

PROKOFIEV, OISTRAKH, AND THE FLUTE SONATA ARRANGED FOR VIOLIN

A CREATIVE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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Of the two violin sonatas that Sergey Prokofiev composed, the second, largely because of its unique history, holds a special appeal to violinists and audiences. This second violin sonata was originally composed as Flute Sonata in D Op. 94, completed and premiered in 1943. The following year this flute sonata was arranged as Violin Sonata No. 2, Op. 94a and premiered so successfully on June 17, 1944, with David Oistrakh on violin and Lev Oborin on piano, that it became better known than the original flute version.<sup>1</sup>

### **Historical Background of Prokofiev and the Sonata**

The second violin sonata contrasts many of Prokofiev's works, because of its different medium, compositional goals, and the life circumstances of the composer during which it was written. There is no reason to think that Prokofiev ever intended the flute sonata to be a violin sonata. His fascination with the flute and other woodwind instruments grew from impressive performances he heard beginning in Paris. Prokofiev recalled the "heavenly sound" of Georges Barrère.<sup>2</sup> He intended this sonata "to sound in bright and transparent classical tones," and to have a "classical, clear, transparent sonority."<sup>3</sup> When he was writing for the flute, he was striving to write lyrically, similar to his conscious efforts to incorporate lyricism into *Cinderella*, which he was working on at the same time. Prokofiev's overall mood was also better while he was writing the flute sonata than it was before and after World War II contributing to that sonata's light and lyric qualities.

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<sup>1</sup> Sergey Prokofiev, *Sonata, Op. 94, for Flute or Violin and Piano* (New York City: International Music Co., c1958), Foreword.

<sup>2</sup> Victor Seroff, *Sergei Prokofiev, a Soviet Tragedy* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), 259.

<sup>3</sup> Harlow Robinson, *Sergei Prokofiev* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002): 421; Claude Samuel, *Prokofiev* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1971), 141.

Though both violin sonatas were premiered in less than three years from each other, the first violin sonata was started as far back as 1938 – harsh years of the Stalin regime in the Soviet Union and unhappy years in Prokofiev’s marriage – but was premiered much later, on October 23, 1946. Prokofiev wrote the Flute Sonata in 1943, Violin Sonata No. 2 in 1944, and heard each premier during the years 1943-1944.

Many things were positive in his life and career during the years of 1941-1945, especially when compared to the years outside these years. Ironically, these great years for Prokofiev coincided with the Soviet involvement in WWII. While art was still controlled by the Committee of Artistic Affairs, it was certainly more relaxed during the war years when Stalin was more concerned about a war than art. Prokofiev found favor among bureaucrats, critics, and audiences since he had completed government commissions and was seen as more patriotic to his country, which he had left for Paris years earlier. His works were getting performed regularly in Moscow, and his music was seen more favorably by the public, press, and government. Within this span of four years, he completed the first version of *War and Peace*, *Cinderella*, the Fifth symphony, a string quartet, two piano sonatas, five film scores, pieces for orchestra, songs, other pieces for piano, and the flute sonata.<sup>4</sup> These pleasant, fruitful years (1941-1944) seem to have influenced the light mood of the second violin sonata.

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<sup>4</sup> Harlow Robinson, *Sergei Prokofiev* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 390.

### David Oistrakh

David Oistrakh, considered the “Emperor of the violin,” was well-received in the Soviet Union as well as the West. He was one of the few musicians the Soviet Union allowed to tour internationally before Stalin's death in 1953. He began his career participating in competitions, placing second at the 1935 Henryk Wieniawski Violin Competition and first at the Eugène Ysaÿe Violin Competition in 1937. In addition, he was awarded many Soviet honors including a Stalin Prize in 1943 and an Order of Lenin in 1946.<sup>5</sup> He was so popular among Western audiences that he was invited to play in West Berlin in 1954 (though authorities originally did not allow it), and tickets to see him at Carnegie Hall sold out within two hours in 1955.<sup>6</sup> Oistrakh was open to playing new music despite the oppressive government environment that would cause musicians to prefer playing safe, traditional music. This made him popular among Soviet composers including Prokofiev, Shostakovich, and Khachaturian, all of whom dedicated works to him.<sup>7</sup>

### Collaboration

Prokofiev and Oistrakh developed a close friendship, though one would never expect it from their first meeting. Oistrakh was just 18 when he first met Prokofiev. Prokofiev gave a concert of his own music in Odessa in 1926. Oistrakh was already familiar with the composer as he had learned Prokofiev's First Violin Concerto in preparation for his final examination. He played the Scherzo from the Violin Concerto in a manner that displeased Prokofiev. With such an inauspicious beginning, one would expect a hostile rather than a friendly relationship to

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<sup>5</sup> Kiril Tomoff, *Virtuosi Abroad* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2015), 116-117.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-121.

