

■ ANTHROPOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

Annual General Meeting: Remembrance for Sergei O. Prokofieff

Great Creative Power

On March 28, Sergei O. Prokofieff and Hella Wiesberger were recalled as part of the remembrance of the dead during the Annual General Meeting. Virginia Sease spoke about Sergei O. Prokofieff; her remarks (in abbreviated form) concerning his work on the Executive Council at the Goetheanum are shared here.

Following Sergei O. Prokofieff's death memorials were held around the world. However one aspect of his life could not be taken up there—his work as a member of the Executive Council of the General Anthroposophical Society at the Goetheanum. Only seven people ever experienced him in that context. When he joined the Executive Council it consisted of Heinz Zimmermann, Paul Mackay, Rolf Kerler, and myself. During the summer of 2000, before he fell ill, Manfred Schmidt-Brabant was able to take part in Sergei Prokofieff's appointment. Sergei Prokofieff and Bodo von Plato joined the Executive Council at the same time; a year later—in 2002—Cornelius Pietzner replaced Rolf Kerler. Heinz Zimmermann died in 2012 and Cornelius Pietzner withdrew from the Executive Council in 2011—which left five people who were connected with Sergei Prokofieff as colleagues on the Executive Council. Although it was not intentional, the constellation of the new Executive Council was an image of the west, the east, and the middle.

1st Council Member from Eastern Europe

Sergei Prokofieff was the first member of the Executive Council from Eastern Europe. From his youth he had experienced what it meant when a free spiritual life was oppressed by political power. He was able to bring these aspects into our Executive Council work—something we valued. He had been active in the anthroposophical underground in Russia, always in the face of great danger.

What effect did this have? It gave rise to courage. In our Executive Council work he always demonstrated this courage—courage for the right decisions, projects, and so forth, courage for anthroposophy, courage for Rudolf Steiner. That was a part of his character. We experienced this as well in 1991 at

the refounding of the Anthroposophical Society in Russia; Manfred Schmidt-Brabant, Heinz Zimmermann, Rolf Kerler, and I were able to attend. Those of us who had not known Sergei Prokofieff earlier were able to experience him there in his own context.



Five Objectives

Sergei Prokofieff published prolifically, and in 2014 [on the occasion of his 60th birthday] he assembled a catalog of all his publications. In this catalog he wrote about his biography and described the goals and themes he chose when he was appointed to the Executive Council. "In 2001 when I was invited to join the Executive Council of the General Anthroposophical Society at the Goetheanum and the leadership of the School for Spiritual Science I had agreed to the task principally because I wanted to work there intensively on the five anthroposophical themes I had often dealt with before. They appeared to me then as they appear to me today—and above all for the future—to be an inseparable part of the Goetheanum insofar as the Goetheanum might evolve further as Rudolf Steiner had hoped so that it could truly become a place for the New Mysteries. These themes are:

1. Cultivating the connection to Rudolf Steiner;
2. Deepening the contents of anthroposophy and especially anthroposophical Christology;
3. Working for an ever better understanding of the 1923/24 Christmas Conference as the founding of the New Mysteries;
4. Developing the esoteric of the Anthroposophical Society (often wrongly confused with the esoteric of the First Class), for the founding of the General Anthroposophical Society was an esoteric deed of the highest order;
5. Strengthening the effectiveness of

the First Class of the School for Spiritual Science through cognitive work and the development of the General Anthroposophical Section as a place for spiritual research."

I would like to cite some of Sergei Prokofieff's own words from that catalog, and note how I experienced what he describes: "But looking back at the ten years of my work with the Executive Council I must say I was unable to achieve this goal. I did not even succeed in establishing the initial steps for it in some enduring form at the Goetheanum." In my own view and as an Executive Council colleague I believe it is too soon to evaluate what remains of his personality and his work at the Goetheanum. Time will reveal that—at least this is my hope.

Responsibility for Rudolf Steiner's Christology

"Similarly, in my second year on the Executive Council my attempt to establish a Christological Section remained without positive response." Here I can say at least I—and I believe my colleagues as well—had not perceived this intention. We always assumed Rudolf Steiner's Christology belongs to the General Anthroposophical Section. In the Executive Council we each agreed to certain responsibilities—Sergei Prokofieff and I took up Rudolf Steiner's Christology. Sergei Prokofieff fulfilled his responsibility for that Christology in an exemplary way.

He writes: "In addition, during my ten years with the Collegium of the School for Spiritual Science we never came to a shared conversation concerning the anthroposophical and School themes I had written about." Unfortunately this is correct. Many colleagues were unable to free themselves sufficiently from their responsibilities to read these substantial books. For example, the weekly meetings consume quite a lot of time. Preparing a review of my 31 years on the Executive Council, I noticed that 31, 25, 20 years ago I had much more time for reading and my own research than I do now. For want of time we never discussed his wonderful books. Then he writes: "Nonetheless, I am convinced now as before that only the realization of these five tasks can make of the Anthroposophical Society, the School for Spiritual Science, and the Goetheanum—their center—what the

spiritual world expects of them in accord with the time spirit.”

