

Prokofiev - Scythian Suite • Suite from 'The Steel Dance' • Alexander Nevsky (2008)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Ala i Lolli Suite, Op. 20, "Scythian Suite": I. The Adoration of Veless and Ala*
2. *Ala i Lolli Suite, Op. 20, "Scythian Suite": II. The Enemy God and the dance of the Spirit of Darkness*
Neeme Jarvi 3:11 [play](#)
3. *Ala i Lolli Suite, Op. 20, "Scythian Suite": III. Night* Neeme Jarvi 5:24
4. *Ala i Lolli Suite, Op. 20, "Scythian Suite": IV. The glorious departure of Lolly and the Sun's procession*
Neeme Jarvi 5:14
5. *The Steel Step Suite, Op. 41bis: I. Entry of the People* Neeme Jarvi 2:21
6. *The Steel Step Suite, Op. 41bis: II. The Officials* Neeme Jarvi 4:43
7. *The Steel Step Suite, Op. 41bis: III. The Sailor and the Factory-worker* Neeme Jarvi 3:13
8. *The Steel Step Suite, Op. 41bis: IV. The Factory* Neeme Jarvi 3:03
9. *Alexander Nevsky, Op. 78: I. Russia under the Mongolian Yoke* Linda Finnie 3:03
10. *Alexander Nevsky, Op. 78: II. Song about Alexander Nevsky* Linda Finnie 3:36
11. *Alexander Nevsky, Op. 78: III. The Crusaders in Pskov* Linda Finnie 7:23
12. *Alexander Nevsky, Op. 78: IV. Arise, ye Russian People* Linda Finnie 2:17 [play](#)
13. *Alexander Nevsky, Op. 78: V. The Battle on Ice* Linda Finnie 13:14
14. *Alexander Nevsky, Op. 78: VI. The Field of the Dead* Linda Finnie 5:58
15. *Alexander Nevsky, Op. 78: VII. Alexander's Entry into Pskov* Linda Finnie 4:30

Linda Finnie contralto
Scottish National Orchestra & Chorus
Neeme Järvi - conductor

This desirable re-release is from Neeme Järvi's highly praised Prokofiev cycle recorded by Chandos in the 1980s. The symphonies from this series were all excellent, and the miscellaneous orchestral items that acted as fillers were also of high quality. The first thing to strike one is the typical in-house sound that was a hallmark of Chandos from this period, and

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indeed still is in some venues. It doesn't suit everyone, but the mixture of a lively, resonant acoustic with a rather bright, front-end balance does, I think, work well in this type of music. I did tame the treble a tad, but the climactic passages are really tremendous, viscerally exciting but with bags of detail.

The same thing could be said of the readings. Järvi tended in this series towards fast tempos, and for the most part this approach pays off. The Scythian Suite has a nervous edge that is thrilling. In places I miss the sheer weight of tone and savage splendour of Gergiev's Kirov account on Philips, especially in the second movement, the famous 'Enemy God and Dance of the Black Spirits', but he pays more attention to the tender moments than Gergiev, as in the lovely wind passages of movement 3, entitled 'Night' – around one minute in. All told, it's a very convincing reading, with the Scottish National playing their socks off and only losing out to more famous rivals in exposed high string passages.

The 'Steel Dance' of 1927 is a bit of a rarity and well worth having. As with Scythian Suite, this was also originally a Diaghilev ballet commission that ended up as a concert suite, and being subtitled 'A Ballet of Construction', one can pretty well guess that it suited Prokofiev's style from this period. The depiction of factory life and the mechanised age is brilliantly brought to life in orchestral language that balances brutality and atmosphere with consummate skill. Yes, there is an air of pompous propaganda in places, but it's impossible not to be swept along by the rhythmic vitality and wit of it all, especially in Järvi's finely gauged and superbly played account.

Alexander Nevsky is the main work here, and the one with most serious rivals. It's a good rendition, very well played and sung with an edge of rawness from the chorus that is quite fitting. Linda Finnie's contribution is first rate, and my only concern is that when set alongside the very finest accounts, of which my own favourite is Previn with LSO forces and Anna Reynolds on an EMI twofer, the last degree of excitement is missing. Others may disagree, and I have to admit to being swept away by Järvi's spectacular rendition of Battle on the Ice, but then this works in just about every version I've heard. The Chandos recording really does help here, with a bite and vividness that is thrilling. There is definitely a bitter chill to Järvi's Russian winter here, and anyone buying this disc is very unlikely to be disappointed. Indeed, with such intelligent couplings, a budget price tag and with well over 70 minutes, it stands out even in a crowded field. -- *Tony Haywood, MusicWeb International*

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