<sup>7</sup> Boris Schwarz, “Oistrakh, David,” *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press).

develop, but by the 1940's, Oistrakh was considered an accomplished soloist, and their relationship had changed.<sup>8</sup>

Oistrakh attended the premier of the flute sonata and requested Prokofiev to adapt it to violin. Prokofiev agreed and the two worked together on the project. Oistrakh made notes of places to change and gave multiple variations for Prokofiev to choose from.<sup>9</sup> The violin version is similar to the flute version with some exceptions. The violin version includes violin techniques foreign to flute playing such as pizzicato, double stops, chords, and harmonics. The piano part, however, was left unaltered. Because of this close collaboration on the sonata and on other projects, Oistrakh became known as an interpreter of Prokofiev and premiered both Violin Sonatas accompanied by Lev Oborin on piano.<sup>10</sup> Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No.2 was even dedicated to Oistrakh.

### Version Differences

Though the violin and flute sonata versions share many similarities, there are some differences in pitch choice, rhythms, and idiomatic techniques including double stops, harmonics, and pizzicato. Some differences are minor such as adding a double stop to provide a fuller sound, but more significant alterations were also made by Prokofiev and Oistrakh to create a sonata that was more characteristic of the violin.

One such difference comes as soon as the second measure (fig. 1). Other than the added grace note, the rhythm of beat two has been changed from sixteenths to eighth-note triplets.

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Hanson, *Prokofiev, the Prodigal Son* (London: Cassell, 1964), 137-138; Victor Seroff, *Sergei Prokofiev, a Soviet Tragedy* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), 144-145.

<sup>9</sup> Harlow Robinson, *Sergei Prokofiev* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 427.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

This was most likely done only to facilitate more natural bowing. With the change to triplets in the violin part, the whole-note D at measure 4 comes on an upbow, which sets up a downbow for the following phrase. This rhythmic change could have been avoided in two different ways. There are problems with each (fig. 1 Flute).

Fig. 1. Flute Sonata, Mvmt 1, m 1-5.

Moderato ♩ = 80

mf

I

SERGEI PROKOFIEV  
(1891-1953)

Fig. 1. Violin Sonata, Mvmt 1, m 1-5.

Moderato ♩ = 80

mf

I

SERGEI PROKOFIEV  
(1891-1953)

If the sixteenth-note figure was retained in the violin part (fig. 1 Violin), it could have been performed with the same *portato* articulation (slight separation of notes performed with bow moving in one direction) as the triplet figure Prokofiev originally chose. However, the only slight difference in eighth-note triplets versus sixteenth-notes is enough to make this articulation awkward, because at the requested tempo, the sixteenth-note figure with a *portato* marking would likely sound like a staccato articulation, which is not what the composer intended.

It would also have been possible to put a bow lift at the end of the phrase (the whole note on D), as the flute player would certainly need to breathe at this point. It seems that either Oistrakh or Prokofiev preferred the change in rhythm to a bow lift. If the bow lift is not performed, the next phrase would have to be played with a completely opposite bowing.

It is interesting that when this theme comes back in the development, sixteenths are now chosen instead of eighth-note triplets (fig. 2). Again, this is to facilitate natural bowing. As the dynamic is now marked forte at measure 52, a violinist will want to use as much bow as possible. This is the reason that beat 3 and the thirty-second-note triplets on the and-of-4 are now split in measure 54. The reason a downbow is preferred on the and-of-4 is that the sixteenth-note triplets in the following measure (55) go much better at the frog to get a strong sound. The additional upbow for the sixteenth-note triplets in measure 55 is to give plenty of bow to the half note on beat 3. The same is true for measure 63 (fig. 3). The sixteenths allow for a downbow at measure 65 and give room to use plenty of bow up to that point. Otherwise, a slur would have been required on the high Bb, reducing the amount of bow available for better tone. This would also take away from the sound of the dotted-half-note, as it is already a long note value at a forte dynamic. The final statement of this theme in measures 126-128 (fig. 4) uses the *portato* triplet to end on a downbow, as there is no note following that should be played with a downbow.

