57). The second theme is stated in a simple, moving melody of four measures (mm. 58-61). In the second phrase of this section the harmony is changed slightly, while in the third phrase the melody is in the left hand and has modulated to the key of G-sharp minor (mm. 62-69). The fourth phrase finds the melody and harmony altered. However, the fifth phrase is an exact repetition of the second theme an octave higher (mm. 70-77).

Serving as a coda to the exposition the next four phrases are diatonic in character and have a tenderly swaying melody (mm. 78-93).

Irwin Freundlich, in his introductory material to the Leeds edition of the complete sonatas states the following in regard to this development section:

. . . All the material of its single movement is stated up to the cadence in C. . . which closes the exposition. The development now draws upon this material, extracting further implications from it by fragmentation, rhythmic diminution, interval distortion (mostly huge expansion), stretto, sequential treatment, combination of fragments all stated in an orchestral piano style. . . culminating in a final explosive tutti. . . before a shortened, varied recapitulation brings the work to a close.²

In examining the music one finds the Allegro tempestoso and fortissimo of the first theme are recalled in the opening phrase of the development section (mm. 96-102). The second theme is transformed from a tender melody into an angry shout with winging, chromatic figures and sharp accents in the accompaniment (mm. 103-113). Continuing in an agitated manner the coda material of the exposition is reinstated (mm. 114-122) to be followed by a complete five phrase statement of the second theme over an animated and breathless accompaniment. The development section concludes in a climactic combination of the second theme and its coda (mm. 144-154).

In the recapitulation the first subject is omitted; therefore the recapitulation commences with the bridge passage (mm. 155-188). This is somewhat developed and supplemented with new material which could be taken from the development (mm. 189-204). At the Poco più mosso the coda of the second theme appears but it is barely recognizable. It has

²Prokofieff Piano Sonatas, Leeds Music Corporation (New York), 1957, p. 2.

lost its singing quality and has become percussive (mm. 205-220). The following phrase (mm. 220-228) brings back some of the rhythmic quality of the first theme. In the final measures of the sonata, motives of the second theme are heard for the last time in a loud and triumphant spirit.

Sonata No. 4 in C Minor, Op. 29

Prokofieff's Fourth Sonata is the last of the rewritten student sonatas. In this work he utilized the first and last movements of his Fifth Conservatory Sonata and the second movement, "Andante assai," of his youthful E Minor Symphony--both written in 1908. He completed the finale and polished the harmony and piano texture, especially in the second movement, leaving the basic themes and general structures unchanged in the rewriting in 1917.

Unlike the preceding Sonata, the charm of the Fourth Sonata lies in its restrained, melancholy Slavic flavor. There is an intensity in the first movement but it is not as dramatic, or gay, or frantic as the previous sonatas.

The opening theme of the Allegro molto sostenuto begins very softly with both hands in the lower register. The theme is repeated in the first phrase being slightly modified the second time and giving the effect of two phrases (mm. 1-7). In the second phrase the theme is continued but also repeats itself in the last four measures--this time an octave lower (mm. 7-10).

Changing to the upper register the colorful episode passage has a light, delicate lyricism (mm. 17-29). This section is seemingly interrupted when a motive of the first theme slips in for a brief moment (mm. 29-36).

The second subject, beginning in measure 37, possesses reserved qualities similar to the first subject. Particularly important to the melodic effect are the appoggiated grace-notes and the moving bass line (mm. 37-59). While this area ends in the key of E-flat major, the emphasis upon D in the melody--not as a leading tone--and other harmonic ambiguities leave the actual key in doubt until the coda (mm. 61-76).

Differing from some of the previous sonata developments, this section takes extensive use of the first subject. It begins with two phrases of the first subject (mm. 71-87), followed by three phrases which contrapuntally combine the first and second subjects (mm. 88-116). Continuing after the climactic phrase of the development is a piano phrase which gradually crescendos as the two subjects are played by alternate hands (mm. 117-125). A retransition passage (mm. 126-136) with a 3 pedal point foretells the close of the development, and prepares for the recapitulation by a sudden pianissimo and solemn 3 major ending (mm. 132-136). The virtual absence of episode material, excluding the left hand part in measure 110, is noteworthy.

With the exception of being slightly shortened, the first theme appears in the recapitulation as it does at the beginning of the work (mm. 137-148). The episode material is somewhat modified

harmonically as it now prepares for the key of C major. Appearing in E-flat major in the exposition the second subject now occurs in the key of C major (mm. 162-181), although the same tonal ambiguity is present here. A short coda recalls the codetta of the exposition and ends the movement in C minor (mm. 182-196). The final chord (C-E-G) contains an added, unresolved F-sharp--a characteristically pungent dissonance of Prokofiev.

The exultant Finale of this three-movement sonata contrasts sharply with the introspective Andante and the first movement. In the form of a rondo, the music of the last movement creates the impression of someone suddenly springing into dance for sheer joy.

Opening this movement is an exuberant, sharply accented melody set in an environment of continuous racing figurations in the bass. In C major the first theme is characterized by its accentuated dissonances. The "A" section of this rondo is in binary form with the first three phrases forming the recurring theme (mm. 1-24). The second phrase continues the theme which is then repeated in the third phrase.

Succeeding the brilliant "A" subject and forming its "b" counterpart passage are two modulating phrases which prepare the way for the "B" theme (mm. 25-42). This passage is effective because of its two carefully designated crescendos.

Formally structured in three similar phrases the "B" theme has a touch of grotesqueness about it (mm. 43-66). It has a quiet air of mystery that differs greatly from the "A" melody. Although the key

signature has not changed, this section appears to be in G. In the final measure of the last phrase (mm. 59-66), the left hand moves chromatically ascending into the C scale.

Continuing in C major the "A" theme reappears in two phrases (mm. 67-82). The second phrase is noted for its added embellishments of the melody. The change of key signature, at the end of measure 83, marks the beginning of the "C" section.

Creating another mood entirely, this theme is simple and serene, displaying Prokofiev's gift of melody. It is written in a small ternary form in A-flat (although the key signature omits the D-flat). Containing only two phrases the "a" section is to be played "dolce e semplice" (mm. 84-99). Consecutively the "b" portion is to be played "con una dolce espressione" (mm. 100-113). To conclude this peaceful interlude there is a repeat of the "a" material with slight changes in the harmony (mm. 113-133).

