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# Prokofiev's reception in Western Popular music



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In terms of the sheer number of quotations of Serge Prokofiev's themes in Western popular music, be it pop, rock, or any other genre, references to his oeuvre are clearly outnumbered by those to, say, Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Grieg or Dvořák – all landmarks of mainstream classical concert repertoire. However, if we compare Prokofiev to other twentieth-century composers, only Rakhmaninov and Shostakovich come anywhere close. So what makes Prokofiev's music so attractive? The obvious answers would be because his music is a milestone of the concert-goers' favourite repertoire; because it is accessible, melodic, predominantly tonal, cheerful, upbeat, easily memorable, pictorial, associative, and by virtue of all these, easily adjustable to the popular music structures.

In order to address the numerous ways Prokofiev's music has been referenced in Western popular music, let me first outline the various ways in which classical pieces can be adopted and adapted by popular music artists.

1. Works from the classical repertoire can be performed in non-classical ways. The examples are very diverse and include Barbara Streisand's recordings of lieder and arias by Handel, Schumann, Fauré, Debussy, Orff and others,<sup>1</sup> where some of the songs are performed in their original setting and the only "non-classical" feature is the fact that they are sung by a non-trained singer, while other songs have been given smooth orchestral arrangements, in the manner of so-called "easy listening" music. The Swingle Singers' numerous recordings of classical "hits" in vocal (scat) arrangements, with or without instrumental accompaniment, also belong here.

2. A segment from an instrumental classical piece can be extracted (with its melodic and harmonic content intact), given added lyrics, and used as a verse or chorus (or both) of a given song. At the same time, some parts of the same classical piece can be used in the instrumental interludes of the new song. For example, the song "They" by Jem<sup>2</sup> is based on J. S. Bach's Prelude No 12 in F minor from the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book II: not only is the chorus of the song based on the prelude, but the other parts of the song arrangement also refer to various segments of Bach's piece. However, Jem does not quote the original keyboard version of the prelude, but its vocalised version

recorded by the aforementioned Swingle Singers.<sup>3</sup> Another example, but slightly different, is "Piano and I" by Alicia Keys.<sup>4</sup> The song begins with a quotation from the first movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 27 No. 2: the singer starts to recite while still playing Beethoven's piece on the piano, and then different layers of the arrangement are piled atop it. Thus the quotation of Beethoven's movement provides a basis for the entire song.

3. A characteristic chord progression can be borrowed from a classical piece, and then the entire song, or its parts, built around the quotation (either modified or unmodified). For example, the chorus of Barry Manilow's song "Could It Be Magic"<sup>5</sup> is based on a chord progression from Chopin's Prelude in C minor Op. 28 No. 20 (Example 1); Manilow's singing in the last verse fades into a straight performance of the last few bars of the Prelude.

Example 1: Chord progression from Chopin's Prelude in C minor Op. 28 No. 20, upon which Manilow's "Could It Be Magic" is based



4. A sample from a classical piece can feature anywhere in the arrangement of a pop / rock song. For example, the instrumental introduction to the song "Spanish Caravan" by The Doors<sup>6</sup> is based on the beginning of Isaac Albeniz's *Asturias*.

5. Two (or more) classical pieces, or a classical and a jazz piece, can be merged: for example, the psychedelic rock band Big Brother and the Holding Company (with Janis Joplin as the lead singer) incorporated a short sample of the main theme from J. S. Bach's Fugue No. 2 in C minor from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* Book I into their cover of "Summertime" from George Gershwin's opera *Porgy and Bess*. The quotation has been transposed to G minor and rhythmically modified, and can be heard at the beginning of the electric guitar solo, which serves as an instrumental interlude between the song's verses.<sup>7</sup>

Example 2a: Beginning of J. S. Bach's Fugue No. 2 in C minor



Example 2b: Beginning of the guitar solo from George Gershwin's song "Summertime", arranged and recorded by Big Brother and the Holding Company with Janis Joplin.

Transcribed by I. Medic



6. The entire classical music piece – even a long, cyclic one – can be "covered" by a pop-rock artist, but extensively reworked and / or improvised on. A well known example is Emerson, Lake and Palmer's version of Musorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.<sup>8</sup> In their version, some of Musorgsky's movements are given a new, sympho-rock arrangement ("Promenade", "The Gnome"), others, such as "The Hut of Baba Yaga" are reworked to the point of being barely recognisable, while some have been given lyrics – for example "The Great Gates of Kiev". Finally, the band replaced several movements from the suite with their own.

7. Sometimes the jazz / rock improvisations can be loosely based on, or inspired by, a classical piece – but without obvious connections between the two works. A good example is

"Beck's Bolero" by rock guitarist Jeff Beck,<sup>9</sup> which was allegedly inspired by Maurice Ravel's eponymous composition; however, the only musical link between Ravel's and Beck's pieces is the bolero rhythm.

