

# Love Scores: Oslo Philharmonic and Vasily Petrenko to release Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet on the LAWO label

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Following their successful first release of Scriabin's Symphonies Nos. 3 and 4, praised by *The Sunday Times* as 'brilliantly played', the Oslo Philharmonic under Chief Conductor Vasily Petrenko will release its anticipated second recording on the LAWO label in late September 2016. The upcoming disc will comprise of Prokofiev's scintillating score for his ballet *Romeo and Juliet*, recorded in its entirety - which is a first for the orchestra as well as its conductor. The Oslo Philharmonic recorded Suites Nos. 1 and 2 under Mariss Jansons in 1989, but never the complete ballet up until this point.

Prokofiev's imaginative orchestration has made the ballet *Romeo and Juliet* world-famous, primarily through the orchestral suites as opposed to the ballet as a whole. Unmistakably a child of the Rimsky-Korsakov school of orchestration, Prokofiev's orchestra arsenal for the ballet includes tenor saxophone, four mandolins, cornet, celesta, organ, piano and a number of percussion instruments. The richness in orchestration allowed for unique timbres that the composer could employ in the musical illustration of one of the world's most iconic and love stories. The complexities and drama of Shakespeare were nearly matched by the circumstances around the first production of the ballet.

Prokofiev was originally commissioned to compose for a project at the Mariinsky Theatre in 1934; however the project was abandoned after producer Sergei Radlov fell out of favour with the theatre due to a change of directorship. Following this, Prokofiev entered a new agreement; this time with the Bolshoi Theatre. He composed the music in 1935-36, however his return to the Soviet Union after many years spent abroad – with freedom to explore musical expression beyond custom – proved difficult. Prokofiev, along with Shostakovich and a myriad of other artists, found themselves having to balance musical innovation with loyalty to the political leadership. The Bolshoi premiere of *Romeo and Juliet* was in fact postponed, with the official reasons given were that the ballet was too 'difficult' and its music 'impossible to dance to', however it is believed that there were other underlying reasons of a more politically complicated nature. The ballet finally saw its premiere in Brno, Czechoslovakia, in 1938, with a revised version being performed at the Mariinsky Theatre – renamed Kirov Theatre – in 1940. It is this version of *Romeo and Juliet* that has become one of the twentieth century's most performed and recorded ballets.

While Russian music has been integral to the Oslo Philharmonic's recording and performance schedule in the three years that Vasily Petrenko has been at the helm, it has held an important position in the orchestra repertoire dating back to its recordings with Jansons in the 1980s and 1990s. The exploration of this vast musical catalogue is set to continue in the orchestra's future projects with Petrenko, whose tenure as Chief Conductor was recently renewed until the 2019-20 season – which encompasses the orchestra's 100th anniversary. The Oslo Philharmonic's creative partnership with the LAWO label will also continue to grow. In the pipeline already is the next instalment of the orchestra's complete Scriabin symphony cycle, the first being the 2015 recording of Symphonies Nos. 3 and 4, which will be the composer's Symphony No. 1 with Alisa Kolosova and Maksim Aksenov as soloists. Furthermore, the 2016-17 season will see the start of another significant series of recordings this time featuring the major works of Richard Strauss which will include *Ein Heldenleben* and *Also Sprach Zarathustra*.

The large-scale projects undertaken by the Oslo Philharmonic in the 2016-17 season typify the orchestra's ambition and purpose. The season opens with a Beethoven Festival where all nine symphonies will be performed across five concerts, presented between 31 August and 11 September. Later on in the season, in March 2017, the orchestra and its Chief Conductor embark on a tour of Asia including concerts in Hong Kong and Taipei.

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