To follow the traditional path of the rondo the main theme recurs with added embellishments. The second phrase is extended and altered by chromatic runs in the left hand and small changes in the melody (mm. 134-152). Its "b" counterpart begins as it did originally. However, from measures 155 to 157 it is written enharmonically to the original in measures 27 to 29. From measure 157 the music continues to modulate until it cadences in B major (m. 166). Quickly modulating through many keys the rest of this period is also extended, leading to the return of the "B" theme (mm. 167-177).

Now in the key of C major the "D" melody is played in part in the bass and then finished in the treble. This section is, as before, three phrases long, but now the first two phrases are marked fortissimo and the last phrase is piano with a gradual crescendo (mm. 173-203).

The "A" material returns for six measures with the theme filled in with runs designating an elaborate, though short, delay for the coda (mm. 204-209). To close this movement the final sixteen measures make use of the brilliant "A" theme, ending in C major.

Sonata No. 5 in C Major, Op. 38/135

The Fifth Sonata was written in Paris in 1923 but was revised in 1953 as the last completed work of Prokofieff. Op. 135 differs from Op. 38 in all three movements, not only in details but in an extensive alteration of the last movement, including a more lengthy coda and re-workings of entire phrases. Irwin Freundlich states the following in his editorial remarks of the Leeds Edition of the Fifth Sonata.

Smooth textures, parallel harmonies, square melodies of a sophisticated naivete and a generally simple rhythmic relationship among the parts contribute to an impression of coolness, clarity, polish and quiet charm. No thundering climaxes here; rather a gliding smoothness in the entire motion, a discreet classic effect. Even the opening Allegro is modified to tranquillo, the Andante is softened to an Andantino, and the concluding movement moves along gently un poco allegretto.³

In the MCA edition of the Prokofieff Piano Sonatas the following remarks are made concerning the Fifth Sonata.

It is one of Prokofieff's most even-tempered and serene compositions; it has none of the Sturm und Drang impulsiveness of the earlier sonatas, nor the massive climaxes of the later ones.⁴

When this sonata was presented to the Parisians in March 1924 it was received with restraint and little enthusiasm by this ultra-modern culture. Nestyev states that the Paris modernists criticized Prokofieff for writing music that was too lucid and not sufficiently complex. This sonata, the product of fresh influences, seems to stand by itself from a stylistic viewpoint and separates the previous four from the Sixth and Seventh Sonatas, products of the early years of the Second World War.

The most transparent of the three movements of this sonata is the first, Allegro tranquillo. The main theme is charming, in its naive, almost Schubertian ingenuousness and classical clarity. It is in a bright C major with characteristically colorful digressions. The first subject is presented in four, four-measure phrases. The third and first phrases are similar to each other as are the fourth and second phrases. In the last two phrases the melody is an octave higher and the harmony altered (mm. 8-16). An episode passage follows which prepares for the change in mood and character of the second subject (mm. 17-24). A somber, almost foreboding quality prevails over this theme.

⁴Sergei Prokofieff-Complete Piano Sonatas, MCA Music Inc. (New York).

The left hand plays a continuous rhythmic pattern of ten eighth notes to a measure while the right hand projects a melody which the composer marks narrante--in a narrative manner (mm. 25-35). In its second statement (mm. 36-45) the harmony becomes closer with many half-steps and whole steps. Quite abruptly a march-like marcato passage enters in $\frac{6}{4}$ time. Its second phrase resembles the first, with the melody beginning a fifth higher (mm. 46-55). The third phrase serves as a brief coda to the exposition by recalling the running motive of the second theme (mm. 53-61).

The development begins in measure 63 with the left hand playing a varied first subject in the treble as the right hand accompaniment furnishes steady eighth notes (mm. 63-69). The right hand then takes over the melody (mm. 70-77). The following passage is quite effective in that a polytonal effect is created with the right hand playing the first subject in E as the accompaniment provides B-flat chords (mm. 77-81). Although the keys vary throughout these four phrases based on the first theme (mm. 77-91) the effect is always polytonal.

The second theme enters with the right hand establishing a triplet rhythm which is then continued by the left hand as the right hand restates the second theme in a slightly varied manner (mm. 92-113).

Having gradually increased in dynamics the marcato-passage enters at a fortissimo level and with fuller chords than in the exposition (mm. 114-120). Continuing at this level the second phrase is extended with accented chords (mm. 121-126) building to a climactic return of the first subject. With the left hand playing above the

melody, high in the treble, the first subject appears in a slightly varied form (mm. 127-141). Without any abrupt break, the development flows into the recapitulation.

The recapitulation restates the first two phrases as they are in the exposition. The third and fourth phrases are changed harmonically as they lead into the episode passage and the second subject material now gives the effect of being in the tonic key (mm. 149-179). Once again the marcato transition theme is stated beginning on A, and then on E, a fifth lower than the statements in the exposition (mm. 180-187).

A coda begins at the *Più mosso* which is only eleven measures long and based primarily on first subject material (mm. 192-202). This relatively uncomplicated movement ends, as it began, in C major.

The Second Movement, *Andantino*, has been described as a charming part of the Sonata. However, it also has been disliked by some critics because of its somewhat grotesque tonal combination. It has a scherzo quality with an unchanging mechanical $\frac{3}{8}$ rhythm. In the "A" section the accompaniment is a series of steady eighth note chords preceded by a grace note on the first beat of each measure. The three descending half-steps of the theme persistently appear with various embellishments. The "B" section breaks the monotony of the left hand background, although the mood remains the same. With the return of the "A" section the melody is varied slightly by different embellishments.

The Finale, *Un poco allegretto*, is in sonata form and, unlike the first movement, has some very harsh tonal qualities. It begins

with an open fifth (C-G) followed by the right hand playing a persistent C for seven beats. In the second phrase a prolonged F-sharp and two open fifths (E-B) are accented (mm. 5-8). The transition passage that follows begins pianissimo in sixteenth notes and with much chromaticism (mm. 9-10). There follows a two-measure contrast in which eighth-note chords appear in the left hand while separated chords, each anticipated by grace notes are in the right hand (mm. 11-12). At measure 15 the opening motive of the transition reappears a third higher and the sixteenth-note chromaticism returns at measure 19 and is extended (mm. 19-24).

