

## Piano Concerto No. 2

### Sergei Prokofiev

**Sergei Prokofiev** wrote his first composition aged five, following with an opera aged nine. He entered the St. Petersburg conservatory aged thirteen studying harmony and counterpoint with Liadov, orchestration with Rimsky-Korsakov and conducting with Tcherepnin. A phenomenal pianist he toured Western Europe and America conducting and playing his own works before settling **(in)** back in the USSR by 1936. The five piano concertos are extremely representative of his style; well crafted, harmonically advanced with an orchestration and musical language that is uniquely recognizable. As a body of work they fall between 1911 and 1932. Aside from having these hallmarks of distinction the one thing that performers agree on is the fiendishly difficult nature of not only the solo piano parts but also the accompanying orchestration. This second piano concerto from 1912 when he was just 21, much less famous than the third and much more difficult, ranks as one of the hardest to play in the entire repertoire. The opening movement contains little orchestral accompaniment and a vast rhapsodic cadenza written, at times, on three staves. The *perpetuum mobile* of the second movement continues with penetrating technical prowess leading a somewhat exhausted listener into a third movement that is marked by extraordinary orchestration and particularly by Prokofiev's penchant for making melody and rhythm simultaneously important in one part. The finale is a rip-roaring *tour de force* for piano and orchestra. Neither win the battle for supremacy. The infrequent occasions on which this piece is performed is testament to its perverse range of difficulties coupled with an unsuccessful box office. Today, live performances are cherished rarities.

*Zane Dalal*