Structural, dramatic and stylistic relationships in Prokofiev's Sonatas no. 7 and no. 8

Prokofiev's compositional output during the years 1939-1944 was exceptional in both quantity and quality. The War Years spawned many of Prokofiev's greatest works, including the trilogy of the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Piano Sonatas, known as the "War Sonatas." Focusing on the Seventh and Eighth Sonatas allows for a comparison of these, the most closely related of the three. Written almost simultaneously, the Seventh and Eighth Sonatas share an intricate unity although their contrasting elements are many. Prokofiev's versatility and genius in the use of motivic and cyclic elements links the movements of each sonata, and, ultimately, the two sonatas. Because of the motivic nature, which can be quite subtle, a Schoenbergian "Grundgestalt" method of analysis is used. Not solely a unifying device, the motives and their manipulation also create the drama of these highly charged works. Consequently, performance can be enlightened and enhanced through a detailed motivic study of both sonatas. Chapter One explores the historical context of the War Sonatas and an overview of Prokofiev's piano works, focusing on the nine Piano Sonatas. In Chapter Two, the structural relationships, motivic material, and stylistic differences of Sonata No. Seven and Sonata No. Eight are summarized. The introductory theme of the Seventh Sonata, its "Grundgestalt," contains all of the other themes in essence. Chapter Three examines how the drama of the sonatas influences their structure and the use of their motives. The Seventh Sonata is subjected to formal, tonal, and motivic analysis. Chapter Four continues the process with a full analysis of all three movements of Sonata No. Eight. In conclusion, these ideas are brought together in an overview of performance practice in the Seventh and Eighth Sonatas.
Prokofiev was born in Sontsovka (now the village of Krasne in Donetsk oblast), Russian Empire (now Ukraine) as an only child. His mother was a pianist and his father a relatively wealthy agricultural engineer. In the current Russian state of unrest he saw no room for his experimental music and in May he headed for the USA. Life abroad. Paris was better prepared for Prokofiev's musical style. He reaffirmed his contacts with the Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and with Stravinsky, and returned to some of his older unfinished works such as the third piano concerto. Later, in 1921, The Love for Three Oranges finally premiered in Chicago, but the reception was cold, forcing Prokofiev to leave America again without triumph. Sergei Prokofiev's Piano Sonata No. 7 in B♭ major, Op. 83 (1942) (occasionally called the "Stalingrad") is a sonata composed for solo piano, the second of the three so-called "War Sonatas". The sonata was first performed on 18 January 1943 in Moscow by Sviatoslav Richter. Early in 1943, I received the score of the Seventh Sonata, which I found fascinating and which I learned in just four days. The work was a huge success. The audience clearly grasped the spirit of the work, which reflected their Sergei Prokofiev's Piano Sonata No. 7 in B♭ major, Op. 83 ("Stalingrad") is the second of the Three War Sonatas. It was first performed in 1943 in Moscow by Sviatoslav Richter. Later that year, Prokofiev started composing his sonatas no. 6, 7, and 8. These sonatas contain some of Prokofiev's most dissonant music for the piano. Biographer Daniel Jaffé has argued that Prokofiev, "having forced himself to compose a cheerful evocation of the nirvana Stalin wanted everyone to believe he had created" (i.e. in Zdravitsa) then subsequently, in these three sonatas, "expressed his true feelings". It was therefore ironic (most especially given the musical allusion that Prokofiev made to 'sadness' in the central movement) that Sonata no. 7 rece