The second subject is marked forte, espressivo and has a mournful character (mm. 25-36). A short passage of new material (mm. 37-40) precedes the coda which is based on the first subject and closes the exposition on a C major chord with an added major seventh (mm. 41-51).⁵

The first measures of the development create an air of mystery before one hears the repetitive C's of the first subject, now in octaves (mm. 53-59). A new melody then enters, which is similar to the second subject and could be based on it. The general contour is similar, but the rhythm here is elongated. It is a broad, singing theme played against a full, chordal background (mm. 60-69) which eventually leads into a phrase based on the first subject material (mm. 70-75), diminishing at the end to piano. There follows a short passage of episode material, marked *piu dolce* (mm. 76-79). The last measure is retarded

⁵The actual spelling of this chord is debatable. It could be considered an E minor chord with an added sixth.

to move into the recapitulation.

The order of the material in the recapitulation differs from that of the exposition. It begins at measure 80 with a statement of the episode passage exactly as it is in the exposition (mm. 80-83). The following phrase is somewhat condensed and altered by key (mm. 86-92) as it leads into a phrase of the second subject in the bass (mm. 93-95). Then the second theme is restated in octaves by both hands (mm. 95-97) and is followed by new material consisting of full, staccato, eighth-note chords which gradually build in intensity to the climactic statement of the first subject (mm. 98-103). The first subject is presented at the Poco meno mosso in extensive, full chords covering a wide range of keys in an exciting moment of the movement (mm. 104-111). The final C octave is held for a measure and tied into the pianissimo beginning of the coda (mm. 111-112).

The coda as a whole is tense and exciting with its fast tempo, staccato eighth notes, and unison runs. It is based extensively on material from the first subject and ends the movement decisively on a C major chord (mm. 112-140).

Sonata No. 6 in A Major, Op. 82

Undoubtedly, this Sixth Sonata shows much more turbulence and agitation than the previous sonatas. Begun in 1939 and completed in February of 1940, this work is, perhaps, a reflection of the impending world crises. Although it had been sixteen years since Prokofieff had completed a piano sonata, the composition demonstrates the composer's

predilection for piano virtuosity. A variety of virtuoso devices are employed, including difficult, sharply accented leaps in the first movement, full chordal writing and rich figuration in the third movement, and rapid finger technique in the finale. Some of the fiery temperament displayed in the early sonatas reappears here to combine facets of the old and new style. Nestyev comments on this fact:

Indeed, certain familiar features of Prokofiev's earlier writing, such as rigid rhythms and "barbaric" harmonies (first movement) and light textures in the style of Scarlatti (finale) are strangely combined here with profound lyricism and mature emotion (middle movements).⁶

The opening theme of the First Movement is a warlike march that uses a mixture of A major and minor with a bass that pounds out the tritone of A and D-sharp. Dissonant harmonies and mechanical rhythms give the first subject a cold, brutal quality (mm. 1-23). This quality, somewhat softened, continues into the bridge passage which consists of a series of octaves and chords with virtually no melodic line (mm. 24-39).

At the *Poco più mosso* a striking contrast is presented with the simple, diatonic motion of the second theme. It begins with both hands playing in octaves over a low B pedal point (mm. 40-43). The theme continues with very little harmonic support (mm. 44-47) and then is transferred to the left hand with some slight changes (mm. 48-51). With a different setting offered by the accompaniment the next two phrases repeat the theme (mm. 52-59).

⁶Nestyev, p. 320.

Beginning the coda are four measures (mm. 60-63) of seemingly new material which is then used as background for the second theme (mm. 64-67). The next two phrases are based almost entirely on this new material (mm. 68-76). Near the end of the exposition special emphasis is placed on E, D, C-sharp, B (changing later to C-natural), and on A, G-sharp, F-sharp, F-natural (mm. 77-85). In the last phrase a low A serves as a pedal point, with a moving bass below it which settles on a minor third (E-D) as the A becomes reaffirmed and unresolved over it (mm. 86-91).

The development begins in the *più mosso* of tempo I over the unresolved cadence of the exposition, presenting a substantially altered version of the second theme. Here the opening motive of the second subject is accented, detached and imitated at the diminished fifth (mm. 92-98). The accompaniment is restless with hammering ostinato-like figures in the bass, at first above the continuing pedal point. The second phrase begins a minor third higher and is extended (mm. 99-110), while the third phrase is shortened and restates the motives in thirds from the first theme (mm. 113-117). In the fourth phrase the left hand continues with the second theme as the right hand breaks in with the first theme (mm. 118-128). Thematic augmentation is employed as the development continues in its unrestrained manner (mm. 129-139). Enhancing the climax is the use of percussive piano devices as the col pugno (mm. 140-149). Lessening in intensity the music now seems derived from material found in the

last strains of the exposition (mm. 157-168). Once again the music is fortissimo and seems to reach its zenith with the added effect of glissandi (mm. 130-134). Subsiding and becoming calmer the music almost becomes stationary with its repetitive descending chords (mm. 196-210). Although it is a languid passage, it is quite effective because of its obtrusive forte motives, the contrasting dynamic markings, and the added eighth notes (mm. 200 and 203). The last phrase is similar to the closing phrase of the exposition but here the final note is F.

Immediately the march-like first theme starts the recapitulation in A major. The condensed main theme (mm. 218-241) is followed by a brief and altered second theme (mm. 242-253).

Recalling its turbulent spirit, the coda employs the closing phrases of the development and--at the end--the motive of the first theme (mm. 253-272). The final cadence is typical of Prokofiev--an A unison with an unresolved B-flat.

After the demonic, warlike, expressionistic images of the first movement one welcomes the gaiety of the dance-like second movement (Allegretto). This is a three part form that skillfully incorporates inventive variation technique.

The Third Movement is quite lyrical and is in the rhythm of a slow waltz (Tempo di valzer lentissimo). Rich and vivid harmonies with a wealth of polyphonic writing in the inner voices, sharply differentiate the two middle movements from the first.

The playful *Vivace* contains some of the familiar characteristics of the youthful Prokofieff, including his love of vigorous motion, impetuous running passages, and light, carefree themes. Employing a much freer sonata form than previously, Prokofieff here unites the movements of the sonata through the return of the first theme of the first movement, introduces new melodies in the development, and reverses the order of the themes in the recapitulation.

The first subject is gay, repetitive, and quite catchy. This theme which is in A minor is presented three times, each repetition somewhat varied (mm. 1-28). The third statement serves as the episode, and leads into the second subject which is more melodic in character. It is only two phrases long and is in the key of C major (mm. 29-45). A brief transition follows (mm. 45-60) which leads into a restatement of the second subject now posing as the beginning of the coda (mm. 61-71), which also includes some new material (mm. 71-77) and transition material (mm. 78-84).

