

From Russia, with Verve

Summer Festivals Paid Homage to Prokofiev and His World

The prolific life and turbulent times of Sergey Prokofiev provided the theme for this year's Bard SummerScape and Bard Music Festival, which took place on campus in July and August.

Highlights were many. *Romeo & Juliet, on Motifs of Shakespeare*, the resurrection of Prokofiev's ballet in its intended form—which featured choreography by Mark Morris, performed by the Mark Morris Dance Group—was an event of culturally historical significance. Much painstaking research and inspired collaboration went into the realization of this lost masterpiece, and SummerScape's audience was amply rewarded with a performance that had “a distinctly bracing quality,” according to the *Washington Post*.

Another high point was a double bill of sumptuous stage works by Karol Szymanowski, a Polish contemporary of Prokofiev. With Leon Botstein conducting the American Symphony Orchestra and two choruses, Szymanowski's opera *King Roger (The Shepherd)* and his pastoral dance *Harnasie* were exemplary reminders of one of the summer festival's prime directives—to rediscover engaging and challenging works that have been overlooked or forgotten. “I expect many ears pricked up for a score that I am not alone in believing on par with the Stravinsky, Ravel, and Prokofiev ballets,” said Mark Swed in the *Los Angeles Times*.

Also enlivening the SummerScape boards were an affecting *Uncle Vanya*, starring Peter Dinklage in the title role, and a frothy revival of 1931's still relevant satiric musical comedy, *Of Thee I Sing*. The annual film festival celebrated Prokofiev's powerful collaborations with Sergei Eisenstein, *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible*, Parts I and II, along with Depression-era musicals and comedies, and the Spiegeltent was packed to the canopies four nights a week with riotous cabaret and circus acts and the New Albion new music festival.

The difficult juggling between artistic imperatives and political realities that distinguished the musical careers of Prokofiev and his Russian contemporaries was well illuminated by the 19th Bard Music Festival, directed by Botstein, Robert Martin, and Christopher H. Gibbs, with Simon Morrison serving as this year's scholar in residence. Among the many memorable concerts were performances of two Prokofiev symphonies, No. 1 in D Major and No. 3 in C Minor; his denounced and suppressed *Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution*; and his children's classic *Peter and the Wolf*, charmingly narrated by Michael York. Great works by other Russian, European, and American composers were also heard, as were rarities by Joseph Achron, John Alden Carpenter, Samuil Feinberg, and other unjustly neglected figures.

A third weekend of programs, which contrasts Prokofiev's time in the United States with his return to Russia and his subsequent contretemps with Soviet censors, takes place on October 24 and 25.



Uncle Vanya



Of Thee I Sing



King Roger (The Shepherd)



Harnasio



Romeo & Juliet, on Motifs of Shakespeare



Epitaph (Mandelstam), Dina Kuznetsova, soprano