

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953) wrote his second violin concerto in 1935 for french violinist Robert Soëpens. It is an intimate and lyrical work which Prokofiev had originally intended to write as a violin sonata. Like many other Russian musicians, Prokofiev fled to the West after the Communist Revolution of 1917, and eventually settled down in Paris. In 1927, Prokofiev made the first of many return visits to Russia due to his homesickness. He eventually relocated back to Russia in 1936.

As Prokofiev moved back to Russia, his style evolved to become more lyrical and attractive to mass audience. Peter and the Wolf and the ballet Romeo and Juliet were among the first things he wrote when he was back.

Prokofiev died in 1953 from a stroke, in the same hour, day and year as Stalin. Sadly, there was not a single flower at his funeral as Stalin's funeral used every flower available.

THE MUSIC

The intimate, lyric nature of this concerto is evident from the first instant of the Allegro moderato where the solo violin all alone lays out the opening theme, all alone. This concerto veers between extremes - murmuring and mysterious one instance, and bright and full of vigour the next.

Pizzicato strings open the second movement, and the solo violin lays a sweet and beautiful melody on top of the accompaniment. This melody changes metres seamlessly between 12/8 and 4/4.

The mood shifts dramatically into a bright, exciting dance in the finale. Here, Prokofiev made use of percussion to enliven the music, particularly and castanets. With alternating measures of 7/4. 5/4. 2/2 and 3/2 with the basic pulse of 3/4, Prokofiev drives the concerto to an exciting and fiery close.