When it comes to Prokofiev, his works have been approached by pop, rock and jazz musicians in various ways, with more or less ambition, creativity and success. The majority have opted for Prokofiev's most popular works, such as *Lieutenant Kijé*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Peter and the Wolf*, while a few have ventured into reworking more challenging pieces. The discussion that follows, though well researched, is by no means exhaustive; it should however give us a fairly good insight into the ways popular music artists have referenced Prokofiev.<sup>10</sup>

The earliest example known to me, the instrumental "Midnight Sleighride" recorded in 1952 by the Sauter-Finegan Orchestra,<sup>11</sup> is actually a conveniently renamed "Troika" from the *Lieutenant Kijé* Suite, rearranged for a jazz ensemble. Eddie Sauter and Bill Finegan were proficient arrangers who led a 21-piece band, whose members each contributed on three or four instruments, sometimes quite non-standard. "Midnight Sleighride" called for horse's hooves as an introduction and backing, and Finegan achieved this sound by beating his chest before the microphone.<sup>12</sup> The title "Midnight Sleighride" has become so widely accepted that most jazz musicians and audiences nowadays believe it to be Prokofiev's actual title.

A more recent jazz version of "Troika" is Sammy Nestico's arrangement for full jazz ensemble – "Kiji Takes a Ride!"<sup>13</sup> Unlike the previous example, which called for some unusual instrumental effects, "Kiji Takes a Ride" is a straightforward big band number with elaborate virtuosic solo sections, penned by Count Basie's former chief arranger; it was nominated for the Best Instrumental Arrangement at the 2002 Grammy Awards. Both these examples fall into my first category – non-classical versions of a classical piece.

The psychedelic rock band The Free Design quoted "Troika" in their song "Kijé's Ouija", released in 1970.<sup>14</sup> The quotation of "Troika" acts as the song's verse, and the lyrics added to it are quite bizarre: *There was a gentleman from way up north / and Kijé was his name, / and he got strange answers from a magic board / 'cause Ouija was his game*. This procedure falls into my second category, when a segment from an instrumental classical piece is given lyrics and used as a verse or chorus of a new song.

The progressive rock trio Emerson, Lake and Palmer, a.k.a. ELP, frequently turned to Prokofiev as a source of inspiration.<sup>15</sup> Keith Emerson has explained their preference for Prokofiev in these terms: "From the very beginning of ELP, Carl Palmer encouraged me in the direction of Bartók and Prokofiev... even Panufnik. It may have been because of the percussive element. [...] The meeting point for Carl and I was indeed the percussive element..."<sup>16</sup>

Emerson's first band The Nice incorporated "Troika" into their cover of the Dave Brubeck Quartet's song "Blue Rondo à la Turk" (inspired by, though not based on, the final movement of Mozart's Piano Sonata No. 11, K 331). While Brubeck's song is in 9/8 time signature, The Nice version, entitled "Rondo", is in 4/4. (Later, "Rondo" became a part of ELP's repertoire.) The Nice performed this piece in various arrangements, and the most famous version was recorded in a concert with the orchestra of the Newcastle Arts Festival conducted by Joseph Eger, at London's Fairfield Halls in 1969.<sup>17</sup> This is an example of the "merge" procedure, number five in my categorisation – although The Nice's merge is far from a smooth one: in fact, the orchestra "attempts" to perform Prokofiev's movement in the original setting, but it is "interrupted" several times by The Nice's rendition of Brubeck's "Rondo", with improvisational segments which include a sample of Bach's fugue from the Toccata and Fugue in D minor; and only near the end of the

performance do "Troika" and "Rondo" finally merge.

The same "Troika" theme was used in another ELP song, "I Believe In Father Christmas" (discussed below). Although the song was originally released as a solo single for Greg Lake in 1975, both Emerson and Palmer took part in the recording sessions. The song was re-released in 1977 on ELP's album *The Works Part II* (in a slightly different arrangement) and on several compilations, most notably in 1995 on the band's Christmas EP. When re-released on the Christmas EP, "I Believe In Father Christmas" was coupled with the band's synthesiser-and-rhythm-machine-laden rendition of the entire "Troika" movement.<sup>18</sup>

In 1970, the same year that The Free Design quoted "Troika", the American jazz-rock band Blood, Sweat and Tears incorporated "Romance", the second movement of the *Lieutenant Kijé* Suite, into the arrangement of their song "40,000 Headmen"<sup>19</sup> - a cover of the song originally performed by the English rock band, Traffic. The song contains four quotations, two of them from classical pieces (Bela Bartók's "Ballad" from *Hungarian Peasant Songs* and Prokofiev's "Romance" from *Lieutenant Kijé*) and two jazz numbers (Thelonius Monk's "I Mean You" and Fred Lewis' "Étude For Lew And Zoloff").<sup>20</sup> The song begins with an instrumental introduction based on the Bartók quotation, but as soon as the verse begins, the singing is accompanied by the "Romance" melody performed by a solo flute, which is also used as a filler between two verses. The lyrics sung above the "Troika" quote are no less intriguing than in the case of "Kijé's Ouija": *Forty thousand headmen couldn't make me change my mind / If I had to make the choice between the deafman and the blind / I know just where my feet should go and that's enough for me / I turned around and knocked them down and walked across the sea.*

