

# THE INNOVATION OF THE LATE BALLETS BY SERGEI PROKOFIEV

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## Summary

The creative life of Sergei Prokofiev has always been linked with ballet. His first contribution to the above genre, namely, music for the ballet *The Chout*, was written as early as in 1915, whereas the last (*The Tale of the Stone Flower*) – in 1950 towards the decline of his life. This timeline quite symbolically highlights the essential place of the genre in question within the context of Prokofiev's creative effort.

Owing to such a formal criterion as timeline, his ballets can relatively be divided into two distinct groups, referred to as *early* and *late*. However, the difference between these groups is marked not only (and not primarily) by the chronological factor alone, but also by such factors as the interpretation of the genre, aesthetics, implementation of the author's concept in music, including also the addressee, who has set very tangible tasks for the composer to solve. As to the latter, Prokofiev has always been noted for his very exact approach.

His early ballets were meant for the Russian seasons (*Ballets Russes*) of Sergei Diaghilev, in other words, for staging them in the West, while the three late ones were commissioned by the administration of the Kirov (the Mariinsky) theater in St. Petersburg and the Bolshoi theatre of Russia for staging them in the land of Soviets. The theme has provided Sergei Prokofiev with a substantial food for thought. This is what he writes: *Our audience gives preference to long ballets, lasting till late at night, whereas western public is in favour of shorter ones. [...] Such a discrepancy of views is predetermined by the fact that Russian audience places strong emphasis on the story-line and its development, while foreign spectators consider these elements to be of minor importance* [2: 187]. This holds to be true – for such late ballets as *Romeo and Juliet* (1936), the same as *Cinderella* (1944) and *The Tale of the Stone Flower* (1950) are extended performances, consisting of several acts and saturated with details of the plot, gradually showing up as the ballet performance proceeds. However, behind this external difference there is something else – quite a diverse concept of the ballet, making itself evident in the music as well.

As to the attitude towards Prokofiev's ballets, there is a certain stereotype. His early ballets are considered to be innovative and daring, which reflect the author's disposition towards mastering the unexplained. Here Prokofiev unambiguously focuses on the problems of music. The composer's innovative approach is primarily linked with the language of sounding material, whereas Prokofiev's late ballets are considered to be the implementation of his classical canons. They are also innovative, only in a different way, synthesizing, compared to the early ones. The three elements, among them music, story-line and visual theatricality rise to the

surface in inseparable uniformity and interaction. Prokofiev not in vain just before writing music for the ballet *Romeo and Juliet* in the middle of the 30s professed himself in both the field of music for the theatre – *Egyptian Nights* (1934) and the cinema. He possessed an irreputable talent of the director. An essential feature of Prokofiev's late ballets proves to be his ability to present an exquisite elaboration of music material. It means that the structure of the whole ballet performance had already been planned while on the level of notation. The bold nature and particular accuracy of the story-line in Prokofiev's late ballets manifest themselves so powerfully that any adapting of the music material to some other not so closely scenario-linked stage variant seems to be rather problematic. Nowadays, when many directors and producers are ready for the most diverse transpositions and curtailments as well as combining music from different sources, success may be rooted in a strict observing the musical direction, suggested by the composer. Any aspiration to employ Prokofiev's ballet music within the context of an inappropriate story-line is doomed to failure.

#### Literatūra

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