The development begins with a statement of the first subject in E-flat (mm. 85-94). An episode passage of new material (mm. 100-114) followed by motives of the first subject (mm. 115-126) leads to a new and important theme. This theme appears to be in the key of G-sharp minor and it is also of a light, carefree nature. Its four statements are all similar at the beginning but each one ends a little differently (mm. 127-157). At this point the key signature changes to A minor and motives of the first theme alternate with the

new development subject (mm. 158-173).

An Andante section recalls the opening motive of the first movement (mm. 185-203) and the moving chordal passage from the first movement development (mm. 204-214). The Andante interlude ends as it began, but now the motives of the first movement gradually come to a cadence on A major (mm. 215-228).

Once again Vivace, the development seems to come into bloom with a number of phrases devoted entirely to the beginning melody of this movement. Modulating through many keys, F-sharp, D, F, B, E, A, E-flat, B, this melody finally comes to a rather abrupt end on a diminished B chord, thus ending the lengthy development section (mm. 229-289).

In contending that this is a sonata-form composition, one discovers that the themes in the recapitulation are presented in reverse order. The recapitulation begins with the development subject now in the tonic key (mm. 290-306). Succeeding it is the episode passage from the development (mm. 306-321) and a statement of the development subject played in the left hand (mm. 322-331). Measure 343 finds the lovely, peaceful second theme entering in A major (mm. 343-363). The third statement, however, emerges in F major with the melody in the left hand (mm. 364-371). The first subject now ventures forth in A minor for its first appearance in the recapitulation. Interspersed between statements of the first theme are motives of the first movement (mm. 376, 381, 409, 410). The music grows more frenzied as the main theme is accompanied by glissando-like runs and by the

insistent repetition of the accented notes (mm. 414-433). Reminiscences of the first movement are heard again in the final phrase as the sonata triumphantly ends on an A major chord.

Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major, Op. 83

Like the Sixth Sonata, this work was begun in 1939. Prokofieff wrote the principal themes at this time, intending to complete the work sometime in the near future. He laid it aside several times during the course of the three years following, to engage himself in the opera, War and Peace, the suite The Year 1941, the Second String Quartet, songs, and marches for the Soviet Army. Finally, in the spring of 1942, the composition was completed in the course of a few days.

The deep feelings and emotions aroused in Prokofieff by the shattering events of the war seem to be reflected in this sonata. Nestyev states that, "In harshness and fury this is the most radically modern of Prokofiev's piano sonatas, surpassing in this respect even the Sixth Sonata, with its fierce raging and moments of almost mystical aloofness."⁷

The First Movement, Allegro inquieto, creates the impression of a fiendish scherzo. The feeling is intensified by the elements of the music.

. . . the restless pattern of the melody, the unrelieved persistence of the ostinato phrases in the bass, the bare rhythmic construction, and mainly the dissonant harmonic texture. . . Here melody clearly becomes secondary in importance to the blend of

⁷Nestyev, p. 335.

spare texture, dissonant harmony, and sharply accentuated mechanical rhythm.⁸

Prokofieff himself described the harmonic texture as atonal,⁹ but there are tonal centers evident in the strong B-flat major and B-flat minor cadences.

The first theme is one of swirling motion in $\frac{6}{8}$ that begins with the hands playing in unison an octave apart. In the fifth measure there appears the restless hammering motive that recurs frequently in the principal theme and throughout the movement (mm. 1-9).

In the second phrase (mm. 10-19) the pattern that is established in measures 10 and 11 is repeated four more times, with the only variance being in the left hand on the first beat of some of the patterns. A different rhythmic pattern is conceived in the third phrase which consists basically of two different measures (mm. 20 and 24), each repeated three times (mm. 20-27). The fourth phrase is similar to the opening phrase although the right hand is two octaves higher, the bass gives more harmonic support, and the last two measures are quite altered (mm. 28-34). The fifth phrase also begins with the opening material, but after the first measure wanders off this course to elaborate freely on the material in the first measure (mm. 36-39) and material found in the second phrase (mm. 40-44). The rhythmic pattern conceived in the third phrase returns for the sixth and seventh phrases in which the left hand moves chromatically upward in the beginning of each phrase as the right hand plays full, dissonant

⁸Nestyev, p. 335.

⁹Nestyev, p. 336.

chords (mm. 45-60). Returning once more is a statement of the first opening measures, this time in the key of C (mm. 61-64).

The bridge passage begins in measure 65 containing the hammering motive (mm. 76 and 80) and also new material that is then repeated. Measures 100-103 are very similar to measures 104-107. The notes used to make up measures 113-115 are reiterated two more times in measures 116-120 and in 120-124.

The melancholy second theme is in $\frac{9}{8}$ time and begins with the hammering motive in a slower tempo. Even though the tempo is slower, the melody extends into the eighth measure of the Andantino (mm. 134-141). The first two measures of the second phrase are very similar to the first phrase, but then the melody jumps down to the A below middle C to soar to the B-flat four octaves higher (mm. 141-153).

The first four measures of the fourth phrase are identical to the beginning measures of the second theme (mm. 154-158). Starting in measure 163 extensive use is made of the hammering motive. Two measures later the time signature returns to $\frac{6}{8}$ as the music gradually accelerates to bring back the fury of the first theme (mm. 163-191).

The development begins in the manner of the closing phrase of the exposition--starting at fortissimo to recall and elaborate on different portions of the first subject (192-278). Throughout this lengthy section different shades of forte are used, but most of it is fortissimo. When the second theme enters in irregular augmentation in the bass, the accompaniment is marked piano (mm. 279-283). These five measures are repeated in measures 291-295 with the second theme now played

in octaves. The last phrases of the development recall material from the bridge passage with the last chord being a subdominant seventh of C minor (mm. 304-347).

The recapitulation begins with the second theme in the tonic key. It is presented as it was in the exposition, although shortened (mm. 348-368). A pianissimo passage of expository material on the first theme, marked *Allegro inquieto*, leads into the forte statement of the first subject (mm. 382-396). This is followed by a modulatory phrase of first theme material (mm. 397-410), preparing for the last phrase of the movement. Although extended and with more harmonic support, the final phrase is one last statement of the principal theme, ending the work clearly in E-flat major (mm. 411-422).