Example 3: Blood, Sweat and Tears, "40,000 Headmen": voice and "Troika" theme on flute. Transcribed by I. Medic

The image shows a musical score for the song "40,000 Headmen" by Blood, Sweat and Tears. It features two staves: Flute (FL) and Tenor (T). The tempo is marked "Slow". The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are written below the tenor staff. The score includes measures 4 through 7, with measure numbers 4, 6, and 7 indicated on the flute staff. The lyrics are: "For - ty thou - sand head - men could not make me change my mind — If I had to make a choice be - tween the deaf man and the blind I know just where my feet should go and that's e - nough for me".

The quotations of Monk and Lewis feature in the instrumental interlude in the middle section of the song, however "Romance" is heard again in the final instrumental section of the song, only this time scored for brass and rhythm section (and followed by the Bartók quote, which rounds off the song). This is another example of the merge procedure. As for the reasons for including Prokofiev's "Romance" (which does not feature in Traffic's original recording), I should point out that, at the time of releasing this record, the band had only just returned from a tour of Eastern Europe, sponsored by the United States Department of State.<sup>21</sup> It is likely that the inclusion of Bartók and Prokofiev quotes was at least partially

inspired by the band's visit to the countries on the other side of the Iron Curtain (although Blood, Sweat and Tears were already known for including classical quotes in their arrangements).

The British singer and occasional actor Sting also included Prokofiev's "Romance" in the arrangement of his anti-Cold War song "Russians".<sup>22</sup> Sting used the main melody in the instrumental interludes of his song; but Prokofiev's theme also provides the harmonic base for the verses. So, this song belongs both to my fourth category (a quotation of a classical piece is incorporated into the arrangement), and the third category (because parts of the song are built around a characteristic chord progression borrowed from "Romance"). Sting's lyrics are rather pretentious and cheesy, whining about "Oppenheimer's deadly toy" and the "political fence", with the oft-repeated catchphrase "I hope the Russians love their children too"; and the accompanying black and white video clip is filled with imagery commonly associated with the Soviet Union, including a rhythmic gymnast and the ubiquitous snow. It is easy to presume that Sting selected "Romance" as an emblematic Russian / Soviet tune.

The aforementioned Emerson, Lake and Palmer's official releases contain two more "covers" of Prokofiev, both of them belonging to my first category - non-classical interpretations of classical works. In 1977, ELP recorded the entire second movement of Prokofiev's *Scythian Suite*, "The Enemy God Dances With The Black Spirits" for their double album *The Works: Part I*. The album was divided into four major sections, with three "solo sides" (each highlighting one of the band members) and one "collective side". The Prokofiev movement appears in the drummer Carl Palmer's solo side,<sup>23</sup> as a vehicle for Palmer to explore the "percussive element" that was of utmost importance to him.

In 1992, after a hiatus of almost fifteen years, Emerson, Lake and Palmer reunited to record the album *Black Moon*. This time they arranged Prokofiev's "The Dance of the Knights" aka "Montagues and Capulets" from *Romeo and Juliet* Orchestral Suite No. 2 (in the ELP version, the number is renamed "Romeo and Juliet").<sup>24</sup> This album is not considered their best work: the glory days of progressive rock were long gone, and the band's interpretation of "The Dance of the Knights" is rather uninventive, dominated by the intrusive sound of synthesizers.<sup>25</sup>

"Montagues and Capulets" inspired a truly bizarre example of rock music: the song "Only Ash Remains" by the German tech death metal band Necrophagist.<sup>26</sup> The song exemplifies this extreme genre, with heavily distorted guitars, deep growling vocals, multiple tempo changes and morbid lyrics: *A demon passed on from one to the next / Infiltrates a mind innocent and pure; / Being prey to the blackest of demons, / Paralyzed they fail. / Fallen beneath the mark of dignity, they fail. / Only ash remains.* The Prokofiev quotation features at the very end of the song, as an appropriately menacing instrumental "outro" performed on the distorted electric guitar, thus putting this song into my fourth category.