In concluding, Sergei Prokofieff looks to the future: “And I hope that along the way an engagement with my written works will have a deepening and helpful effect for all whose quest takes them in this direction.” This sentence belongs perhaps to his most important legacy.

Listening to Members

Sergei Prokofieff, of course, contributed significantly to our anthroposophical work—and what he offered was always enriching. He could describe the most complicated situations in the briefest time and make barely visible relationships visible. When he cited Rudolf Steiner he was able to provide the exact sources for each citation with clarity and certainty. He was an enormous asset for our small Executive Council circle.

If we review the years between his affirmation at Easter 2001 and when he became an emeritus member in 2012, we see that they coincided with a very difficult and challenging period for the Anthroposophical Society. There was much unpleasantness—the constitution question and various controversies, legal actions, and financial questions, as well as the 2011 call for a vote of no confidence in regard to the Executive Council. Three Executive Council members underwent that process and, of course, all received an affirmation of confidence from the members. Of the members present, more than 1000 expressed their confidence in Sergei Prokofieff. Often when we in the Executive Council were uncertain about how to weigh a decision, Sergei Prokofieff would ask, “What would the dear members say about this?”—And I had to think during this vote that the dear members spoke more than 1000 times over in regard to his work.

My colleagues and I also had to marvel at his patience. The meetings were drawn out with the weighing of decisions, and he listened, participated collegially—even when not directly involved. Yet when the time for a decision came after a lengthy discussion, he frequently surprised us by stating that he had long since come to his own conclusion but had waited until it was his turn to share it.

Sergei Prokofieff brought surprising moments of humor. He could distance

himself—even from difficult topics—and see a situation differently. His capacity to experience another perspective was the source of his humor.

He frequently appeared to act as a soloist, but this was not intentional on his part. The impression often arose because he traveled extensively on his own. But when he collaborated with one of us or a member of the Collegium he did so gladly. For example, I recall a conference for which we shared responsibility at Christmas 2005, *The Fifth Gospel as the Gospel of the New Mysteries*. There were six lectures to be assigned and he shared them with me in a very brotherly/ sisterly way: one for you, one for me, one for you, one for me...

Responsibility toward Rudolf Steiner

Sergei Prokofieff took up important initiatives. It was his impulse to organize and conduct five important conferences, each at Ascension. In these conferences he took up Rudolf Steiner’s major works; Rudolf Steiner’s Christological view always served as a focus. One such conference was connected with his book *Anthroposophy and the Philosophy of Freedom*. The 2011 conference at the Goetheanum commemorating Rudolf Steiner’s 150th birthday was jointly organized by the Goetheanum Executive Council and the Council of the Anthroposophical Society in Switzerland. Sergei Prokofieff had an essential role in this collaboration and he offered a lecture titled “Rudolf Steiner and Michael.”

Soon after—already unwell—he went to Rome and then attended a large international congress in Bologna. His lecture was titled, “Rudolf Steiner’s Path of Initiation and the Mystery of the I.” Thus, 100 years after Rudolf Steiner’s participation in the 1911 International Philosophy Congress in Bologna, someone stepped forward again to speak on the theme “The Mystery of the I” —and Rudolf Steiner!

Sergei Prokofieff felt a great responsibility toward Rudolf Steiner and toward the members of the First Class. This led to two comprehensive books for members of the First Class, *The First Class of the Michael School and Its Christological Foundations* (2009), and *The Esoteric Path through the Nineteen Class Lessons* (2014)—completed just before his death.

As his work on the Executive Council drew to a close he was increasingly concerned about whether the Goetheanum and those with responsibility there would do enough to carry out what was needed to meet Rudolf Steiner’s expectations and contribute to the renewal of the Christian Mysteries. This weighed heavily on him; he was already ill and it was difficult for him to work at full capacity. He demanded much of himself in exemplifying a Christian ethos. When something that evokes great reverence or even a will for the truth is violated, then one responds accordingly. Thus during the Annual General Meeting on March 30, 2012, Sergei Prokofieff expressed his concerns in his address commemorating Rudolf Steiner. He had experienced that something quite sacred for many people—namely, the Carpentry Building—had been remodeled to provide exhibition space. This was deeply painful for him. And further, when he saw empty picture frames hanging in the deserted, still-unfinished north stairwell—with a very special picture of Rudolf Steiner in their midst—he felt compelled to mention this. His words sounded like a reproach, a criticism, but they were a wake-up call. I think my colleagues also took this as a wake-up call.

Michaelic Christ-Impulse

Although at the end he suffered greatly, a strong creative power lived in him, always under the sign of the Michaelic Christ-impulse. And today, as a member of the Executive Council, I would like to thank him from the depths of my heart—and thank him also in the name of the current Executive Council and our friends in the Goetheanum leadership—in the hope that from his present place in the spiritual world he might experience how these streams of gratitude now rise toward him.

If I had to summarize in a single sentence why Sergei Prokofieff was called to the Executive Council and how he worked there, it would be as follows: He was a great and true representative of anthroposophy. | *Virginia Sease, Goetheanum Executive Council emerita*

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