

# Irony and the First Movement of Prokofiev's Violin Sonata in F Minor Op. 80

## Ironia e o Primeiro Movimento da Sonata para Violino em Fá Menor de Prokofiev Op. 80



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**Abstract:** The article aims to disclose the various contexts of irony manifestation in S. Prokofiev's work using his Sonata for Violin and Piano (in F minor, Op. 80, first movement) as an example. The research methods employed include analysis, comparison, synthesis, and surveying. The conclusion of the study is the interpretation of musical irony as a complex artistic phenomenon, within which a collision of tradition and innovation occurs, as well as the establishment of the leading principles of Prokofiev's neoclassicism, contributing to decoding the intersections between music, irony, and social context that characterize his works.

**Keywords:** chromatic (extended) tonality · neoclassicism · social context · tradition and innovation · transformation of the work's structure · variable and mixed meters

**Resumo:** O artigo tem como objetivo revelar os vários contextos de manifestação da ironia na obra de S. Prokofiev, usando sua Sonata para Violino e Piano (em Fá menor, Op. 80, primeiro movimento) como exemplo. Os métodos de pesquisa empregados incluem análise, comparação, síntese e levantamento. A conclusão do estudo é a interpretação da ironia musical como um fenômeno artístico complexo, dentro do qual ocorre uma colisão de tradição e inovação, bem como o estabelecimento dos princípios

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fundamentais do neoclassicismo de Prokofiev, contribuindo para decodificar as interseções entre música, ironia e contexto social que caracterizam suas obras.

**Palavras-chave:** tonalidade cromática (estendida) · neoclassicismo · contexto social · tradição e inovação · transformação da estrutura da obra · compassos variáveis e mistos

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## 1. Introduction

In the early twentieth century, the totalitarian government of the Soviet Union imposed strict censorship on literature and art to ensure that the works were in line with communist ideology. Under this system, artistic creativity was greatly restricted; in music, more innovative, modern techniques of the Western musical tradition were banned (Goldman, 2019; Weickhardt, 2004). In light of these social conditions, irony—a rhetorical device renowned for its juxtaposition of surface and underlying meanings—emerged as a crucial tool for many writers, artists, and composers to convey concealed messages. In this mode of ‘truth-telling,’ simplicity is often deliberately foregrounded to veil deeper sentiments within the artistic creation (Balter, 2009). The composer Shostakovich in particular has been recognized for his adept use of musical irony within his compositions to underscore the contrast between truth and falsehood (Bartlett, 2000; Blokker, 1979; Fay, 2004). As many scholars have noted, the presence of irony in his music is intricately linked to the prevailing social context of his era (Sheinberg, 2000).

Prokofiev, a composer from the same social-political milieu as Shostakovich, appears to have also engaged with irony in his music, particularly in compositions that are categorized under what is known as ‘neoclassicism.’ Neoclassicism, as a reaction against the subjective inwardness of nineteenth-century Romanticism, can be construed as embodying a dialectic fusion of the ‘conventional’ syntax of eighteenth-century Classical music and ‘anti-conventional’ syntax of twentieth-century music: the former adhered to a rigid adherence to regularity, consonance, and functional harmony, whereas the latter embraces irregularity, dissonance, tonal ambiguity, and even atonality (Ballengee, 2021; Hukić, 2014). This dichotomy of the ‘old’ and ‘new’ closely aligns with the inherent paradoxes in ironic expressions. Despite the scholarly interest in discussing irony in Prokofiev’s famous satirical operatic works, such as *The Ugly Duckling* (op. 18, 1914) and *Love For Three Oranges* (Op. 33, 1921) (Shapovalov, 2004) the intricate relationship between neoclassicism and irony, especially in relation

to his instrumental music, has received considerably less attention (Donaldson, 2023).

In response to this neglect, this article delves into the first movement of the Violin Sonata in F minor (Op. 80, 1938-46) composed after the composer's return to the Soviet Union. Initiated during Stalin's reign and amidst the looming Second World War, Prokofiev encountered challenges in finishing this piece, ultimately setting it aside (Redepenning, 2001). Ronald Woodley in his study 'Strategies of Irony in Prokofiev's Violin Sonata in F minor Op. 80' has examined the ironic elements of this work from the performer's standpoint, emphasizing the various interpretations by musicians as well as the rendition of distinct timber by the two instruments (Rink, 2019). In contrast, the aim is to explore the elements of irony within the sonata movement from a listener's standpoint, through score analysis. It endeavors to dissect where, at what levels, and in what manner irony can be revealed within this music. Before conducting an in-depth analysis of the sonata, it would be useful first to draw briefly on existing literature on irony and discuss how ironic expressions may be supported in a purely musical context.