The Third Movement, *Precipitato*, is the most impressive movement of this sonata and one of the most difficult of Prokofiev's sonata movements to perform. It is a dynamic, toccata-like, sonata form work in $\frac{7}{8}$ time. The thick, heavy chords, ostinato basses, and the ceaselessly flowing rhythm seem to suggest a warlike procession. Even more than in the first movement, the melody is overwhelmed by elemental rhythm, and full dissonant chords. Throughout this movement the $\frac{7}{8}$ rhythm is steady and strict.

The first theme is set into motion at a mezzo-piano dynamic level and with both hands in the bass clef. The right hand gradually moves into the treble register and increases in sound so that the second phrase (mm. 11-18) begins mezzo-forte. Although extended with new material in the high register, the third phrase shows re-

semblance to the opening phrase (mm. 19-31). Through measure 27 the rhythmic pattern established in the first two measures of the left hand continues with every other measure repeating the same notes (B-flat, C-sharp, B-flat). The fourth phrase is similar to the second phrase but has new material which is interspersed throughout the extended phrase (mm. 32-44). Congruent to the first and third phrases, the fifth phrase (mm. 45-52) prepares the way for the second theme with different material in the last measures.

The melody of the second theme, containing three phrases, is almost overcome by the dissonant, treble chords, although it is marked forte and marcato (mm. 52-78). A change of key signature in measure 61 leaves the closing of the exposition on A (mm. 61-78), with a strong implication of A minor in the right hand.

The development section is relatively short consisting of forty-eight measures. This section commences with material based on the first theme (mm. 79-96) which is then partially repeated in the following phrase (mm. 97-104). One statement of the second theme is then presented in measures 108 to 116. A closing phrase (mm. 117-126), corresponding to the last phrase of the exposition, reinstates the A, now as the leading tone, in the last two measures as the dynamics gradually increase (mm. 125-126).

The condensed recapitulation resumes the tonic key with an identical repetition of the opening phrase of the exposition (mm. 127-136). In the second phrase there are octave changes which vary it slightly from the second phrase of the exposition (mm. 137-144). There

is no mention of the second subject, however, as the music hurries into the coda.

The coda elaborates and enlarges on the first theme, ever increasing the total volume of sound by extending the range and adding to the chords (mm. 145-170). The movement comes to a close in a phrase of detached, fortissimo, octaves with occasional B-flats and E-flats added, which lead into a clear descending D-flat major scale and a broken tonic chord concluding the sonata on B-flat octaves (mm. 171-177).

Sonata No. 3 in B-flat Major, Op. 84

Opus 84 is the third in the series of piano sonatas which Prokofieff had begun in 1939. The Eighth Sonata was completed early in September 1944. During the five year period in which these three sonatas were written (Op. 82, 83, 84) a new stage of the composer's piano style was developed.

Nestyev states that these three sonatas clearly demonstrate the duality of the composer's aims.

These later sonatas were more profound in conception, more dramatic, and on a grander scale than the earlier ones. On the other hand, the expressionistic tendencies that he had shown earlier he now indulged to an even greater extent. This can be seen in the exaggeration, lack of restraint, and harsh dissonance in certain passages; in the rather enigmatic bizarre quality of the lyrical themes; and occasionally, in the predominance of pure rhythm and motion over the melodic element.¹⁰

¹⁰Nestyev, p. 351.

Prokofieff's sketchbooks show that the main themes of the Eighth Sonata were composed in 1939. These sketches show two themes that were later employed in the first movement, the principal minuet theme of the second movement, and the two opening themes of the finale. In the final writing, however, new, sharply contrasting themes appeared, the tonality was changed from the original C major to B-flat major, and the number of movements was reduced from four to three.

The opening material of the first movement, *Andante dolce*, is unusual in Prokofieff's piano writing, in that it begins with a tender, melancholy theme, quite unlike the beginnings of the other sonatas.

The first theme, with its flowing melody and extensive use of chromatic alterations, has a large three-part structure, with two new themes serving as its middle section. The movement begins softly with two similar phrases which comprise the first theme (mm. 1-9). The middle section consists of two short themes, each containing two corresponding phrases (mm. 10-17 and 18-25). The first theme recurs with the first phrase stated exactly as it is in the opening measures (mm. 26-30), however, the second phrase is imperceptibly varied by triplet figures between the melody notes (mm. 31-34).

The episode passage begins at the *Poco più animato* with refined, lovely, harmonic effects (mm. 35-41). The flowing modulatory motion is taken over by passage work (mm. 42-45) which then provides a background for a modified statement of the first theme, this time in the bass (mm. 46-54). The last phrase of the episode passage returns

to the Andante tempo preparing for the second subject (mm. 55-60).

It has been said that the second theme of this sonata is unusual because of its fragmentary nature, sounding a bit like operatic recitative. The first and third phrases of this theme resemble each other (mm. 61-66 and 73-78), changed only by some added accompaniment in the bass. The third phrase is increased dynamically as this melody crescendos and decrescendos, cadencing the exposition on a G chord (mm. 78-89).

The Allegro moderato introduces the development section which is composed of complicated running passages, creating an ever-increasing whirling energy. There appears to be a new theme at the beginning of the development. It is in measure 100 that one can definitely detect the second melody of the first theme in augmentation in the bass (mm. 100-107). Prior to this the left hand has carried the melody over busy right hand work parallel to that found in the episode passage (mm. 92-97). For three brief measures (mm. 110-113) the beginning of the episode passage comes in, succeeded by two measures of the first theme (mm. 114-115). At this point the bass regains the melody leaving the right hand free to move rapidly in running passages (mm. 116-133). Having gradually increased in dynamics, both hands move toward each other in fortissimo espressivo chords (mm. 133-136). Marcato chords intervene as the melody jumps to the high register moving up in sequential phrases (mm. 149-154), to be briefly interrupted twice by the first theme in augmentation (mm. 155-158 and 165-169). This is succeeded by second theme material which leads into the

climactic portion of the development section. Marked fff and Andante, each measure is filled with broken runs and accents (mm. 183-190). The music gradually subsides into a pianissimo, preparing for the return of the quiet first theme (mm. 191-205) and completing the development section.

The recapitulation recalls note for note the first theme and its middle portion, but leaves out the second occurrence of the first theme (mm. 206-231). The episode is altered, shortened, and in a different tonality (mm. 231-244) and is followed by a slightly altered and shortened second subject (mm. 245-260).

The coda recalls the dynamic motion of the development section, including the new theme. It begins very quietly, gradually building up to a con brio fortissimo (mm. 261-280) and then gently becoming calmer so that the movement quietly subsides on a D-flat major chord (mm. 285-296).

