

Sergei Prokofiev

Russian Composer

1891-1953

- Born in Sontsovka (now Krasne, Ukraine)
- Was an only child; mother a pianist; father a relatively wealthy agricultural engineer
- Showed unusual musical abilities from an early age; wrote an opera at age 9
- Known as a pianist and composer from age 11
- Entered St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1904 (studied with Glière, Rimsky-Korsakov, Lyadov, and Tcherepnin, who cultivated his interest in Scriabin, Debussy, and Strauss); viewed as eccentric and arrogant; found his education boring
- Made début as pianist in 1908; considered ultra-modern
- Graduated from St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1909 (in composition); continued at the academy concentrating on piano and conducting
- Father died in 1910, resulting in loss of financial support; started making a name for himself as a composer
- Went to London in 1914 (exposed to works by Stravinsky and first met Diaghilev of Ballets Russes)
- Went back to academy during WWI, studying organ
- 1917, finished opera on Dostoyevsky's *Gambler*
- Composed first symphony, the *Classical*, in 1917, inspired by Joseph Haydn
- Went to USA (San Francisco) in 1918 because of unrest in Russia; started out with great success
- His *Classical Symphony* greatly influenced a period of Neoclassicism in music
- *The Love for Three Oranges*, Chicago opera written in 1919, but not performed until 1921 (not well received); most of his opera compositions were fraught with bad luck
- Went to France in 1920, instead of Russia, after having financial problems in the US (did not want to appear a failure in his homeland); music better received there; reconnected with Stravinsky and Diaghilev; continued composing, working on some older unfinished works
- Moved to the Bavarian Alps with his mother in 1921 to concentrate on composing (working mostly on previously started opera *The Burning Angel*); Russia began accepting some of his later music
- Married Lina Llubera (a Spanish singer) in 1923 and moved back to Paris
- Received commissions from Diaghilev in 1927; started concert tours in Russia





- Slightly injured his hands in a car accident in 1929, temporarily stopping his touring
- Began reconciliation with Soviet Union in the early 1930s; including a commission for the score of a Russian film, *Lieutenant Kije*, and a request from the Kirov Theater in Leningrad for a ballet; resulted in *Romeo and Juliet* (one of his best known works today)
- Settled permanently back in Moscow in 1936; Russian government isolated composers from

outside influences through regulations by the "Composers' Union"

- Not greatly affected by the rules, he turned to music for children and wrote *Peter and the Wolf* (a symphonic fairy tale for orchestra and narrator) in 1936, among others
- *Romeo and Juliet*, a full-length ballet finally commissioned by the Bolshoi, and after much delay, premièred in 1938 in Czechoslovakia
- Had first heart attack in 1941, followed by others causing poor health; began work on his opera *War and Peace*
- Evacuated from Russia many times during WWII
- Marriage broke up due to another relationship and Lina being a "foreigner" (later arrested for espionage)
- Moved to an estate outside Moscow in 1944; wrote his most successful symphony (Fifth Symphony); suffered a concussion which greatly lessened his productivity
- Retired to the country in 1946
- At the end of WWII his music was seen as dangerous (a grave example of "formalism") to the Soviet people; his opera projects were cancelled
- His last performance was in 1952, the première of his Seventh Symphony
- Died in Moscow from a cerebral hemorrhage the same day as Stalin, March 5, 1953
- Buried in Novodevichy Cemetery in Moscow, Russia
- Types of musical compositions he wrote: orchestral suites, motion picture scores, symphonic fairy tales, ballets, chamber music, piano sonatas, piano quintets, operas, concertos, symphonies, etc.; his writing style was a mix of national and modern characteristics