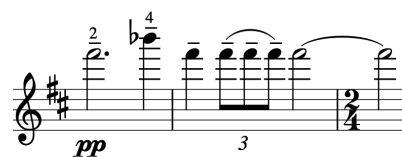
Fig. 2. Violin Sonata, Mvmt 1, m 52-55.



Fig. 3. Violin Sonata, Mvmt 1, m 62-65.



Fig. 4. Violin Sonata, Mvmt 1, m 126-128.



Many places in the sonata have been altered to make them more idiomatic to the instrument. The flute sonata's key of D major is already a key that is very friendly to the violin,

as all open strings are in the key. In fact, a list of added double stops with open strings is overwhelming. Figure 5 gives only a handful of examples.

Fig. 5. Mvmt 1, m 42-49.



Fig. 5. Mvmt 2, m 153-155.



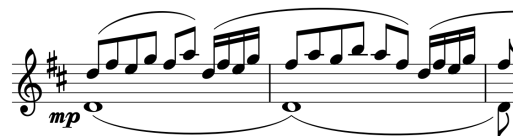
Fig. 5. Mvmt 2, m 177.



Fig. 5. Mvmt 4, m 124-125.



Fig. 5. Mvmt 4, m 145-146.



Open strings play an important role to help thicken the texture with double stops. There are also many spots where music was edited specifically to incorporate open strings, and thereby make the music more idiomatic to the violin.

Similar edits to incorporate open strings are more frequent in the second movement. For example, while measures 13 and 14 (fig. 6) do not have any note changes, open-E versus closed-E on the A string is specified in measure 13. Measure 14 uses left-hand pizzicato, which is very easy on an open string. Left-hand pizzicato on open A is used later in measure 41 (fig. 7).

Fig. 6. Mvmt 2, m 13-14.



Fig. 7. Mvmt 2, m 41.



The grace notes of measures 162 and 166 (fig. 8) were also changed to be rolled across three strings, including open A and D. Measure 174 was changed to be rolled across all four strings, and uses open D and G. Measures 175, 178-179 (fig. 9), and 190-194 (fig. 10) use natural harmonics, as opposed to artificial harmonics. In this way, they also depend on open strings. While measures 335-339 (fig. 13) do not use open strings, those notes were changed so that each one belongs on a different string. This section is idiomatic to the violin in the way that the bow is rolled across all 4 strings.

Fig. 8. Flute Sonata. Mvmt 2, m 162-163, 166-167.

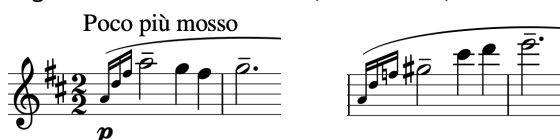


Fig. 8. Violin Sonata. Mvmt 2, m 162-163, 166-167.

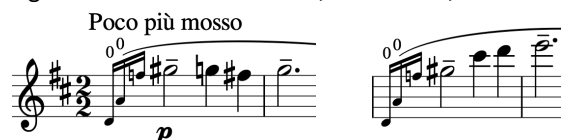


Fig. 9. Flute Sonata. Mvmt 2, m 174-175, 178-179.



Fig. 9. Violin Sonata. Mvmt 2, m 174-175, 178-179.

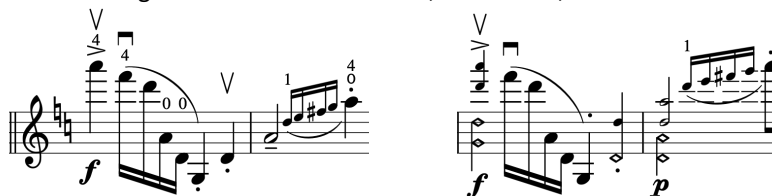


Fig. 10 Flute Sonata. Mvmt 2, m 335-339.



Fig. 10. Violin Sonata. Mvmt 2, m 335-339.



## Analysis

Prokofiev paid homage to the Classical composers by choosing sonata-allegro form, as well as incorporating Baroque and Classical harmony and counterpoint. The following analysis examines the first movement.

Prokofiev did indeed write lyrical and calming melodies for the flute in the primary and secondary themes. These melodies by themselves only fit into a handful of keys. Prokofiev uses the piano to reharmonize these melodies with quickly shifting key centers in ways that at times sound twentieth century, like in the transition, secondary theme, and closing themes. The primary theme, which opens the sonata, is an exception. The primary theme foreshadows the twentieth century nature of the sonata, while also incorporating elements of Classical and Baroque harmony and counterpoint.