## 2. Musical Irony

Irony in music does not assume any specifically defined forms. However, scholars examining musical irony commonly draw references from ironic expressions found in language, literature, and the broader philosophical and aesthetic domains. In exploring irony as a phenomenon, contemporary scholars employ an interdisciplinary approach conducive to its multifaceted and nuanced elucidation. Specialists assert that irony encompasses various dimensions within the framework of human experience: scales of influence on individual and societal levels; significance in linguistic communication; depth of interrelation with affect; and expressive contexts (Dynel, 2023). The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines irony as 'the expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024). This type of

irony, as defined by the OED, aligns with what Douglas Colin Muecke classified as 'verbal irony.' According to this author, this is also the most fundamental form of ironic expression, similar to 'antiphrasis' in spoken language (Muecke, 2021). When represented graphically, verbal irony can be thought of as two parallel lines—one solid, one dotted—with what is said on the surface being the dotted line and the underlying intended thought being the solid line. Michael Cherlin elaborates on this concept by describing verbal irony as 'irony within a contrapuntal juxtaposition,' where verbal elements are in direct conflict with each other and cannot be reconciled into a coherent whole (Cherlin, 2017). In music compositions with text, such irony might arise when the textual content contradicts the musical expression, for example, one expresses joy whereas the other expresses sadness. In instrumental music, on the other hand, this irony could manifest, for instance, when an instrumental part is characteristically or aesthetically opposite to the other parts. Ironists, whether in literature or music, favor 'verbal irony' for its effectiveness in evoking the audience's curiosity to contemplate their artful intentions.

What Muecke categorized as 'situational irony' is yet another mode of irony that is often discussed in a musical context. Situational irony refers to the irony created by the discrepancy between anticipated expectations of an event and the actual way in which it occurs (Muecke, 2021). This type of irony is very similar to Friedrich von Schlegel's 'romantic irony' in that it requires the active engagement of both the ironist and the listener, surpassing mere linguistic implications (Cherlin, 2017). In music, situational irony can be evoked when a light-hearted or playful composition unexpectedly switches to a more solemn tone. Another way in which situational irony could manifest is through the deliberate violation of the listener's expectations. In functional harmony, for instance, the listener generally anticipates a logical progression of musical phrases, continually seeking the 'what's next?' The irony is thus achieved when the composer disrupts these expectations, introducing, at the specific juncture of harmonic expectation,

abrupt plot changes, or stylistic reversals. Analogous to Cherlin's 'Ironies of irruption or interruption,' this phenomenon occurs when an unfamiliar material abruptly intrudes and interrupts the original direction, at the same time undermining the audience's prediction of where it is going (Cherlin, 2017). This discrepancy necessitates a reorientation for the listener, for, at that moment of subversion, the anticipated musical trajectory collides with the actual unfolding, creating the improbable coexistence of contradiction. Many musicologists have engaged with this form of irony. For instance, Mark Evan Bonds discusses the ironic nature of the unexpected 'twist'—Haydn's famous 'mistake'—occurring at the end of the String Quartet Op. 33 No. 2 in E flat Major ("The Joke") (Bonds, 2017). Robert Hatten's discussion of 'romantic irony' in the music of Haydn, Beethoven, and Schumann—which depends on the deliberate departure from traditional compositional norms—is also on a similar point (Hatten, 2004).