An artist who has devoted a great deal of time and effort to reworking Prokofiev and other classics is the acclaimed Japanese composer of electronic music Isao Tomita.<sup>27</sup> His 1979 album *The Bermuda Triangle*<sup>28</sup> is dedicated mostly to arrangements of Prokofiev, intertwined with Tomita's own compositions, Sibelius' "Valse Triste", and music from science-fiction movies. Tomita goes beyond the usually referenced Prokofiev's works: apart from sharing his affinity for the *Scythian Suite* and *Romeo and Juliet* with ELP, he also tackles Prokofiev's symphonies and even the First Violin Concerto. Tomita turns Prokofiev's movements into ambient, space-y electronic music, interspersed with unusual (at least for the year 1979) sound effects. Tomita also gives kooky, lengthy titles to his arrange-

ments. Below is the list of Prokofiev-based tracks from this album, with Tomita's titles and their true sources:

2. "Strong Electromagnetic Waves"  
(*Romeo And Juliet* Suite No. 2, "Montagues And Capulets")
4. "The Giant Pyramid Sitting at the Bottom of the Sea of Bermuda and the Ancient People"  
(*Scythian Suite*, "The Adoration Of Veles And Ala")
6. "The Children Playing in Agharta, the Deep Underground Kingdom"  
(Symphony No. 5, 2<sup>nd</sup> movement – Allegro marcato; attached to it is John Williams' theme from Steven Spielberg's movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*)
8. "The Song of Venus"  
(Violin Concerto No. 1, 1<sup>st</sup> movement – Andantino)
9. "The Dawn at Bermuda"  
(Symphony No. 6, 1<sup>st</sup> movement – Allegro moderato)
11. "The Dazzling Bright Cylindrical Object Which Had Crashed Into Tunguska, Siberia"  
(Symphony No. 6, 1<sup>st</sup> movement – Allegro moderato)
12. "The Harp Being Played by the Ancient People and the Venus and Her Space Children Singing the Song of the Future" (Violin Concerto No. 1, 3<sup>rd</sup> movement – Moderato)
13. "The Visionary Flight to the 1448 Nebular Group of the Bootes" (merges three pieces: Tomita, "Departure Of The UFO"; Prokofiev, "The Adoration Of Veles and Ala" and Sibelius, "Valse Triste").

Aside from the two tracks where Prokofiev's movements are merged with other composers' works (tracks 6 and 13), all other arrangements of Prokofiev's movements belong to my first category – non-classical interpretations of classical pieces.

Other artists who have recorded Prokofiev's music using solely electronic instruments are Jeffrey Reid Baker, whose extensive discography contains an amusing but accurate "translation" for synthesiser of the "March" from *Love for Three Oranges*, recorded in 1989,<sup>29</sup> and Hans Wurman, whose 1969 album *The Moog Strikes Bach...* contains a transcription of the Prelude Op. 12 No. 7 for Moog synthesiser.<sup>30</sup> Both these transcriptions also belong to my first category.

An interesting example of reworking an entire Prokofiev work is the CD *Quartetski Does Prokofiev – Visions Fugitives Op. 22*<sup>31</sup> by Canadian free jazz ensemble Quartetski. According to the musicians themselves, the quartet was formed "with the goal of rethinking and reinterpreting works by great composers of the twentieth century within an improvised context. While staying true to the spirit of the selected composers, Quartetski uses their works as vehicles to discover new musical horizons, creating in the process a mosaic that is equal parts homage and exploration."<sup>32</sup> In their recording of *Visions Fugitives*, the original 20 numbers have been reduced to 18, reordered and, in some cases, renamed.<sup>33</sup> The band's double-bassist and arranger Pierre-Yves Martel greatly expands Prokofiev's short pieces, especially by including elaborate solo parts for saxophone and trumpet. For example, Prokofiev's fifth movement "Molto giocoso" (No. 4 on Quartetski's album) starts off as a cheeky jazzy number, with Prokofiev's original movement arranged almost note for note, but then slides into a slow ambient section which gradually develops and culminates in improvisational frenzy.

Another Canadian artist who has referenced Prokofiev's *Visions Fugitives*, albeit in a completely different manner, is the singer and pianist Kara Keith and her band Your Dignity, who recently released an indie-rock album entitled *Vision's Fugitives*. Not only is the album's title inspired by Prokofiev, but the eponymous track,<sup>34</sup> according to the artist herself, is based on a chord progression from the first movement of Op. 22.<sup>35</sup> Besides, Prokofiev's style is evoked by the fierce, *barbaro* chords on piano, which feature prominently in the arrange-

ment. This is an example of my third category, when a song is based on a chord progression from a classical piece.