The use of sonata-allegro form after the Classical Era is nothing new. One way composers such as Beethoven and his successors would reinterpret the form is by choosing different keys for the secondary theme than the traditional dominant in the exposition and tonic in the recapitulation. Though Prokofiev moves quickly through distant key areas, his use of sonata-form reflects a more Classical interpretation in his choice of keys for the secondary theme, closing theme, and coda. He uses the typical switch to the dominant key for the secondary theme as Classical composers do in the exposition and the traditional choice of tonic for the secondary theme in the recapitulation.

The violin melody in the primary theme (measures 1-8) is certainly elegant and lyrical, but the accompaniment on first glance may not look the same because of the number of accidentals in the piano part. However, these well-placed accidentals do in fact pay homage to

composers before him. The violin melody alone for the first 4 measures clearly expresses D minor. However, the major chord from scale degree 6, Bb, supplied by the accompaniment, is the harmony that sounds most like tonic in the first four bars. This is expressed through a Bb-major-7 harmony throughout the bar with a Bb whole note in the left hand, and no accidentals outside of Bb.

Fig. 11. Mvmt 1, m 1-5.

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for the violin, the middle for the piano right hand, and the bottom for the piano left hand. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 4/4. A tempo marking of quarter note = 80 is at the beginning. The piano part features a left hand with a sustained Bb whole note and a right hand with a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes and triplets. The violin part has a melodic line with triplets and a fermata in the final measure.

This Bb major is the relative major of G minor. Though this jump from D to Bb is justified through G minor, Prokofiev ends up on C major in bar 5. Even still, Prokofiev's movement from Bb to C is smooth, reminiscent of Bach. Other than the sporadic thirty-second-note triplets and repeated notes in measure 2 in the violin melody and piano right hand, bars 2-4 and the resolution to C on bar 5 is nothing Bach wouldn't do. Not only do these bars move smoothly to C by introducing naturals with Eb moving to E♮ and Bb/A# moving to B♮, Prokofiev has also included a Bach-like circle of fifths progression. In measure 3, beats 1 and 2 come across as A minor 7 given E-C-G in the right hand of the piano, and the encirclement around A in the left hand. This moves to D minor 7 on beat 3. Bb is still included in the following measure, but it is spelled as A#, indicating its function as a neighbor to B♮. The Am7 to Dm7 in the preceding bars sets up an expectation of G in a circle progression. The left hand satisfies this expectation on

the downbeat of measure 4. The A-minor-7, D-minor-7, and G chords share the common key of C, the final resolution of the circle and the beginning of the new phrase at bar 5.

Prokofiev has gone through D major, G minor, and Bb major, in just two bars, without clearly establishing a tonic. Though this is not Baroque writing, it is not a fair example of twentieth-century harmony either. Mozart and Schubert have both done similar things by resolving a dominant of a minor key directly to its relative major (see Appendix).

Prokofiev chose a Bb-major-7 chord which includes both a Bb-major triad and a D-minor triad. This chord expresses both the shift from D major to the parallel D minor and the sound of a new key area from Bb major. This parallel duality remains a key aspect of the movement and exists in the transition, secondary theme, and closing theme. In the transition, Prokofiev's skillful use of the augmented triad plays an important role in showcasing major/minor duality. Whereas the change from D (with F# as the major-third) to Bb in the beginning expresses the augmented triad through the roots, the key of D minor expresses the augmented triad through the dominant A-major flat-6 chord. Expressing the triad on F–A–C# changes the tonic of D from a major sound to a minor sound. This back-and-forth happens twice in the transition's opening two-bar phrase (fig. 12). The E major, F augmented, and A major over the D pedal are like impressionistic extensions to D major/minor piano part. The D-minor sound comes from a D ascending melodic minor on beat 3. The piano part emphasizes the change to D minor as it holds a D through the measure and has an E# at the start of beat 3. The second time is the same A-augmented triad on beat 3 of the second measure of the transition (measure 10), but now has an A in the bass. This expresses the dominant of D minor instead of the tonic as before. This A augmented triad resolves back to D major.

Fig. 12. Mvmt 1, m 9-12.