## 2.1 Irony in the First Movement of the F-Minor Violin Sonata

The sonata movement opens with an *Andante Assai* tempo in the key of F minor, characterized by a mixed 3/4 and 4/4-time signature that immediately instigates metrical irregularity. Regarding its formal structure, Boris Blagoev (2010) argues for an explicit ternary 'ABA' layout, with the A section subdivided into a small five-part rondo 'abaca' (Figure 1). However, unlike the traditional ternary form that typically displays proportional sections, this movement's A section occupies nearly two-thirds of the overall duration. As I would like to propose, a different reading of the formal structure might be reached according to the reprise of the main theme 'a,' which reappears three times in A and is reiterated in A', making a total of four appearances throughout the movement, with each slightly varied from the preceding one. Thus, alongside Blagoev's reading of a three-part structure, I add that the entirety of the first movement also embodies the characteristic of a varied rondo form (Table 1). This structural ambivalence, deviating from the norms of both a three-part form and a rondo, sharply

contrasts with the sense of structural clarity typical of Classical-era compositions. This juxtaposition of two distinct forms within the same musical architecture infuses the movement with discernible ironic undertones.

Figure 1 - Blagoev's outline of the form of Prokofiev's F-Minor Violin Sonata, first movement

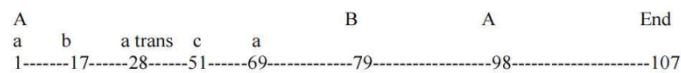


Table 1 - A comparison of the ternary reading and rondo reading of the form of the sonata movement

Form	measure	
A	1-78	
B	79-97	
A'	98-107	
Form	measure	Key
A	1-16	F minor
B	17-27	A minor
A'	28-44	A-G minor
C	45-68	D-B minor
A''	69-78	C minor
D	79-88	F minor
A'''	89-107	F minor

Irony can be further located in Prokofiev's interplay between stability and instability. Appearing first in F minor, the thematic melody (mm. 1-5) encapsulates three times a descending fifth (C-F, A $\flat$ -D $\flat$ , and F-B $\flat$ ), which becomes an important motif in the music that follows. Notably, E $\flat$  is used here instead of E (the leading note of F harmonic minor), thus giving this music a stabler and attenuating the Aeolian color of the natural minor. This stability is consistent with the contemplative, inwardly focused characteristic of the i-VI-iv-V-I progression of the thematic melody. However, this



stability is juxtaposed against a disquieting undercurrent present within the mixed 3/4 and 4/4 meter, compounded by the violin's brief inclusion of two short eighth notes in measure 4 (Figure 2). It is through the mixed meters that Prokofiev constantly articulates a sense of disquiet amidst the ongoing, stable trajectory. This coexistence of stability and instability, reassurance and discomfort, immediately invokes a poignant sense of irony.

Figure 2 - Prokofiev, Violin Sonata in F minor, first movement, measures 1-16

The image shows a musical score for the first movement of Prokofiev's Violin Sonata in F minor, Op. 80, measures 1-16. The score is in F minor, marked 'Andante assai' with a tempo of quarter note = 60. It features a Violin part and a Piano accompaniment. The piano part has a 3/4 and 4/4 time signature. The score includes dynamic markings (p, mp, mf, f, dim.) and a Roman numeral chord chart (i, VI, iv, V, i) above the piano part. Two measures (6 and 7) are highlighted with boxes.

Moving on to an examination of musical irony at the tonal level. In measure 5, the A $\flat$  in the violin, serving as the third degree in F minor, solidifies the tonal center of F minor. This ostensibly conventional tonality exhibited in the first five measures hence sets up the expectation of a straightforward harmonic trajectory in F minor. However, measure 6 abruptly introduces the dissonances of C $\flat$  and F $\flat$ . This sudden departure from the prior C and F not only disrupts the established tonal stability and tranquillity from the earlier measures but also produces a harmonic surprise, redirecting the listener from his or her tonal expectation to a moment of questioning. Measure 8 marks the return to the more conventional yet stable VI chord in F minor. This is, however, followed instantly by an unusual D $\flat$  minor tonality in measures 9-10, evident in the notes D $\flat$ -E $\flat$ -E $\sharp$ -F $\sharp$ -A $\flat$ -A $\sharp$ . It is at this point that the dissonant notes C $\flat$  and F $\flat$  in measure 6 can be



re-interpreted as part of the F  $\flat$  major scale, of which D  $\flat$  minor is a relative scale. Both F  $\flat$  major and F minor share the common note A  $\flat$  / G  $\sharp$ , which Prokofiev retains for a subtly common-tone modulation. Later, in measure 12, the appearance of the note E reestablishes the F harmonic minor scale, reinforcing F minor once more. When examining measures 1-16 as a whole as centered around F minor, the successive modulations to F  $\flat$  major and D  $\flat$  minor introduced by Prokofiev appear as unexpected elements, contradicting the established F minor tonality and disrupting the harmonic progression's conventional, 'Classical' outlook. These unexpected tonal shifts, while continuously interrupting the listener's expectations, successfully engage an experienced listener's attention, further prompting them to listen through the surface into the ironic undertones of the music. Despite the outward stability, one is challenged by the instability lurking behind to reflect upon whether the perceived stability is illusory. This contradiction between real and unreal brings us directly to the heart of 'situational irony.' This introductory section thus sets the groundwork for the entire movement's ironic undertones.

