

***Symphony No. 5 in B-flat Major, Opus 100***  
**Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953)**

Written: 1944

Duration: 46 minutes

Sergei Prokofiev is unusual among Soviet-era Russian artists. After fleeing the tyranny of the Soviet state, he actually returned to his homeland! Prokofiev wrote some of his most endearing and charming works during the first few years back in Russia: *Lieutenant Kije Suite*, the *Second Violin Concerto*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Peter and the Wolf*. Strangely missing from the first eight years of his Soviet residency were any symphonies. When he finally started writing his *Fifth Symphony*, it only took a month, with another month to orchestrate it. “I conceived it as a symphony glorifying the human spirit . . . praising the free and happy man—his strength, his generosity, and the purity of his soul,” he wrote.

One of the hallmarks of the *Fifth Symphony* is its profusion of melody. The first movement begins with a quiet theme, played by the flutes and bassoons, which expands into the rest of the orchestra and grows to heroic proportions. A second melody, again starting with the flute but this time shared with the oboe, has a sweeter and almost ballet-like character. The central section of the movement becomes more animated and intense until the initial melody is played full out by the trumpet. After a quiet restatement of the second theme, the initial theme of the movement returns for the final time—this time at an explosively loud dynamic.

The second movement is a scherzo. The first section has a sort of demented obstinacy to it. It gives way to a tuneful middle section where a fast-moving accompaniment propels it forward. The middle section ends the same way it began, and then the trumpets and pizzicato strings slowly begin a sort of twisted variation of the opening theme. The tempo gets faster and faster until the scherzo ends in a frenzy.

The slow third movement seems to be made of one continuous melody that gets passed around to various sections of the orchestra. It has a broad range of character, from the gentle and mournful to impassioned, anger-filled tragedy.

The final movement begins with a gentle introduction. Soon the violas get the tempo going for a series of contrasting melodies set over an active accompaniment. The central part of this movement has a smooth, singing character. The low brass upset the atmosphere by their belligerent intrusion. Soon enough, the main themes return. A crazy coda concludes the movement.

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