But the work most frequently recorded by pop, rock and jazz artists is *Peter and the Wolf* – which should not surprise us, considering that, according to Michael Biel, this is "one of the most, if not the most, often recorded classical work."<sup>36</sup> Biel, the world's authority on the various recordings of *Peter and the Wolf* has collected hundreds of recordings of Prokofiev's work; when it comes to popular music genres, according to Biel:

"Big Band jazz fans can find versions by Benny Goodman, Freddy Martin, Guy Lombardo, Shep Fields, Les Brown, John Scott Trotter, Jimmy Smith, the Clyde Valley Stompers, and Pee Wee Erwin. Rock fans can look for versions by the Ventures, Harpers Bizarre, Zero G, and multiple language releases with an all-star band including Phil Collins, Gary Moore, Robin Lumley, Jack Lancaster, and Stephane Grappelli. Those interested in unusual instrumentation can find Dave Van Ronk with his Kazoo-O-Phonic Jug Band, Bono with a mandolin, banjo, accordion and percussion, a broadcast parody by Spike Jones and His City Slickers, and Wendy Carlos and her synthesizer "The LSI Philharmonic".<sup>37</sup>

Biel has also collected various recordings in which the popular music singers, be they chanteurs such as Charles Aznavour and Jacques Brel or rock stars such as David Bowie, Sting and Bono, narrate the story, as well as numerous parodies. Speaking of parodies, Biel praises the one recorded by "Weird Al" Yankovic (the American singer who has achieved mainstream chart success with his humorous songs that parody specific songs by various pop and rock acts) and Wendy Carlos.<sup>38</sup> While Prokofiev's music is rearranged for Carlos' electronic "symphonic orchestra" and Yankovic's accordion, the story is retold in a humorous way – Peter catches the wolf with dental floss, thus allowing Yankovic to dwell upon the importance of oral hygiene.

A different example is supplied by the American pop-rock band from the 1960s Harpers Bizarre, who have only borrowed Peter's theme and used it as a basis for a new song, conveniently titled "Peter and the Wolf".<sup>39</sup> Not only does the song begin with Peter's theme played by the oboe, but its choruses are also entirely based on this melody, which is attributed psychedelic lyrics, courtesy of Ron Elliot: *Hey Barry bear with me / Carry cause I'm feeling free and / Nothing can stop me from dreaming / And why can't we be friends / Try and catch me if you can / And please understand me I'm singing*. While this song belongs to my second category, an example of the sixth category – an extensive reworking of the entire cycle – is provided by the above mentioned all-star band assembled by Jack Lancaster and Robin Lumley, who turned *Peter and the Wolf* into a progressive rock conceptual album.<sup>40</sup> The instruments have been "recast": the Cat is portrayed by Stephane Grappelli's violin, the Duck is Gary Moore's guitar, the Wolf is played by Brian Eno on synthesiser, etc. In a true prog rock manner, the authors have replaced, renamed, rearranged and reworked Prokofiev's movements, as well as added some new ones. Among the newly added numbers one finds a "Threnody for a Duck" and even a "Rock'n'Roll Celebration".<sup>41</sup>

Let us now focus on the song "I Believe in Father Christmas" by Emerson, Lake and Palmer, as a good example of the creative and efficient use of a classical quotation in a pop arrangement. Greg Lake's songwriting was influenced by English folk music and the Anglican Church musical tradition: most of his songs are modal, hymn-like and solemn. Although "I Believe in Father Christmas" is often categorised as a Christmas song, Lake and his collaborator Peter Sinfield actually wrote it in protest at the commercialisation of Christmas. The song was

released in November 1975, becoming the Christmas number two in the UK charts.<sup>42</sup>

It is small wonder that the decision was made to incorporate Prokofiev's famous theme into the arrangement of "I Believe in Father Christmas", because "Troika" has been endlessly (ab)used in films to accompany Christmas scenes and scenes involving snow; besides, "Troika" features frequently on popular compilations of Winter classics, Christmas classics, etc. – all of these possibly influenced by the already mentioned popular version entitled "Midnight Sleighride". Since the original Soviet film (based on Iurii Tynianov's novella *Lieutenant Kijé* and directed by Alexander Faintsimmer in 1934) had all but disappeared in the West after a few screenings in the late 1930s,<sup>43</sup> it is almost certain that neither Greg Lake nor his collaborators knew about *Troika's* original function in the film. As it were, "Troika" is very much Prokofiev's *La donna e mobile*, a song about women's frivolity: *A woman's heart is like an inn: / All those who wish go in. / And they who roam about, / Day and night go in and out.* In the film, "Troika" accompanies a scene in Siberia, where the clumsy lover and the fortress commandant get drunk. As they set off for a wild ride, they sing the song aloud. Eventually the fortress commandant trips over and falls off the sleigh, but the court officer only notices that his companion has disappeared when the troika finally stops.