In measure 45, another instance of irony becomes apparent. Starting from measure 39, the piano sustains the dominant note (D) of G minor while the violin incorporates several descending chromatic scales (Figure 3). Initially, this musical passage projects a sense of stability. However, by measure 45, the tonal stability dissipates abruptly: the violin shifts unexpectedly to E  $\flat$  minor, played above an unsettling trill figure in the piano that faintly echoes the violin part in measures 5, 7, and 9-11 (Figure 3). The note D in the trill can be heard as the leading tone of the E  $\flat$  harmonic minor, while the C  $\sharp$  (equivalent to D  $\flat$ ) resembles the seventh degree of the E  $\flat$  natural minor. Not only does this abrupt tonal shift amidst an otherwise stable harmonic backdrop evoke a 'verbal irony,' but the coalescence of E  $\flat$  harmonic and natural minor here also presents an ambivalent collision crucial to 'situational irony.'

Figure 3 - Prokofiev, Violin Sonata in F minor, first movement, measures 36-50

The image displays a musical score for the first movement of Prokofiev's Violin Sonata in F minor, Op. 80, measures 36-50. The score is written for violin and piano. It features a key signature of one flat (F minor) and a 3/4 time signature. The violin part is marked with a forte (f) dynamic in measure 36. The piano part is marked with a forte (f) dynamic in measure 36. The key signature changes to E-flat minor at measure 43, indicated by the text 'Eb minor'. The tempo marking 'a tempo' is present in measures 43 and 47. The dynamic marking 'poco rit.' is present in measure 43. The dynamic marking 'mp' is present in measure 47. The dynamic marking 'p legato' is present in measure 47. The score includes a 'V' marking in measure 43, likely indicating a violin entry or a specific performance instruction. The score is presented in three systems, each with a measure number in a box at the beginning of the first staff: 36, 43, and 47.

The B section, starting at measure 79 in the key of A  $\flat$  major, presents yet another layer of irony within the sonata movement. Prokofiev described this section as resembling a 'wind in the graveyard' with its sustained, brisk tempo, and solemn ambiance. However, amidst this, materials from the opening A section resurface, abruptly bringing the brisk tempo down to a slower pace. Notably, in measure 89, the sudden use of pizzicato in violin, coupled with dissonant intervals and a wide range of tonal shifts, attributes a remarkably grotesque tone to the section. This grotesque violin line appears as though an inner voice that mocks the outward solemnity and stability prevalent in the section, perhaps even parodying the introductory material of section A. The abrupt introduction of this grotesque element imparts an additional, yet quite different, layer of aesthetic meaning to the original section B. In addition, it is through this collision of mockery and solemnity that another instance of irony emerges (Figure 4).

Figure 4 - Prokofiev, Violin Sonata in F minor, first movement, measures 79-93

Rifkin (2004) investigates the panorama of intonational motifs inherent in the music of S. Prokofiev. The scholar categorizes them into three groups: systemic, functional, and non-functional (Rifkin, 2004). Such a conceptual framework enables the establishment of patterns regarding the composer's application of effects of unexpectedness in terms of tonal-functional development of musical material.

Bazayev (2018) sheds light on the role of octatonic scale models in the works of S. Prokofiev. The scholar perceives in this a profound understanding by the composer of the traditions of his predecessors, particularly N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, who utilized the mentioned sound system to vividly portray fantastical characters and fairy tale heroes. Prokofiev, in turn, employed them to depict the calamities brought about by the Second World War (Bazayev, 2018). This represents one of the tendencies of S. Prokofiev's unique musical language, which renders it multifaceted, extending beyond the boundaries of the classical tonal-functional system. This accounts for the presence in his opuses of melodic-harmonic turns enriched with chromaticisms and dissonances.

