

[PDF] Lina And Serge: The Love And Wars Of Lina Prokofiev

Simon Morrison - pdf download free book



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Description:

Q&A with Simon Morrison

Q. What special research did you do for Lina and Serge?

A. I worked for four years in archives in New York, London, Paris, and especially Moscow. The first part of the book, which concerns Lina Prokofiev's childhood and teenage years in New York City,

makes extensive use of materials preserved in Brooklyn, along with newspaper databases, ships manifests, and some of her own scattered recollections. I walked the neighborhoods where Lina lived in search of traces of her existence in and around her Brooklyn high school, No. 3, the oldest one continuously operating in the United States. In London, I consulted the recorded interviews and Lina's scattered attempts at an autobiography, which never got beyond her impressions of her distant relatives. The Prokofiev family gave me carte blanche to consult the letters, documents, and photographs in Paris (the homes of Svyatoslav and Serge Prokofiev Jr.). In Moscow I worked for a year in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, also the Russian State Archive of Social-Political History.

Q. How did you gain such intimate access to the letters and diaries?

A. In April 1955, two years after Serge Prokofiev's premature death from a stroke, his two sons and second wife Mira Mendelson arranged through diplomatic channels for a suitcase of documents to be transferred from New York City to Moscow. Prokofiev had left it there for safekeeping, on deposit at a bank, during his final tour abroad in 1938. Presumably he feared his personal papers falling into the hands of Soviet agents. A year later, the suitcase arrived in Moscow. Its contents were sealed in the vaults of the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, but uncataloged--accessible only to the composer's heirs. Much time passed. Lina Prokofiev was released from the gulag after eight years of imprisonment in 1956. Mira died in 1968; Prokofiev's younger son Oleg defected to the West in 1972; and his older son Svyatoslav accepted French citizenship in 2000, a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But still the archive remained sealed, *nikomu ne vidavat'*--not to be given out to anyone. I received exclusive access from Svyatoslav in 2008 after several years of work on behalf of the Prokofiev Estate, including a reconstruction of one of Prokofiev's ballets and the realization of the original happy ending version of the ballet *Romeo and Juliet*. It was something of Svyatoslav's dying wish that the true story of his mother be told in unvarnished guise, and so he entrusted me with her intimate letters. These tell the story of her turbulent early years with Serge and their fateful relocation to the Soviet Union in 1936. Sadly, Svyatoslav died before the book was finished. His son, Serge Prokofiev Jr., ensured that I retained my special access to the Moscow archive throughout the writing process, and allowed me to consult those materials about Lina's arrest and imprisonment that he discovered in his father's apartment.

Q. How did what you learn affect your thoughts about composer Sergei Prokofiev?

A. I learned that all of his love went into his music, and that his wife and children suffered terribly as a result of his self-absorption and belief that his talents were divine, God-given. His conviction that he operated above and apart from the concerns of the real world had terrible real-world consequences. I still hugely respect his genius, but what he allowed to happen to Lina was unconscionable. I can't get my head around it. I would insist that the book tells the story of sacrifice for art, except for the fact that Prokofiev's betrayal of his wife had a deleterious effect on his music. He was never quite the same composer again after he left her.

Q. What do you think Lina's legacy is?

A. Lina defined the 20th century in its most glorious and horrible aspects. Her modest successes on the operatic stage were no match for her astonishing performances in real life: long-suffering would-be bride, glamorous ingénue, and finally, tragic heroine of the Stalinist police state. She loved her husband despite his shocking betrayal of her in the worst of all places at the worst of all times: Stalinist Russia during the Purges. And that love manifested itself in her efforts to preserve his musical legacy after her release from the gulag. She did not think of herself as Prokofiev's muse, but she truly was. She inspired the opera *The Fiery Angel* and the ballet *Romeo and Juliet*. And then, at the end of her life, long after his death, she brought unknown Prokofiev scores to the world's

attention.

Photographs of Lina and Serge

Click on the images below to see the full-sized images.

Review "Powerful."

—*Wall Street Journal*

"The sort of reading experience one might expect from a novel of foreign intrigue."

—*SF Examiner*

"Morrison energetically and compellingly traces Lina's life from her childhood in Europe through her young adulthood in New York to her tempestuous marriage to the famed composer Serge Prokofiev, her time in the gulag, and her final years in the U.S...**Morrison's powerful portrait reveals a haunting story of one woman's tragedy and one man's flaws."**

—*Publishers Weekly*

"An authority on the life and works of Serge Prokofiev charts the sad biographical arc of his wife, Lina, who spent some devastating years in the Soviet gulag. Morrison, who had access to the family and significant archival collections, has produced a gripping story of a young woman's rise into the highest social and musical circles, her marriage to Prokofiev (whose principal affection was for his music, not his family), and their globe-trotting tours and swelling celebrity...**Research, compassion and outrage combine in a story both riveting and wrenching."**

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred)

"Simon Morrison has written a brilliant and riveting tale of love, intrigue, terror, and betrayal that forces us to confront the paradox of how great art can be made by unspeakably cruel and heartless individuals."

—**Leon Botstein, music director and conductor, American Symphony Orchestra, and president of Bard College**

"I knew my mother-in-law in the last fifteen years of her life and understood her as a person whose relationship with Prokofiev was the driving force of her life. She was someone who was unwilling to revisit the painful aspects of her past and yet longed for her story to be heard. This well-written and impeccably researched book is an authoritative and sensitive account of an extraordinary relationship."

—**Frances Prokofiev**

"In the hagiographic hall of fame that is the Russian artist's wife — Sophia Tolstoy, Anna Dostoevsky, Nadezhda Mandelstam, all muses who stood watch while their men created things of genius, and then who jealously guarded the legacy — Lina Prokofiev is odd woman out. **Her story almost cannot be believed, until Simon Morrison gained access to the documents (and the trust of the family) in** order to tell it. Biography does not get more important than this."

—Caryl Emerson, author of *Mikhail Bakhtin* and *The Life of Musorgsky*

"**An engrossing tale**, beautifully told on the basis of new material that illuminates Prokofiev's life as well as Lina's. An attractive young cosmopolitan singer lands her man, the famous composer, and ends up with him in Moscow — and then alone in the gulag. Simon Morrison has given us her story, including the parts that were too painful for her to remember."

—**Sheila Fitzpatrick, professor emerita of Soviet history, University of Chicago**

"In "Lina and Serge" Princeton musicologist Simon Morrison, best known for his biography, "The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years," **creates a fascinating portrait of the self-absorbed couple**. Lina's dramatic story, new to Western readers, reveals Prokofiev beyond his famously unsentimental exterior. Beginning with Lina's arrest, which had "shaken" Prokofiev, **Morrison maintains strong narrative tension, following the couple back to their cosmopolitan milieus before the ill-fated relocation.**" -- *Boston Globe*

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