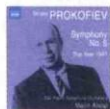


## Prokofiev

Symphony No 5, Op 100. The Year 1941, Op 90

São Paulo Symphony Orchestra / Marin Alsop

Naxos © 8 573029 (60' • DDD)



### Alsop begins São Paulo Prokofiev cycle with the Fifth

I'm not sure we needed a recording of Prokofiev's symphonic suite *The Year 1941* but, as an up-beat to a brand-new cycle of the symphonies with Marin Alsop's brand-new orchestra, the São Paulo Symphony, it's a collector's item which at least 'bigs up' the impact of the masterpiece it prefaces.

As a response to the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War against Nazi invaders, you can understand why it was greeted with less than qualified rapture by the powers that be. 'In the Struggle' is little more than an offcut from the *Romeo and Juliet* fight sequences, delivered, it has to be said, with gusto by Alsop's Brazilians, and what follows is so infected by Prokofiev's sweetly parodistic manner that the momentous events of that year couldn't be further from one's mind. There's a big tune 'For the Brotherhood of Man' but it's strictly 'end title' stuff of the celluloid variety, and 'the grandeur of the human spirit' promised and

delivered in the Fifth Symphony's first movement is hardly anticipated.

Disciples of Leonard Bernstein (for whom the Fifth was a regular calling card) all do well by this piece – none more so than Michael Tilson Thomas in a thrilling performance with the London Symphony Orchestra on Sony. Alsop's account is not of that sonic splendour but it does have the measure of the piece, not least the epic first movement, its myriad fluctuations of pulse confidently worked into an imposing whole. A searing first trumpet and ripe descanting horns add to its impressiveness. The recording engineers go for depth and breadth – the widescreen approach – which those, like me, with a taste for more immediacy might find too homogenised.

Americans always 'get' the *Scherzo*, with its affluent Cadillac of a Trio gliding through a newly adopted neighbourhood, and I like Alsop's slow movement, its shot-silk texturing tempering ecstasy with (at the climax) a touch of agony. But maybe it's about going the extra distance, temperamentally speaking, which ultimately separates a very good performance from a great one. Alsop is firmly in the former category but somewhat short of the latter.

**Edward Seckerson**

*Sym No 5 – selected comparison:*

*LSO, Tilson Thomas (3/93) (SONY) SMK48239*