However, the issue of embodying irony in S. Prokofiev's Sonata for Violin (in F minor) requires further exploration as a complex phenomenon encompassing a variety of aspects (tonality-mode relationships, meter, tempo, musical form). This fact has prompted researchers to address its elucidation in the proposed article.

## 3. The Perception of Musical Irony in the Academic Educational Environment

### 3.1 Problem Statement

The motivation for conducting this research stemmed from the necessity to study the nuances of embodying irony in S. Prokofiev's Sonata for Violin and Piano (in F minor) as a complex integrated system containing a spectrum of key categories essential for its functioning. Additionally, it was driven by the importance of obtaining insights regarding the attitudes of contemporary students in performance faculties towards the principles of musical language inherent to S. Prokofiev, thus delineating his compositional style as unique.

This, in turn, underscores the aim of the present study, which is to illuminate the intricacies of S. Prokofiev's embodiment of irony as an artistic phenomenon in the Sonata for Violin and Piano (in F minor). In light of this objective, the research authors outline the following tasks in the publication:

- Establishing the leading components of irony as a complex integrated system in S. Prokofiev's music;
- Analysing the implementation of each component of the concept of 'irony' using the Sonata for Violin and Piano (in F minor) by S. Prokofiev as an example;
- Identifying characteristic features of each component of the artistic phenomenon of irony in the aforementioned work;
- Determining the attitudes of contemporary music performers towards these components;

- Exploring all components of irony in Prokofiev's work as interconnected elements of a unified complex phenomenon.

## 3.2 Methods and Materials

### 3.2.1 Research Design

The study is grounded in methods such as surveying (questionnaire), identifying types of tonal systems, meter-rhythms, and compositional structures (analysis), comparing tonal-functional principles and formal development across different epochs (comparison), and synchronizing or considering various stylistic manifestations coexisting simultaneously (synthesis). Through these enumerated methods, the investigation sheds light on the problem of embodying irony as an artistic phenomenon in Prokofiev's Sonata for Violin and Piano, both from a practical standpoint (surveying students from performance faculties) and theoretical perspective (formulating the concept of irony in Prokofiev's music as a multifaceted artistic notion).

### 3.2.2 Sample

The foundation of the research comprised scientific materials accumulated in the field of musicology up to the present time, as well as information provided by students from performance faculties of three higher education institutions in Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and Lithuania (each country represented by one educational organization) regarding their perception of irony as reflected by S. Prokofiev in the Sonata for Violin and Piano. The total number of surveyed students amounted to 150 individuals: 50 students from each of the three higher education institutions. The survey took place from 2022 to 2024.

### 3.2.3 Survey

The survey of students from performance faculties regarding their perception of irony in S. Prokofiev's music as a complex artistic phenomenon was conducted remotely in the form of questionnaire

administration. Students were provided with a list of questions addressing the discussed issue (provided in the Appendix).

### ***3.2.4 Statistical Processing***

The data obtained from the survey of students were processed by calculating percentages using proportional methods, with active assistance provided by tables in Excel format.

### ***3.2.5 Research Limitations***

The limitations of the study lie in the fact that it involved the participation of students from only three higher education institutions, totaling 150 individuals (the overall number of respondents to the questionnaire).

### ***3.2.6 Ethical Issues***

The ethical aspect of the study entails that all participating students engaged in the project are under conditions of anonymity and the preservation of their data as confidential information.

## **4. Results**

As revealed through the research process, the effect of irony in the works of S. S. Prokofiev manifests across various levels, including tonality-mode relationships, functional chordal relationships, meter, tempo, and musical form.

The impression of 'situational irony' arises when unexpected alterations occur to the classical, most commonly adopted scheme of tonal planning prevalent in the works of representatives of the Viennese classical school (Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven). These alterations are based on the introduction of unrelated tonalities about the one established in the opening section of Prokofiev's Sonata. This also applies to the juxtaposition of different tonalities simultaneously, giving rise to a kind of composite vertical complexes where one layer constitutes a stable chordal-harmonic foundation while the other is built upon the alternation of abrupt tonal shifts.

