

A Recollection of Sergei Prokofieff

Van James, Honolulu, Hawai'i



I first met Sergei Prokofieff in 1979 at a small gathering of mostly American faculty members from Emerson College in the home of John Davy in Forest Row, England (Anne Stockton, John Meeks and Paul Matthews were present, among others). It was Sergei's first time out of Russia and John Davy, O.B.E., the co-director of Emerson College at the time, had invited him to speak about his experiences of studying anthroposophy under the repressive conditions in the Soviet Union. A former science correspondent for the *Observer*, John, also wanted to encourage a Russian-American, East-West conversation.

I was 30 years old and teaching at the newly founded Tobias School of Art. Sergei was 26 with very basic but adequate English speaking skills. He described the secret anthroposophical gatherings in his homeland, the tension of being under surveillance, and the selection of topics which members of the group would prepare and lecture on to the others in the small group. He painted a very striking picture of the distinct contrast to the way study groups met with ease in the West.

John Davy asked if I could walk Sergei up to Tobias the next day and give him a tour of the cottage-like art studios above the village of Forest Row. We walked over the rolling green hills of the golf course at the edge of Ashdown Forest and Sergei commented on what a peaceful dream-like feeling the verdant English landscape presented. He described

how different it was from his homeland where one was inclined to want to sit down and ponder the vast landscape in order to be present in it. I told him how in America, my homeland, one felt driven to engage one's will by moving through the landscape in order to experience it. Our conversation concerning East and West that day was very stimulating and it was a theme we would pick up together later in our lives. At Tobias School of Art, Sergei showed a fascination for my early neo-surrealist paintings, more so than the current work I was doing in an anthroposophical style. As a former art student himself, he expressed great interest in the artistic trends and styles current in the West.

Years later, after many books were written, lectures were delivered and travels were made on both our parts, Sergei found his way to Hawai'i where I had settled as a teaching artist. He demonstrated through his conversations and lectures his now deeply profound grasp of Anthroposophy and Christology. His powerful connection to the Foundation Stone Meditation, the School of Spiritual Science, and the Michael impulse was remarkably formed and articulate.

However, one of my most memorable experiences with Sergei was taking him around the island of O'ahu and introducing him to the ancient cultural sites of Hawai'i. By now he had experienced the North American continent and its strong north-south magnetic mountain ranges, not to mention many other parts of the world. But here in the mid-Pacific was a different convergence of geographic and life forces that were new to him. He was especially sensitive to the ancient atavistic energies that still reside in some of the places we visited. Yet, he seemed most taken and deeply refreshed by a swim in the gentle and healing, yet awesomely powerful, Pacific Ocean. He did not want to shower after his swim so that he could have the sea salt remain on his skin for the rest of the day (something he made a point of expressing), and it made me think of the subsurface sandy, salt deposits of Russia that encourage one to sit down and take-in the nature of that distant part of the world. Sergei Prokofieff was a Michaelic citizen of the world and yet, at the same time, a true representative of the land of the sixth cultural epoch—Russia.

The last time I saw Sergei was at the Goetheanum, where he had eventually made his home-away-from-home as a member of the Executive Council of the General Anthroposophical Society in Dornach, Switzerland. When left to his thoughts, Sergei's countenance expressed the weight of the world, the deep suffering of his Slavic destiny, and his own melancholic temperament. But when Sergei made eye contact with another person his face lit up and glowed with the radiance of the sun.