The secondary theme shares similarities to the primary theme (fig. 13). The violin melody alone is clearly in the key of A. The pickup and first beat establish A, but the piano obscures it on the following beat with a G octave. This G moves to a G# on the following beat, then to an F#. The F with the G# in the violin line make it sound like A minor. In fact, a C# is not expressed at all in the next measure (23), making the distinction between A minor and A major ambiguous. The end of the first four-bar phrase cadences on G# major. A major moving to G# major implies a progression to C# minor. This G# major functions as a half cadence. Instead of C# minor, the next phrase picks up on E major. This G# to E is the same major-third relationship between D and Bb in bars 1-2, and the same motion used by Mozart and Schubert (Appendix).

Fig. 13. Mvmt 1, m 21-25.

Measures 34 to 36 are very similar to measures 58-62 in the development (fig. 14), except that measures 58 and 60 include even more sharp 9s accompanying the same melody. This moves smoothly from G major/minor to G major in bar 58. At the same time the related bar 60 moves smoothly to G minor in bar 61. The minor with a major seventh sound comes clearly from the collection of Bb–D–F# in the measure.

Fig. 14. Mvmt 1, m 57-62.

The musical score for measures 57-62 is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 57 and 58. The second system contains measures 59, 60, and 61. The music is written for a piano, with a treble clef for the right hand and a bass clef for the left hand. The key signature is G major/minor (one sharp). The primary theme is in the treble clef, and the secondary theme is in the bass clef. Dynamics include *mf* and *cresc.* (crescendo). There are also markings for a 6th note and a 3rd note in the bass clef.

As the primary theme, transition, secondary theme, move between tonic major and minor, so does the closing theme (fig. 15). It starts in A major, a key that Mozart and Haydn would have chosen for the closing theme of a movement in D major. On beat 3, there is an accent written above the C♯, the third of A minor.

Fig. 15. Mvmt 1, m 38-41.

This major-third relation is included in the development. Prokofiev also seemed to consciously relate back to the first two bars of the primary theme in the development because he only writes three key signatures: D, Bb, and D. He moves to Bb through G minor in the measure 61 (fig. 14), and Bb transitions back to D in measures in 71 through a Bb augmented arpeggio on beat 4 with a C and F# in the bass (fig. 16 m 69-71). Measure 69 uses the closing theme double time in the violin part. The augmented triad is used at the climax of the transition (fig. 17 m 81-84). Classical composers often use an extended dominant to move to the recapitulation. What is interesting here is that while Prokofiev is expressing an augmented chord which functions as a dominant, he has chosen to write a D-augmented chord. Like the beginning the tonic functions as a dominant.

Fig. 16. Mvmt 1, m 69-71.

Fig. 17. Mvmt 1, m 81-82.

The musical score for Figure 17 consists of three staves. The top staff is for the violin, the middle for the right hand of the piano, and the bottom for the left hand. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The piece is marked with a forte dynamic (*ff*). The violin part features slurs and accents over eighth notes. The piano accompaniment includes triplets of eighth notes and octaves. The score shows measures 81 and 82.

## Conclusion

Though Prokofiev has blurred harmonies between major and minor and balanced moves to keys a major third away, he has clear melodies that signal the different sections of the sonata form. He has used the movement between major and minor in each section of the exposition and consequently the recapitulation. He incorporated elements from each section into the development, while keeping with the same theme of keys related by major thirds. In addition, he has written a movement, and sonata, that is distinctly Prokofiev sounding, while looking back towards the composers before him.

Prokofiev's Violin Sonata Op. 94 stands out in the repertoire as a piece for both violinists and flautists, with its unique background as a piece originally written for flute. It was also written at a high point in Prokofiev's career when he was looking to incorporate lyricism and elegance into his music. Its fascinating harmony, humor, and lyricism make it a delight for both audiences and performers.

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## Appendix

The following figures are examples of Mozart and Schubert resolving a dominant of a minor key directly to its relative major. In *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Mozart sets up F minor and moves to a half cadence on C (fig. 18).<sup>11</sup> This resolves to Ab. In *Gondelfahrer*, Schubert has set up A minor in measure 6 and its dominant E in the following measure (fig. 19).<sup>12</sup> This resolves back to C. This E to C is the same motion as the C to Ab in the beginning of the piece, though the movement from C to Ab in the beginning does not go through their shared key of F minor.

Fig. 18. Mozart, *Le Nozze di Figaro*. 11, Canzone (Reduction), m 33-37.

Fig. 19. Schubert, *Gondelfahrer*, m 1-9.

<sup>11</sup> Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Die Hochzeit des Figaro* (1941; repr., New York: Dover, 1979). 129-130.

<sup>12</sup> Franz Schubert. *Lieder und Gesänge*, ed. Eusebius Mandyczewski (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1895), 22.