The heightened sense of irony in the music of the first movement of Prokofiev's Sonata for Violin and Piano is also evoked by variable



and mixed meters. These elements introduce elements of surprise, discomfort, and unrest into the process of sound production, deviating from the trajectory established at the outset of the work. Tempo changes throughout the first movement of Prokofiev's Sonata for Violin and Piano further enhance the sense of instability and contribute to a clearer fixation on humorous images.

In addition to the aforementioned aspects, the composer's reinterpretation of classical musical form, established during the era of the Viennese classical school (particularly the three-movement structure, rondo), introduces explicit ironic nuances. Prokofiev treats this form as a flexible structure that follows the embodiment of his artistic ideas and the principles of their development. This results in the fusion of various levels of compositional architecture, creating the effect of unexpected form renewal.

As indicated by the data presented in Table 2, the illusory nature of purely external stability is deeply recognized by a significant number of future professional performers.

**Table 2 - Manifestation of irony in Prokofiev's sonata for violin and piano based on a unique, original authorial system of expressive means and compositional structures**

Context of Irony Manifestation	Number of Survey Participants	Number of Students Recognizing the Ironic Subtext of the Music	Indicators of Students' Perception of Prokofiev's Irony (in percentages)
Expanded (chromatic, 12-tone) tonality and tonal relationships (mostly distant)	150	123	82%
Sphere of meter-rhythm and musical meter	150	135	90%
Musical form	150	102	68%

It is important to note the manifestation of ironic traits through the character of intonations typical of the examined composition. In bars 25-27 from the beginning (end of the first page), the composer presents a sequence of half-tone two-tone motifs in eighth note durations, outlining the contours of a uniformly undulating, low-level wave (piano part). This technique evokes a sense of contrived, intrusive melancholy, which constitutes one aspect of irony, serving as an indirect portrayal of impressions from the surrounding world (Figure 5).

Figure 5 - S. Prokofiev Sonata for Violin and Piano (F minor, Op. 80), bars 1-27

The image displays the first page of the musical score for the first movement of S. Prokofiev's Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 80. The score is in F minor and 3/4 time. It features a Violino part and a Piano part. The tempo is marked 'Andante assai' with a metronome marking of quarter note = 60. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mp*, *f*, *dim.*, and *cresc.*. The first system shows the beginning of the piece, with the piano part featuring a sequence of half-tone two-tone motifs in eighth note durations. The score is numbered '№ 1' and 'Op. 80'. The composer's name 'S. PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)' is also present. The score is marked '© 3483 K' at the bottom.

In bars 45-49 from the beginning, half-tone intonations reappear. However, S. Prokofiev now employs an ostinato line

in the low register of the piano (doubled in octaves), featuring a repeatedly recurring half-tone intonation (D-natural to C-sharp). The rhythmic pattern encompasses various durations (sixteenth notes, quarter notes, half notes). Here, the deliberately gloomy obsession receives even deeper and more expansive elaboration as an ironic trait (Figure 6).

Figure 6 - S. Prokofiev Sonata for Violin and Piano (F minor, Op. 80), bars 36-50

The image displays a musical score for the first movement of Prokofiev's Violin Sonata in F minor, Op. 80, specifically bars 36 to 50. The score is written for violin and piano. The piano part is characterized by a low register, with notes often doubled in octaves, and a recurring half-tone intonation (D-natural to C-sharp). The violin part features a repeatedly recurring half-tone intonation (D-natural to C-sharp). The score includes markings for 'piano rit.', 'a tempo', 'V', 'E♭ minor', 'p', 'd'acento', and 'mf'.

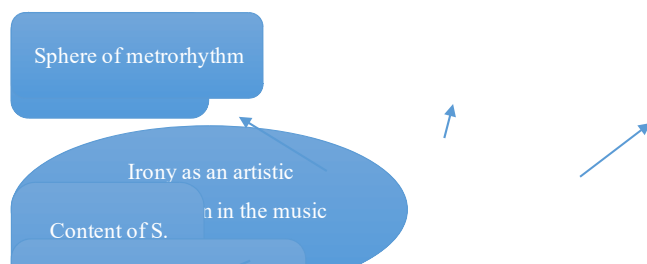
The images of irony also manifest in the manner of juxtaposing different types of musical material horizontally and vertically. For instance, swift scale-like passages with short durations (thirty-second notes) played legato are unexpectedly followed by pizzicato phrases involving wide intervals (bars 79-93 in the violin part). This 'horizontal contrast' reflects the effect of irony based on the synthesis of disparities.

