

MODERN MUSIC

MINNA LEDERMAN, Editor

MY CINDERELLA

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THE wicked stepmother cruelly ill treats her step-daughter, but one day the girl manages with the help of a kind fairy to attend a ball in the Prince's palace. From that moment her whole life changes. The Prince falls in love with her, but at the stroke of midnight, Cinderella vanishes from the palace. Thanks to the slipper which she drops in haste, the prince, after a long search, succeeds in finding the object of his happiness.

This tale is met in the folklore of many countries and races. In Afanasyev's collection of Russian tales, the girl is known as Masha and her nickname is Chernushka (Black-face) because the stepmother compels her to rake ashes from the stove.

In 1940 the Kirov Theatre of Opera and Ballet in Leningrad suggested that I write the music for a ballet with either the Snow-Maiden or Cinderella as subject. Ever since my childhood I have been under the spell of the poetic charm and freshness of Rimsky-Korsakov's opera, *Snow Maiden*. It seemed to me that if I undertook a ballet on this theme I should never be able to escape the influence of his images and that if I sought a different approach I would be absorbed in a constant struggle against that influence. Accordingly, of the two themes I chose *Cinderella*. Nikolai Volkov was asked to write the libretto for the ballet. He is a man of great experience, many of his ballets have been staged in Moscow and Leningrad. He is also known for the stage version of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, which he wrote for the Moscow Art Theatre. I set to work on the music of *Cinderella* without delay, and by the summer of 1941, when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, the outlines of two acts were already completed. War

summoned us to more urgent work and *Cinderella* was temporarily laid aside. But in the summer of 1943 I found it possible to return to my uncompleted manuscript, and in June of this year I went to the city of Molotov, where the Kirov theatre staff now is in residence, to work in contact with them and there finish the ballet.

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In the first act we meet Cinderella, a charming, modest girl, her father who is henpecked by his second wife, the wicked stepmother, and her two daughters who treat Cinderella as their serving maid. The stepmother and the girls are immersed in preparations for the prince's ball. The hairdressers appear, followed by seamstresses and dance masters; they rehearse modish dances to the accompaniment of two fiddlers. At length they all leave; and Cinderella, grieving, remains alone. But the Good Fairy, who once received shoes from Cinderella when she had come to this house under the guise of a beggar woman, commands the fairies, Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter, to deck Cinderella in splendid attire and so enable her to attend the ball. Cinderella speeds to the palace, dancing a waltz, surrounded by fairies, dragonflies, and grasshoppers. The Good Fairy gives her a warning: Return home by midnight.

The second act is the ball in the Prince's palace. The courtiers dance, they are followed by Cinderella's stepsisters, who are more than usually mincing in the unaccustomed brilliance of society. A fanfare onstage heralds the Prince's arrival, and a mazurka is interrupted as he enters. He is not the pampered and effete scion of royalty, clad in silk and velvet, but an ardent, unaffected youth. He strides vigorously across the stage and seats himself on the throne as though in the saddle. Now other youths dance, all as athletic as himself. The mazurka is resumed, but at this moment tender music is heard from behind the scenes and Cinderella enters. Nobody knows who this splendid princess can be, but all are struck by her beauty, and most of all, of course, the Prince. The Grand Waltz begins and he dances only with Cinderella. This is followed by variations by Cinderella, then by the Prince, and an adagio celebrating their love. As the hour of midnight strikes, the ball reaches its climax. From the enormous clock twelve dwarfs leap out dancing the *chechetka* and reminding Cinderella of the Fairy's warning. She dashes home and we see her as she hurries down the staircase losing her slipper. The Prince, unable to overtake her, finds the slipper.

The third act has a rapid succession of scenes. All the shoemakers in

town are awakened at the Prince's order in the dead of night. They come to see him, he shows them Cinderella's slipper, but none can recognize his work. Last to arrive is a drowsy shoemaker who has no idea why he's been summoned, but has brought with him an apprentice bearing an enormous spurred jackboot. The Prince drives him out and hurries in search of Cinderella. In the second scene the Prince vainly scours the world, searching for the beauty whose foot will fit the tiny slipper.

After a long and vain quest the Prince at last arrives at the house where Cinderella is dreaming of him. Seeing that the slipper won't fit her daughters, the stepmother tries to put it on her own enormous foot and when she doesn't succeed she seizes a pair of shears to cut off the refractory toes. All throw themselves upon her in horror. As Cinderella bends over her stepmother, the second slipper falls out of her bosom where she has concealed it in memory of the Prince. At last the Prince has found his love, and at a wave of the Good Fairy's hand, all vanish, leaving the two lovers in a wonderful garden.

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I am composing this work in close collaboration with the ballet master so as to adapt it to the form we call classical, which permits the dancers to display their art to the fullest. Classical ballet has traditions handed down from generation to generation. *Cinderella* will contain a number of variations by Cinderella herself, by her stepsisters, by the Prince, and by the fairies, Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter, as well as a pas de deux, an adagio, three waltzes, a mazurka, a gavotte, a passepied, and possibly other numbers.

At the same time, I mean Cinderella herself to be no unreal distraction but a living, tender and sensitive maiden, capable of making the audience share her sufferings and joys. I intend also a true musical portrayal of the ardent prince, the nagging light-minded sisters, the timid father and other personages.

The ballet will be directed by the Leningrad dancer, Constantine Sergeyev. He will have as his assistant the celebrated young ballerina, Jalina Ulanova, who will test her capacities as ballet director for the first time. Sergeyev and Ulanova are old friends of mine. They danced the title roles in my *Romeo and Juliet*, staged by this same theatre several years ago. Sergeyev has already begun work and expects to hold the first big stage rehearsal shortly after New Year's. The premiere of *Cinderella* is planned for March of this year.