The Second Movement, Andante sognando, is one of the loveliest works written for the piano by this composer. It is a simple, yet lyrical, dance-like miniature in the rhythm of a minuet. Beginning in the key of D-flat the main theme is heard once in this key and then repeats itself in D major. The form is a relatively uncomplicated variation type with a transition section in F major leading back to the principal theme in D major. A sub-theme enters in what appears to be A minor followed by a varied principal theme in D-flat. The movement then seems to go into A-flat for a recurrence of the sub-theme before its final D-flat variation of the main melody.

The Finale, marked Vivace, contains much that is new and boldly dramatic; although the opening material, with its fast triplet passages, resilient tarantella rhythm, and playful, spirited themes, is reminiscent of the finales of the Second and Fourth Sonatas. The virtuoso aspect of Prokofieff's piano style is also richly represented here in the complicated technique of many runs, double notes, leaps, toccata-like passages, and sharp, biting staccatos.

This rondo movement is in B-flat major with a $\frac{12}{8}$ time signature. The first theme, "A₁," has a binary form and establishes from its beginning a gay, spirited, rhythmic motive (mm. 1-8). Contrasting material, "A₂" interrupts with a change in time and key signatures (mm. 9-18). The third phrase (mm. 19-25) leads back to the principal theme re-establishing the original time and key signatures for a shortened phrase resembling the first one (mm. 26-31). A short phrase of the material from measures 9-18 enters and modulates to a transition passage in B major (mm. 32-41).

The "B" theme has a triplet rhythm also, and the melody is frequently played by both hands an octave apart (mm. 42-54). The third phrase of the section (mm. 55-63) is a combination of the main portions of the first and second phrases (mm. 42-54). The fourth phrase echoes its first measures with the right hand two octaves lower in the second half of the phrase (mm. 63-70). A transition section ensues comprised of a passage of broken chords played an octave apart (mm. 71-78), and a short phrase of "A₂" which leads into a return of the "A₁" theme (mm. 79-84).

Two extended phrases based on the "A₁" melody occur in the tonic key leading to the modulation for the third theme and a new key (mm. 85-106).

A dramatic change takes place with the mechanical, ostinato-like new theme which commences the "C" section. In $\frac{3}{4}$ time and in D-flat this theme is continuously repeated in a number of phrases which are each slightly diversified as they build in sonority and dynamics toward a climactic peak (mm. 107-225). The basic rhythm of the left hand continues as the right hand freely elaborates on the theme with runs and trills. Now each phrase gradually diminishes in volume so that the last phrase of this melody is pianissimo (mm. 225-287). Over the persistent, ostinato bass, the recitative phrase of the second theme of the first movement comes in and is stated in four varied ways (mm. 289-340). At the Andantino a modulation takes place, the time signature becomes $\frac{4}{4}$, and hesitantly and imperceptively, two phrases of the "B" theme enter (mm. 341-356). Continuing in reverse order "A₂" is stated and continues into the "A₁" melody (mm. 356-373).

The "A₁" subject begins in the tonic key and resembles the opening of the movement. Here "A₂" is omitted and the principal theme is repeated a whole step lower the second time (mm. 374-400). Leaving out the transition passage, the subsequent section includes three statements of the "B" theme (mm. 401-429). A transition passage and brief glance of "A₂" reappear as they did before the entrance of the "C" theme, but now in different keys (mm. 430-445).

A coda succeeds in the tonic key and in $\frac{12}{8}$ time. This coda

serves well in tying together the melodies and themes of this large movement. A variation of the first theme is stated (mm. 446-454), followed by a passage which leads into two statements of the "B" melody (mm. 464-470). The boisterous coda concludes with a varied transition phrase (mm. 471-482), two measures of "A₂" (mm. 483-484), and finally achieves its completion on B-flat octave.

Sonata No. 9 in C Major, Op. 103

Three years and nineteen opus numbers elapsed between the completion of the Eighth and Ninth Sonatas. Opus 103 was Prokofieff's last completed piano composition, finished in the fall of 1947, a year and a half after it was started. Unlike the three previous monumental and complicated sonatas (Op. 82, 83, and 84), this work is characterized by simplicity, a lightness of style with son-like melodies, and introspective, intimate elements. It contains neither violent outbursts nor complicated technical effects. Nestyev states the following:

Many familiar techniques, such as tonal digressions, unexpected and deceptive cadences, and typically clear-cut rhythms, are employed here. At times one senses a relationship between this Sonata's musical material and that of the operas and ballets of the forties, such as War and Peace and Cinderella.¹¹

Although there are contrasting ingredients used here, the work is unified by its style and by the compositional device Prokofieff uses. Each of the codas of the first three movements introduces the initial theme of the following movement. The thematic link is continued by including in the coda of the last movement the main theme of the first

¹¹Nestyev, p. 395.

movement.

This sonata is in four movements. The first and third movements are predominantly lyrical, and the second and fourth fast and lively. Nestyev states that on hearing the main theme of the first movement, one is reminded of Andrei Bolkonsky's tender lyricism in War and Peace.

This initial theme has a refined harmonic texture with constantly moving chromatic inner voices. It is in C major, in $\frac{3}{2}$ time, and the phrases are generally four to six measures long. The first subject is stated in the first two phrases (mm. 1-10), and then the melody is repeated an octave higher with slight changes in the last two measures and with harmonic alterations in the other voices (mm. 10-19).

An episode passage in $\frac{4}{4}$ ensues containing gay, dance-like motives in its five phrases. Like the first subject, this section is also marked piano, but the mood is quite different. The first and third phrases are similar (mm. 20-23 and mm. 27-30), with the first three measures of the third phrase inverted. The fourth and fifth phrases prepare the way for the second subject emphasizing the F-sharps (mm. 31-40).

The lovely melody of the second subject appears to be in B minor with a sparse background of G octaves held under chords consisting of D and E (mm. 41-46). This combination appears to present two keys at once--B minor and G major. Altered insubstantially on

its second appearance, the melody now indicates an E minor tonality over C, in the same manner as the first statement (mm. 47-53). In its third occurrence the melody is again in B minor, however this time in the bass clef with a slightly diversified accompaniment coming to a cadence on a G chord (mm. 54-60).

The first two phrases of the coda, beginning at the *Poco meno mosso*, are based on material from the episode passage (mm. 61-68). The closing phrase of the exposition is extended and suddenly *forte*, but diminishes in its last measures on a first inversion G chord (mm. 69-76).