Vertical juxtaposition of sharply contrasting images vividly emerges in bars 37-38 (piano part). Here, eighth-note movement through half-tones in the melody is accompanied by resonant octave passages at the fifth, octave, and second intervals in the bass (using longer durations: quarter notes, half notes with dots).

Thus, the panorama of aspects of Prokofiev's musical irony, which found reflection in the first movement of the Sonata for

Violin and Piano (F minor, Op. 80), is highlighted. Their delineation is achieved through Figure 7.

Figure 7 - Irony in S. Prokofiev's Work as a Complex System of Expressive Aspects and Compositional Structure



As a result, the following becomes evident:

- Prokofiev's irony is manifested through the incorporation of unexpected, contrasting elements in the presentation of musical material, concerning both stylistic and tonal as well as chordal-functional aspects.
- Traits of humor and grotesque find expression through sharp harmonic deviations, and the disruption of certain norms of musical form (excessively prolonged or brief themes (thematic sections), metric-rhythmic and tempo complexity, instability).
- Overall, the artistic effect of irony is associated with the complexity of intonational-rhythmic and compositional-technical aspects, which directly impact the structure of the work, demanding thorough preparation from performers and listeners alike for its interpretation and perception.

## 5. Discussion

Contemporary scholars have dedicated a series of publications and musicological works to the issue of embodying irony in music and the oeuvre of S. Prokofiev, in particular. For instance, Donaldson (2023) examines the semiotic system of the second order (based on the semantics of the 18th century), which finds expression in Prokofiev's music. It involves the composer's reference to the genre

and structural aspects of the Viennese classical era, which acquire new intonational content in the conditions of the 20th century (Donaldson, 2023). These findings align with the perspective of the research authors, according to which the manifestation of such a phenomenon in musical art as irony is based on the juxtaposition of the incompatible, the opposite, and fundamentally different (referring to compositional techniques, sound systems of the Viennese school classics, and the renewed repertoire of 20th-century academic music).

Rodriguez et al. (2023) investigate the peculiarities of humor embodiment in music across various historical periods, stylistic directions, and national cultures, as a unique artistic phenomenon (Rodriguez et al., 2023). It is worth noting that their research covers works by J. Lully, J. Haydn, W. Mozart, L. Beethoven, C. Saint-Saëns, R. Strauss, C. Debussy, M. Ravel, and B. Bartók. However, the distinctive manifestation of irony in the music of S. Prokofiev has not been addressed by these experts. This constitutes the difference between the materials of this article and their scholarly work.

Nagy et al. (2022) focus on understanding the various degrees of humorous effect (violation of expectations) by introducing tones that are foreign to the tonality of the melody (tonally incongruent final notes). The playful context serves as the foundation for the manifestation of vivid humorous traits (irony) in the music of any period and content (Nagy et al., 2022). This idea is reflected in the research proposed by the authors of this publication: the theory of incongruity is directly applicable to the works of S. Prokofiev (particularly his Sonata for Violin in F minor).

Trevor and Huron (2018) investigate the characteristic features of reflecting humorous symbols in music. In particular, the experts note that sounds resembling laughter help capture certain nuances in the notes (staccato). Overall, the mood of irony is conveyed through a range of musical genres aimed at reproducing comic effects (humoresque, joke, scherzo) (Trevor & Huron, 2018). S. Prokofiev also employs a similar approach to the artistic interpretation of images related to the realm of humor. However,

he expands and deepens it through innovation in the realm of tonal systems (chromatic, twelve-tone tonality) and harmony, which is enriched with dissonances.

Carr et al. (2023) elucidate the significance of articulation techniques for portraying irony, humor, and comedy. According to their views, the detached manner of musical performance (staccato) is capable of conveying a sense of energy, happiness, joyful surprise, and tension when perceiving amusing situations or objects. Conversely, legato performance reflects a state of contemplation, and melancholy (Carr et al., 2023). S. Prokofiev adheres to a similar concept, utilizing articulation within the context of a comprehensive array of musical expressive means (dynamics, mode, harmony, structure) to achieve the effect of irony.