Since the scene takes place in "snowy" Siberia (but without actual snow), this "justifies" the incorporation of "Troika" into the said compilations of winter-related music; and the fact that Prokofiev was able to write a catchy tune surely contributed to its imminent and everlasting popularity. Still, when Lake incorporated "Troika" in the arrangement of his (anti-)Christmas song, he was not familiar with its original humorous, frivolous note, but only with its link to winter festivities. What is surprising here is that Lake did not just copy and paste the tune in its original orchestration (with harp, tambourine, bells and triangle) to evoke instantly the Christmas atmosphere. Quite the opposite, he used it to convey exoticism, to evoke the land of Jesus Christ's birth. Indeed, the video for the song was shot in Israel, featuring some real Bedouins.<sup>44</sup> The lyrics of the song and its visual presentation do not exactly match: whereas Lake sings about rain, and "the peal of a bell and a Christmas Tree smell", the video clip shows scenes shot in the desert: the Sun, the sand, the Bedouins, and the camels.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike most progressive rock songs, this one has a conventional verse-chorus structure, and the very simplicity of form puts an emphasis on the arrangement. The *Troika* theme is played on a solo trumpet while bells and tambourines play a soft counterpart. The quotation is stripped of all the "wrong notes" from Prokofiev's quirky harmonisation because here, the "Troika" melody is assigned the role of conveying exoticism. Since Lake's original music for the song's verse and chorus is in a Mixolydian mode in D, which successfully evokes the Anglican tradition, the bright diatonic D major of the "Troika" theme indeed sounds different, exotic, Other! And, when performed on a quasi-oriental wind instrument and accompanied with pictures of camels and the bright desert Sun, it successfully evokes the land of Christ's birth. The melody has also been rhythmically modified, with the addition of syncopation which makes the rhythm a bit more arabesque than the original. The arrangement also features a choir in the background, singing on a neutral syllable. The second verse, chorus and interlude do not introduce new material, however the rise in dramatic intensity is achieved by the addition of bass and overdubbing of the voice. In the second interlude, the "Troika" melody is counterparted by a solo on the acoustic guitar.

The third verse and chorus are the most dramatic ones. From an acoustic folkish ditty the song turns into a fully orchestrated aria, and the lyrics become increasingly critical

and satirical. As for the visual presentation, all we can see is Lake's face in the darkness, and with the words *Hallelujah! Noel! Be it Heaven or Hell / The Christmas you get you deserve*, the singer's face is seen through flames, obviously suggesting Hell's fires (the word Hell emphasised by a reverb effect).

From here the song proceeds into a coda, in which the "Troika" theme is again re-coded: this time, instead of conveying exoticism, it becomes a signifier of war. The theme is now scored for a full symphonic orchestra, accompanied by a choir singing on a neutral syllable, and here we discover the reason for the rhythmical modification of the quotation mentioned previously – the punctuated rhythm is now revealed as that of a military march. The video at this point morphs into shots of the Vietnam War, the images of rocket barrages, air strikes and mobile artillery, and finally a soldier hugging a child. The song was recorded when the Vietnam War was entering its concluding phase, and the contrast of the peaceful Christmas evoked by the lyrics and the idyllic footage of the desert with the images of war could hardly be harsher. Hence, far from being just a decoration or a nice "filler" melody, the "Troika" theme performs two different functions in the arrangement of the song, at first introduced as a sign of exoticism, and then reorchestrated (much in the manner of Socialist Realist bombastic kitsch) and re-coded as a signifier of war.

If one of the main aspirations of progressive rock musicians was to boost the artistic credibility of rock music, in this case the goal has been accomplished. Although ELP were frequently accused of being pretentious and magniloquent, in this case a successful mix of a well-known classical theme, Greg Lake's solemn melody and a creative and efficient arrangement has been achieved – resulting in a peculiar Christmas-season favourite, a best seller which was paradoxically supposed to protest against the very commercialisation of the Yuletide festivities.

As we have seen, Prokofiev's works have been referenced by the most diverse pop, rock and jazz acts, from the Sauter-Finegan orchestra to Necrophagist, and in a variety of ways, ranging from simple borrowings of well-known melodies to elaborate cycles which utilise Prokofiev's works as a departure point for improvisation. The reasons for turning to Prokofiev can only be speculated upon, unless stated by the artists themselves; while some of them (for example Quartetski, ELP or Tomita) were obviously paying tributes to the composer who had inspired them and influenced their work, others (such as Sting or Blood, Sweat and Tears) were simply looking for a melody which could fit into the mood of their songs and evoke "Russianness". Prokofiev's works have also served as *tour de force* for arrangers, who have turned them into technically demanding pieces meant to showcase both their proficiency as arrangers, and the instrumental virtuosity of the performers whom they collaborated with. As for the electronic renditions of Prokofiev's pieces, while nowadays some of those decades-old recordings sound painfully dated, they surely sounded fresh and interesting when they were first released; and Prokofiev's works offered a stimulus for pioneers such as Tomita, Wendy Carlos, Hans Wurman and Brian Eno to explore the possibilities of electronic instruments.