The development section is devoid of dramatic conflicts and modest in its development as compared to earlier sonatas. The first eleven measures elaborate on the first subject now in the key of G major (mm. 77-87). Measures 88-90 are very similar to measures 77-79, but then the material changes and resembles the closing of the episode passage (mm. 91-94). The second theme enters with the melody in A minor as the left hand plays continuous eighth notes based on F major (mm. 95-98). Unified in A-flat minor, the right hand again takes the theme as the left hand accompanies in a triplet rhythm (mm. 99-102). In its final statement now in E minor, this melody is disrupted by the entrance of the episode passage in the bass clef (mm. 103-106). The episode passage is continued in the treble with a triplet figure accompaniment (mm. 107-112). Beginning in measure 112, with a growing intensity, the bass states part of the first subject, a measure of epi-

sode material, and gradually climaxes on free triplet material (mm. 112-119). Returning to the middle register the right hand states the first theme in E minor (mm. 120-124).

Very beautifully the first theme begins the recapitulation, now back in C major, pianissimo, and over an ostinato, triplet rhythmic pattern of three alternating low C's (mm. 125-131). The key signature changes just before the final chord of this statement, and the first subject is then repeated in B major (mm. 134-144). Although the episode passage is varied it retains the B major key signature (mm. 144-155) until its final phrase (mm. 156-159). Recurring in E minor the second subject appears in the bass (mm. 160-165), then modulates to A minor for its final statement (mm. 166-169). Both of these statements have the bitonal relationships found in the exposition (here E-C and A-F respectively).

The coda is identical to the coda of the exposition (mm. 174-205), with the exception of keys and excluding the interruption of the main theme of the second movement (mm. 206-210). The additional Meno mosso phrase of this coda concludes the movement, resolving on a C major chord (mm. 211-216).

The Second Movement is a scherzo with an impetuous running "A" theme containing sharp rhythmic effects. The "A" theme is in binary form giving way to a soft, graceful, steady beat in its countertheme. A coda based on the "A" theme leads into a middle section which has a clear singing melody. The "B" theme is comprised of only two voices

and the melody predominates. The "A" theme returns slightly shortened but its "b" section is presented in its entirety. The coda introduces the main theme of the third movement with recollections of the "A" theme.

The Third Movement, *Andante tranquillo*, is in A-flat major and in binary form. A lovely song-like melody begins the movement. It is presented in three varied ways with the last statement modulating into C for the "B" theme. This theme is vivacious and full of life making a good contrast to the first theme. An episode passage precedes the return of two variations of the "A" theme. In its second appearance the "A" theme begins in A-flat and presents the "A" melody in yet another variation and the initial theme of the fourth movement.

The Finale, *Allegro con brio, ma non troppo presto*, is in the form of a rondo and in C major. Although it is not as exuberant or delightful as some of the previous rondo movements, it is the gayest movement of this sonata.

In this movement the "A" theme consists of two contrasting phrases, "a" and "b." The first phrase is forte and covers a wide range of dotted eighths and sixteenth notes (mm. 1-8). It is followed by a phrase with measures of soft, staccato chords and loud sixteenth runs (mm. 8-17). An episode passage follows which is similar to the second phrase, in that it also has soft staccato chords and one beat of sixteenth notes (mm. 18-23).

The "B" theme enters at the *Poco meno mosso* in two gay phrases similar to each other (mm. 25-39). A single statement of the "A" phrase returns (mm. 39-45) followed by eight slower measures which prepare for the Andantino "C" theme (mm. 46-53). This theme is much slower and quieter, creating a different mood entirely (mm. 54-75).

Varying from the usual rondo procedure, the "B" theme recapitulates for one uncomplete statement (mm. 76-79) before the return of the "A" theme. A phrase of "b" then enters (mm. 80-87) and leads into the "a" passage which is in the original key and tempo (mm. 88-94). An episode passage ensues (mm. 95-100) followed by the "B" theme. The "B" theme is presented in three statements as it was in the beginning (mm. 101-120).

The coda leads into a statement of the principal theme of the first movement over a continuous slow trill-like accompaniment (mm. 127-135). This recalls the more somber beginning mood of the sonata and serves to unite the sonata as a whole in the reflective, pianissimo closing phrases of this movement (mm. 136-145).

III

ASPECTS OF PROKOFIEFF'S PIANO STYLE

Style of the Sonatas in regard to Form

Certain techniques are common to most of Prokofieff's piano sonatas. At the same time, one discovers in studying the sonatas that each has its own flavor, mood, and is distinctly individual.

Although Prokofieff sought new effects in harmony and melody he did not experiment with form in his sonatas. He found the established forms sufficient:

In that field [i.e., instrumental or symphonic music] I am well content with the forms already perfected. I want nothing better, nothing more flexible or more complete, than the sonata form, which contains everything necessary to my structural purpose.¹

With two exceptions, the Sonatas are in three or four movements. The First and Third Sonatas are each only one movement long.

1. Opening Movements. All of the opening movements are in sonata-allegro form, the First and Third Sonatas beginning with introductions.

The exposition and development sections follow traditional patterns with very few irregularities. Prokofieff does introduce new episode material in the development of the Sixth Sonata (m. 253).

¹Quoted from an interview with Olin Downes on Feb. 4, 1930, in David Even, The Book of Modern Composers. (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), p. 143.

The composer uses portions of the first theme during the development of the Seventh Sonata (mm. 181-183) in the same key as the exposition (mm. 24-31). Although Beethoven, Schumann, and Brahms had each begun a development with such a repetition, Prokofieff introduces this repetition, twenty-six measures after the beginning of the development.²

Interesting irregularities occur in the approach to the recapitulation. A common feature of the traditional sonata was that in the development no theme would appear in its complete form or in the same key as in the exposition.³ Prokofieff introduces fragments of the first theme in its original key in the First, Third, and Ninth Sonatas. This desire to obscure the precise point of return is consistent with the modern tendency to conceal the seams of musical structure.

Another irregularity is the omission in the recapitulation of the first section of the first theme in the Third and Seventh Sonatas. (Of interest also is the return of the introduction material at the beginning of the recapitulation of the Second Sonata, fourth movement.)

Codas are used for all the sonatas but some of them are quite short. It seems that Prokofieff disliked drawn-out endings.

In each of the first two sonatas the coda is largely repetition of material from the exposition--from the exposition codetta in the

²Kinsey, p. 242.