Rodriguez et al., (2023) emphasize the importance of employing contrast in registers while maintaining classical syntactic (macro-thematic structures) for creating nuances of humor and irony. This contrast can manifest in exaggerated or subtle forms, adhering to the principle of incongruity, which finds reflection in the theory of humor as a phenomenon of artistic culture (Rodriguez et al., 2023). S. Prokofiev utilizes this technique in his work while preserving the clarity of musical form and the vividness of its sections, enriching his compositions with elements from the expanded intonational palette of 20th-century music.

According to the research of Samper Prunera (2022), a humorous perspective on events and irony reflected in works of folklore tradition aid the public in enduring challenging political periods and difficult circumstances. This concept resonates with the civic and creative stance of S. Prokofiev, who sought to oppose the principle of ideological and political authoritarianism in his music and convey thoughts on the freedom of human consciousness and the right of individuals to have an individual perspective on the world.

Schneller (2023) investigates one of the key principles of creating a humorous effect through music for films. It involves the



application of audiovisual counterpoint, where comedic scenes are accompanied by musical intonations conveying images of depth, serious philosophical reflections, and conversely, episodes reflecting the complexity of the situation unfolding against the backdrop of 'light' music, leaving the impression of humor (Schneller, 2023). Similar 'clashes of perspectives' in the context of purely instrumental music, as the research results show, are also observed in S. Prokofiev's work. They occur at the level of the tonal-harmonic system, the functional relationship of chords, and the structure of the composition as a whole.

Wierzbicki (2023) notes that the characteristic type of thinking of a musician (composer or performer) determines the degree to which aspects of irony are reflected in his or her work. Thus, some music creators exhibit images that are severe and deeply philosophical, while others easily convey the comedic subtext of the surrounding reality (Wierzbicki, 2023). The latter of these qualities defines the musical style of S. Prokofiev. However, its uniqueness lies in the fact that irony conceals within itself a depth of reflection on life and humanity.

As evidenced by Lawson (2023), the greatest result in creating a comedic effect can be achieved by synthesizing inherently incompatible elements: 'serious' music, arising from strict academic traditions, and humorous visual objects. This conclusion pertains to films that have gained popularity among a wide audience. However, a similar method finds its expression in instrumental music (solo, ensemble, or orchestra), where the technique of 'mismatch' is employed, as relied upon by S. Prokofiev in his Sonata for Violin (in F minor).

All the studies reviewed hold significant value for contemporary and future musicology. However, the issue of irony in S. Prokofiev's Sonata for Violin (in F minor) demands further in-depth examination and exploration as a unique artistic phenomenon manifesting on various levels (tonality, functional chord relationships, meter, tempo, musical form). This fact prompted the authors of the proposed publication to address its elucidation.

## 6. Conclusion

During the investigation of the issue of embedding comedic elements in Sergei Prokofiev's Sonata for Violin and Piano (in F minor, Op. 80), key mechanisms for transmitting ironic symbols and the degree of their perception by contemporary students of performance faculties of higher educational institutions were elucidated. These include the intricate tonal scheme and 12-tone tonality of the 20th century (82%); polytonality, synthesizing contrasting textural layers concerning stable tones; the diversity and variability of meter, tempo, and size (90%); and the transformation of classical musical form (68%). The outcome of the study resulted in an interpretation of musical irony as a complex artistic phenomenon, which reflects Prokofiev's internal conflict, characterized by a desire for unrestrained creative expression *ab intra* and the constraints imposed upon him by socio-political reality *ab extra*. This phenomenon is presented by the composer as a multisectoral system encompassing aspects of musical expressiveness and structure such as tonality, meter and rhythm, form (syntactic and thematic categories), intonational fund, and the juxtaposition of various modes of thought presentation. The performer's (and listener's) attention is directed toward the coexistence of stability and instability, consonance and dissonance, and modern and ancient elements within the music. These paradoxical collisions serve as artistic devices prompting the performer and listener to read 'between the lines' to uncover the hidden message within the musical work. Prospects for further research into the issue lie in elucidating unique authorial traits and techniques in embodying comedic elements (humor, satire, irony) in music, fostering the emergence of new forms and styles, as well as expressive means systems.

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## Research ethics committee approval

The research was conducted ethically under the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki. The study was approved at the meeting of the Ethics Committee of Hanyang University (Protocol no. 512 dated 10.09.2022). Informed consent was signed by participants.

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