

YENYA'S RETURN

Suite for orchestra

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1950-2023

Yenya's Epic Journey

This suite is based upon an episode in 'The House by the Dvina' (A Russian Childhood) by Eugenie Fraser. (Corgi Books, 1984) In this autobiographical account of the years leading up to the Russian Revolution, Eugenie Fraser tells of how her Russian grandmother, Eugenia 'Yenya' Scholts, travelled by troika from Archangel to St Petersburg in the winter of 1881.

The desperate journey, made with Yenya's mother and a family friend, was to enable Yenya to plead with Tsar Aleksandr II for the release of her husband from prison in Siberia. They travelled for many days through storms, blizzards and intense cold, in conditions of great discomfort. Yenya was eight months pregnant with her second child, Eugenie's father.

Yenya's personal intercession to the Tsar at the Winter Palace was successful: the Tsar promised her, 'Your child will have a father.' The party made the return journey of seven days through the extreme cold of the Russian winter, stopping only where necessary to eat, sleep and change horses. As they neared their home, they were greeted by an advance party of family, neighbours and friends. They celebrated in the customary way, with dancing, singing and feasting.

Yenya's son was born on 13th January, the day after their return. One evening late in February, her husband arrived home, released from imprisonment as the Tsar had promised.

Orchestra

2 Flutes	4 Horns in F	Timpani in D, F and A	Violin 1 Section
Cor anglais	2 Trumpets in Bb	Triangle	Violin 2 Section
2 Oboes	Bass Trombone	Cymbals	Viola Section
2 Clarinets in Bb		Wood Block	Cello Section
Bass Clarinet in Bb		Sleigh Bells	Double Bass Section
Bassoon		Xmas Bells	
		Snare Drum	
		Bass Drum	

Programmatic Events

I The Winter Palace – Homeward Journey

- 00.00 The majesty of the Tsar's Winter Palace (brass & timpani)
- 00.11 The relative insignificance of supplicants such as Yenia (strings)
- 00.31 Yenia approaches the Tsar to plead for her husband's release (woodwind)
- 00.41 Yenia's voice (oboe) making her plea to the Tsar
- 01.06 The regular rhythm (pizzicato strings) of the troika¹ on the return journey
- 01.14 Minor key but optimistic melody (violins) of the troika ride through the snow
- 01.33 Counter melody (clarinet), Yenia's mother giving support and encouragement
- 01.47 The journey towards home continues (woodwind) through the extreme cold
- 02.19 Difficulties and dangers (full orchestra) are experienced on the way
- 02.54 The freezing conditions (tremolo strings) and various dangers (timpani rolls), including weather conditions and the packs of wolves which alarm the horses
- 03.13 Yenia's voice (oboe) as they approach a gornitza² for an overnight rest

II The Gornitza – Sleep

- 00.00 The peace, warmth and safety (flute) of the isolated wayside gornitza
- 00.45 The party settles down in the gornitza for the night
- 01.34 Yenia imagines a future conversation (oboe & bass clarinet) with her husband
- 02.04 The solo violin, representing their home in Archangel, provides a commentary
- 03.01 Peace and rest in the gornitza
- 03.10 Yenia's mother (clarinet) offers her quiet prayers
- 04.04 Yenia dreams of wolves (horn quartet, cf. Peter & the Wolf) but in her dream they are gentle and peaceful, rather than threatening
- 05.45 The peaceful atmosphere of the gornitza (flute) asserts itself in her dream
- 06.21 The party sleeps, with Yenia's mother's prayers (clarinet) in the background

III Arrival – Country Dance

- 00.00 After seven days, they near home and hear a distant conversations between two of their neighbours (cor anglais & clarinet) who are coming to meet them
- 00.31 Other family members and friends (flutes, strings) of join the conversation
- 01.03 The troika is spotted by the advance party, who rush forward in greeting
- 01.34 The country folk celebrate with dancing, singing and feasting (full orchestra)
- 02.01 A brief motif from the 'Song of the Volga Boatman' (full orchestra) is heard
- 02.10 Yenia imagines the motif taken up by the wolves (horns)
- 02.20 The dance melody assumes a gentle triple metre, punctuated by conversation
- 03.54 The original conversation (cor anglais & clarinet) is repeated in a new rhythm
- 04.20 As the conversation continues, Yenia recalls the hardships of her journey and the troika theme of the first movement is heard at a much slower tempo
- 05.02 Yenia recalls the dangers and thunderstorms (timpani roll)
- 05.12 Yenia's melancholy thoughts are brushed aside by the renewal of the dancing

¹ Troika - a traditional Russian open sleigh or carriage, drawn by two or four horses in pairs

² Gornitza - a wayside refuge for travellers, often within or adjacent to an inn, containing beds, heating and cooking facilities

IV The Tsar's Promise Fulfilled

- 00.0 Just over a month later, Yenia's husband has come home from Siberia; Yenia's mother's prayers of thanksgiving (clarinet) are heard
- 00.41 A new voice (flute) softly enters, that of Yenia's baby, born the day after their return from the journey
- 01.20 Yenia's voice (oboe) joins them
- 01.39 A general atmosphere of peace prevails (strings)
- 02.18 Memories of the journey (flute and first violins) float through Yenia's mind
- 02.58 The safety of home (solo violin) now provides reassurance
- 03.39 The voices of Yenia (oboe), her mother (clarinet), and husband (bassoon) are interwoven
- 03.58 They are joined by the baby (flute), who was to grow to be the author's father
- 04.28 Their hardships come to a peaceful conclusion (strings)
- 04.40 The safety and peace of home (solo violin) has the last word

Recording Data

Notation: Sibelius 3

MIDI input: Roland EP5 digital piano

Music Production: Steinberg Cubase SX

Synthesizer: Edirol HQ Orchestral VSTi