³Kinsey, p. 243.

First Sonata and from the first theme in the Second Sonata. One of the most effective codas is in the Third Sonata where the composer uses an unimportant subsidiary idea from the second theme. The coda of the Ninth Sonata includes a quotation of the main theme of the following movement.

2. Middle Movements. In Prokofieff's piano sonatas the middle movements are consistently in ternary form. The Second Sonata has a Scherzo and Trio, the Sixth a March and Trio, and the Ninth a Scherzo and Trio. In the second movement of the Seventh Sonata a development replaces the usual contrasting material of the second part.

3. Finales. There are three rondos, two sonata-allegro movements, a sonata-rondo, and a hybrid form of the rondo, the "arch" (ABCBA).⁴ The three rondo movements are found in the Fourth, Eighth, and Ninth Sonatas. The Fourth has an unusually long rondo because of the return of the first theme of the first movement.

According to Kinsey, the Fifth Sonata is concluded with a sonata-rondo movement and the development is substituted for the usual third theme.⁵ The final movement of the Second Sonata is in sonata-allegro form, with a return of the second theme of the first movement entering in the development. Kinsey believes that the Seventh Sonata has the arch form.

4. Cyclical Relationship. Five of the sonatas use thematic

⁴Kinsey, p. 243.

⁵Kinsey, p. 243. See the discussion of this sonata in this paper, wherein this author considers the movement to be sonata form.

relationship between the movements. In these five sonatas, a theme from the first movement is brought back in the finale. The Sixth, Seventh, and Ninth Sonatas bring back the first theme, and the Second and Seventh bring back the second theme.⁶ The Sixth and Ninth Sonatas both conclude with the statement of the first theme from the first movement.

Certain rhythmic relationships may also be found. In the Second Sonata a three-note motive is used in the themes of the first three movements. A sixteenth-note figure is used in both themes of the first movement of the Fourth Sonata. In the Eighth Sonata the first theme of the first movement resembles the second theme of the second movement.⁷

Perhaps the most unusual variant of cyclic form is found in the Ninth Sonata, where each movement concludes with the first theme of the following movement. The finale concludes with the opening theme of the Sonata.

The use of cyclic devices may indicate a debt to the romantic composers of the 19th century who made extensive use of such devices.⁸

Evolution of style in the Piano Sonatas

In studying and considering style in Prokofieff's Piano Sonatas, one is impressed with the individuality of each separate sonata.

⁶Kinsey, p. 243.

⁷Kinsey, p. 245.

⁸Kinsey, p. 245.

1. The Early Sonatas. The initial versions of the First, Third, and Fourth Sonatas were all begun in 1907 and 1908. The First shows the influence of Rachmaninoff and Brahms. This tendency is also present in the Fourth, but chromaticism is the more predominant influence there. The Third represents a complete break in that it has clear textures and a tremendous vitality. The Second Sonata shows Prokofieff striving for his own style, with innovations in texture, harmony, rhythmic drive, and melodic distinction.⁹

2. Foreign Period. Prokofieff left Russia in May 1918 and did not return to live there until 1933. After much travel, including tours in the United States, he settled in Paris in October 1923. It is in this period that he composed many operas and ballets. Prokofieff's interest in the piano slackened; the Fifth Sonata is the only one written in this period. In comparison to the earlier sonatas this work is said to be cool, impersonal, lacking dynamism, and reflecting the Paris school of Stravinsky.¹⁰

Between the years 1928 and 1934 Prokofieff wrote several small pieces including two Sonatinas, Pastoral Sonatina, Things in Themselves, Landscape, and Thoughts.

The First and Second Sonatinas contrast strongly with the Sonatas. They show influence of the French neoclassical school in their cool mood and texture. Gone is the robust energy of the Sonatas. The harmony is freer and more dissonant, and the tonality is less obvious.¹¹

⁹Kinsey, p. 276.

¹⁰Kinsey, p. 278.

¹¹Kinsey, p. 273.

Nestyev remarks that these works lack Prokofieff's former dynamism:

It was difficult to recognize the old Prokofiev in any of these pieces. Rhythmic resilience and clarity of thought had vanished. Intense emotion and impulsive vigor had given way to dull, rational speculation, and rich tone color had faded into colorless outlines.¹²

Nestyev calls this the "crisis" period in Prokofieff's work:

He turned more and more frequently to his earlier compositions, revising them and fabricating new opus numbers in the form of arrangements and transcription.¹³

3. Soviet Period. After much longing for his homeland, Prokofieff returned to Moscow in November 1932. A surge of creative activity followed his resettlement in Russia. He wrote music for the theater, ballet, and films, as well as operas, symphonies, choral music, and chamber works, including the last four piano sonatas.

The Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Sonatas were all begun in 1939. The Sixth and Seventh Sonatas have very romantic slow movements. The opening and closing movements of the Sixth Sonata recall the vigor and power of Beethoven, while those of the Seventh are closer to twentieth century neoclassicism. The Eighth Sonata is a combination of gentle lyricism in the first movement, a saccharine prettiness in the second movement, and motorism in the third. The Ninth Sonata shows a quiet, introspective lyricism in the first movement, motorism in the second and fourth movements, and romanticism in the third movement.¹⁴

A notable feature of the last two Sonatas is the almost

¹²Nestyev, p. 231.

¹³Nestyev, p. 232.

¹⁴Kinsey, pp. 280-281.

complete absence of constructionist devices, a trend to simplicity and less sophistication. The melodies are simpler and less constructed than formerly, the complex relationships and the contrapuntal manipulation of themes are gone. The harmony is not as dissonant, and the tritone is not featured.¹⁵

Prokofieff's Contributions to the Piano Sonata

That Prokofieff's contribution to the field of piano music is valuable, there is no doubt. There are four main contributions.

Prokofieff pioneered the return of clarity in the piano sonata, in form, texture, and tonality. He demonstrated that modernity and complexity were not synonymous, and that the simpler materials of tonality could still be useful in the twentieth century.

By his rejection of the sounds and textures of romanticism and impressionism, Prokofieff revived the percussive piano style and developed the style mécanique.

Prokofieff was the first twentieth century composer to introduce sarcasm and grotesquerie to the piano sonatas, especially in the scherzo movements.

Prokofieff contributed many works which are very gratifying to perform and at the same time are palatable to a musically mature audience.¹⁶

¹⁵Kinsey, p. 281.

¹⁶Kinsey, p. 282.

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