By borrowing Prokofiev's most popular works, pop, rock or jazz artists have catered for audiences who might have found the "Troika" tune vaguely familiar, although they could not exactly remember where they first heard it or who the author was. Thus, in a way, all these borrowings and arrangements might perform an educational role too, as they might have introduced Prokofiev to listeners who otherwise would not have heard of the composer. And if Bill Finegan's "horse hooves", Tomita's science-fiction music and "Weird Al" Yankovic's paean to dental floss have inspired someone to discover and explore Prokofiev's oeuvre, we can only rejoice in the fact.

- <sup>1</sup> Barbra Streisand, *Classical Barbra* (Sony Masterworks SK 33452).
- <sup>2</sup> Jem, *Finally Woken* (Ato Records ATO0016), track 1.
- <sup>3</sup> The Swingle Singers with Pierre Michelot, Andre Arpino and Gus Wallez, *Jazz Sebastian Bach* (Decca/Philips DEC 3145425522), track 4.
- <sup>4</sup> Alicia Keys, *Songs in A Minor* (J Records 74321 96962 2), track 1.
- <sup>5</sup> Barry Manilow, *Ultimate Manilow* (Arista BVCM 31128), track 3.
- <sup>6</sup> The Doors, *Waiting for the Sun* (Electra / Asylum Records 974 024-2), track 7.
- <sup>7</sup> Big Brother and The Holding Company, *Cheap Thrills* (Columbia CD 32004), track 3.
- <sup>8</sup> Emerson, Lake and Palmer, *Pictures at an Exhibition* (Sanctuary Midline SMBDC375). Live recording of a 1971 performance.
- <sup>9</sup> Jeff Beck, *Truth* (EMI Records 7243 8 73749 2 8), track 8.
- <sup>10</sup> The majority of examples, especially the most recent ones, I have tracked down myself. However I have also used several printed sources, the most extensive and useful of which is a discography compiled by Janell R. Duxbury and published in three volumes: Duxbury, Janell R., *Rockin' the Classics and Classicizin' the Rock – A Selectively Annotated Discography* (New York/Westport/London: Greenwood Press, 1985); first supplement (New York/Westport/London: Greenwood Press, 1991); second supplement (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2001). Another useful source is Bernward Halbscheffel's PhD thesis *Rockmusik und klassisch-romantische Bildungstradition* (Berlin: Freien Universität, 2000), available online at [http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS\\_thesis\\_00000000224](http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS_thesis_00000000224).
- <sup>11</sup> Sauter-Finegan Orchestra, *Inside The Sound* (Jasmine Records JASCD 459), disc 1, track 5.
- <sup>12</sup> In this clip, Finegan's explanation how he did it is followed by a live performance of the piece: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mExpGyauWGC>, accessed 28 August 2009.
- <sup>13</sup> Sammy Nestico, *This is the Moment* (SN.CD-1), track 3. The full score was published in 2002: Sergei Prokofiev / Sammy Nestico, *Kiji Takes a Ride*, (Carlsbad, CA: Fenwood Music Inc, 2002).
- <sup>14</sup> The Free Design, *Stars / Time / Bubbles / Love* (Light In The Attic LITA 007), track 3.
- <sup>15</sup> Keith Emerson (keyboards), Greg Lake (guitars, bass and vocals) and Carl Palmer (drums and percussion) incorporated elements of hard rock, jazz / fusion, classical music, Anglican church hymnody and English folk music. The trademark sound of ELP was dominated by the Hammond organ and Moog synthesiser played by the flamboyant Keith Emerson, a classically trained pianist, who is referred to by rock critics as "the Hendrix of the organ": see Dodd, Philip, *The Book of Rock* (London: Pavilion Books, 2001), 154.
- <sup>16</sup> See <http://www.keithemerson.com/AskEmo/AskEmo.html#LtKije>, accessed 28 August 2009.
- <sup>17</sup> The Nice, *Here Come The Nice – The Immediate Anthology* (Castle Music CMETD 055), disc 3, track 13.
- <sup>18</sup> Emerson, Lake and Palmer, *I Believe In Father Christmas* (Rhino Records R2 72242). Tracklisting: 1. "I Believe in Father Christmas" (from Lake's solo single); 2. "Troika" (from Emerson's 1995 Christmas album); 3. "Humbug" (from Lake's solo single); 4. "I Believe In Father Christmas" (from *The Works: Part II*); 5. "Nutrocker" (from *Pictures at an Exhibition*).
- <sup>19</sup> Blood, Sweat and Tears, *3* (Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab 2013), track 10.
- <sup>20</sup> Bernward Halbscheffel mentions this song among his examples; however he does not state exactly which Prokofiev movement is quoted, and he does not take note of all the quotations that feature in this arrangement. Halbscheffel, *Rockmusik*, 75.
