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# Sergey Prokofiev (20th Century Composers)



## Synopsis

Because of the nature of Soviet society, Prokofiev's life has received little attention from biographers. This survey of his life and work contains several hitherto unpublished illustrations of him and much essential reference material.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A thoroughly researched and well-balanced appraisal of Prokofiev's life and works, beautifully presented in tandem with some fascinating and previously unavailable photographic illustrations. Jaffe handles the very difficult task of interweaving narrative and discussion of the works with commendable aplomb... Surely one of the best written books in Phaidon's series."-Classic CD "An extensive biography of one of the 20th century's foremost composers. Daniel Jaffe... has combined an intimate portrait outlining the life and social circle of Sergey Prokofiev with a full account of the political climate that shaped his career."-Bath Chronicle "Here is an excellent introduction to the life, character and music of a man Jaffe rightly describes as one of the best loved yet least known of all 20th century composers."-BBC Music Magazine "In the same series comes Daniel Jaffe's Sergey Prokofiev, concise but remarkably rich in detail about the life of this enigmatic Russian composer whose death was overshadowed by that of Stalin on the same day."-Birmingham Post "Jaffe [...] brings insight into how Prokofiev's life and work intertwined... Reliable... A clear introduction to the composer."-SCRSS [Society of co-operation of Russian & Soviet Studies] "Among modern

composer-biographies, Daniel Jaffe's Prokofiev stands out as exemplary."-The Independent Weekend Review On the 20th Century Composers Series "As a series, Phaidon's 20th Century Composers has brought remarkable variety and a welter of information, both necessary and delightfully trivial. Intended both for the general reader and for the more enthusiastically musical."-The Scotsman

Daniel Jaffe, a former reviews editor of BBC Music Magazine, is the author of the biography Sergey Prokofiev, and he has lectured and written extensively on Russian music and broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and on BBC Four.

I must admit that this is the first biography of Prokofiev that I have ever read. Jaffe must have been mindful of the book's length. I would guess that the good folks at Phaidon told him to 'keep it short.' As such, he moves rather quickly through the events of Prokofiev's life, with occasional commentary on important works and insight into Prokofiev's character and personality. With that in mind I would say that it is a great first Prokofiev bio to read. Having read it I would now like to read more of the details and the personal accounts of what happened. Jaffe writes with authority, I can tell he has really done his research!

Along with Rachmaninoff, Stravinsky and Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev is one of the 20th century's greatest Russian composers. His seven symphonies, works for piano and his ballets (most notably "Romeo and Juliet") are widely well known alongside his immortal children's classic "Peter and The Wolf". In this biography, part of Phaidon Press's 20th Century Composers series, author Daniel Jaffe not only digs deep into Prokofiev's creative genius but also gives detailed annotations on the composer's personal life and his surroundings in communist Russia. It is written in such a way that it's like getting to meet Prokofiev in a very personal manner. This book is definitely a must-read on one of Russia's greatest masterminds. It is very well-written and packed with detail as well as some great photos (one of which depicts Prokofiev at the piano surrounded by children as he was giving a first-reading of "Peter and The Wolf" in 1936). A Must for any Prokofiev fan!!

I bought this to help me write a report for school. I ended up enjoying the read a lot. A very good insight into a very under appreciated composer from a very dark era in history.

I find these reviews of composers lives and works very useful for getting a quick glance at information that helps the new-comer to the composer's works put in perspective. I also have the same series in the life and works of Sibelius. The illustrations are pertinent to the text--a good quick reference book for everyone and easy reading.

Prokofiev by Daniel Jaffe ©, Phaidon, London, 1998, 240 pp This is simply the best biography of Sergei Prokofiev that I know of. It is comprehensive and liberally illustrated. For better or for worse, there are no musical examples whatever in the text: those who read music find these helpful but, for those who do not, they simply take up space that could be better utilized with informative text. It's a book I have turned to repeatedly when I have prepared programmes of recorded music for listeners, to get biographical information about the composer, or details of the circumstances surrounding the composition of one of his works. There is a classified list of Prokofiev's works at the end, a select discography, which is still relevant a decade on, a short bibliography of further reading and a good, detailed index.

Prokofiev is, in my book, the very top of 20th century composers. That is why I jumped to read this book. Daniel Jaffe did a superb job. I also love Russian music and Prokofiev was a wild stem out of that tree of such great composers, from pre-revolution to the depths of that disastrous turn of history. His relationships with those others, his competition with Stravinsky and others in Paris, his explorations and discoveries in America were exciting and well told. His return to the Soviet Union underlines his deep love for Russia and attempt to express himself from that country's enigmatic soul. Jaffe reveals some things in the composer's life which have been expanded upon from later discoveries. One of these is Prokofiev's interest in Christian Science which was a great help in overcoming his discouragement in America and later in Paris and Russia. He wrote such great music. I lived in Russia for six years and never missed a concert, opera, or ballet. All my children and now their children have grown up with "Peter and the Wolf," and some critics say that his Fifth Symphony is the greatest of the 20th century. I would agree with that. His "Romeo and Juliet" ballet is my favorite. Jaffe's book is clearly one of the best at helping us explain this complicated and genius of a man for our times. The book itself, with its many great photos in the original 1998 Phaidon publication, is a quality keeper. Frederick R. Andresen, Author of "Walking on Ice, An American Businessman in Russia."

This is another solid entry in Phaidon's 20th Century Composers series -- heavy-stock paper and

great photos (including one of his first performance of "Peter and the Wolf" for a group of children) add to Jaffe's text. Jaffe offers the best answer I've found (searching through several books) to the question of why Prokofiev returned to Russia at the height of Stalin's terror. Apparently it was a combination of homesickness, vanity, political naivete, and aesthetic theory. The Soviet regime promised Prokofiev an exceptional privileged status, which appealed to his vanity -- he was overshadowed by Stravinsky in the West, where he never felt he was properly appreciated. And the turn to "social realism," forced on Soviet artists by Stalin, coincided with Prokofiev's voluntary turn away from modernism toward simplicity, melody, and populist narratives. I enjoy both the early and late Prokofiev, but I can see the point of those who claim that his later works are more accomplished. While his music is not on the cutting edge, and thus he was never a critics' darling, Prokofiev's music is marvelous. This is the best single book available at the moment for anyone who wants to know more about one of the greatest early 20th century composers!

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