- <sup>21</sup> About the events surrounding this tour see: [http://www.vh1.com/artists/az/blood\\_sweat\\_and\\_tears/bio.jhtml](http://www.vh1.com/artists/az/blood_sweat_and_tears/bio.jhtml), accessed 10 September 2009.
- <sup>22</sup> Sting, *The Dream of the Blue Turtles* (A&M Records 393 750-2), track 3.
- <sup>23</sup> Emerson, Lake and Palmer, *Works: Part I* (Atlantic 781 409-2), disc 2, track 1.
- <sup>24</sup> Emerson, Lake & Palmer, *Black Moon* (Victory Music 828 318-2), track 4.
- <sup>25</sup> Another progressive rock band, Deep Purple, have often used "Montagues and Capulets" as the intro tune for their live concerts; however, as far as I am aware, none of these performances have been released on commercial recordings.
- <sup>26</sup> Necrophagist, *Epitaph* (Relapse Records RR 6828-2), track 6.
- <sup>27</sup> A very good online source for Tomita is <http://www.isaotomita.net/> accessed 28 August 2009.
- <sup>28</sup> Isao Tomita, *The Bermuda Triangle* (Isao Tomita, RCA R32C-1044).
- <sup>29</sup> Jeffrey Reid Baker, *Everyone's Favorite Synthesizer Pieces* (Newport Classics NCD-60114), track 24.
- <sup>30</sup> *The Moog Strikes Bach... to Say Nothing of Chopin, Mozart, Rachmaninoff, Paganini and Prokofieff* (RCA SB 6831), track A4.
- <sup>31</sup> Quartetski, *Quartetski Does Prokofiev – Visions Fugitives Op. 22* (Ambiances Magnetiques AM 171), tracks 1-18.
- <sup>32</sup> Quoted from Quartetski's MySpace page: <http://www.myspace.com/quartetski>, accessed 10 September 2009.
- <sup>33</sup> In Quartetski's version, the movements are ordered as follows: 1. Lentamente, 2. Andante, 3. Animato, 4. Molto giocoso, 5. Allegretto I, 6. Con eleganza, 7. Commodo, 8. Allegretto tranquillo, 9. Ridicolosamente, 10. Con vivacità, 11. Assai moderato, 12. Feroce, 13. Inquieto, 14. Dolente, 15. Presto agitatissimo e molto accentuato, 16. Con una dolce lentezza, 17. Allegretto II, 18. Lento irrealmente.
- <sup>34</sup> Kara Keith and Your Dignity, *Vision's Fugitives* (P 2009 Kara Keith), track 2.
- <sup>35</sup> From the author's email correspondence with Kara Keith, dated 24 September 2009. According to Ms Keith, she had originally written the song without consciously thinking of referencing Prokofiev, and then accidentally discovered that the chord progression from her song was exactly the same as the opening passage of Op. 22.
- <sup>36</sup> Biel, Michael, "Recordings of Peter and the Wolf", *Three Oranges*, No. 12 (2006), 23-28.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 24.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 28. "Weird Al" Yankovic and Wendy Carlos, *Peter & the Wolf / Carnival of the Animals* (CBS DIDC 070458), tracks 1 and 2 (The title is spelled *Peter & The Wolf* on the cover, but *Peter and the Wolf* everywhere else.)
- <sup>39</sup> Harpers Bizarre, *Feelin' Groovy* (Sundazed Records SC 6176), track 8.
- <sup>40</sup> Various Artists (ed. Jack Lancaster and Robin Lumley), *The Rock – Peter and the Wolf* (Verdant Records #V3).
- <sup>41</sup> Full track list: 1. Introduction; 2. Peter's Theme; 3. Bird and Peter; 4. Duck Theme; 5. Pond; 6. Duck and Bird; 7. Cat Dance; 8. Cat and Bird; 9. Grandfather; 10. Cat; 11. Wolf; 12. Wolf and Duck; 13. Threnody for a Duck; 14. Wolf Stalks; 15. Cat in Tree; 16. Peter's Chase; 17. Capture of Wolf; 18. Hunters; 19. Rock and Roll Celebration; 20. Duck Escape; 21. Peter is a Hero (Final Theme).
- <sup>42</sup> The B side of the original single is an instrumental track called "Humbug", another satirical reflection on Christmas with its obvious reference to Charles Dickens.
- <sup>43</sup> The film's first recent public screening took place at the London Barbican Centre on 8 May 2004, as part of a season celebrating Prokofiev's contribution to cinema.
- <sup>44</sup> In 1970s, the pre-MTV era, video clips were quite simple: pop/rock artists usually used the footage of their live performances or TV appearances as promotional videos; hence the purposefully filmed clips with some artistic aspirations – such as the one shot for "I Believe in Father Christmas" – were a rarity.
- <sup>45</sup> The video clip has recently been rereleased on the DVD *Emerson, Lake & Palmer – Beyond The Beginning*, Sanctuary Visual Entertainment SNTU88418DVD. It is also available on Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqOfXumI18A>, accessed 10 September 2009.