

THE BACKGROUND MUSIC OF *WAR AND PEACE*

Nino Rota



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Natasha (Audrey Hepburn) and Andrey (Mel Ferrer) at the Court Ball.

In composing the background music for *WAR AND PEACE* I followed the two concepts of the story as they develop in Tolstoy's novel, constantly alternating, or overlapping and flowing together, thus giving a certain rhythm to the entire narrative and establishing its musical structure. These two concepts, already so clearly expressed in the title and of course reflected in the film, are illustrated on the one hand by the motives of the private lives, the relationship between the protagonists, their individual feelings and experiences; motives that somewhat broadly may be named "peace motives", or "personal motives." On the other hand, they are illustrated by the motives of public life, or history with its great feats of arms, of reality as objectively told in historic documents; these we may call the "war motives" or "environmental motives."

This distinction, clearly present in the book and in the film with the alternate succession or converging of the two themes, was the first and fundamental basis for the work of the musician.

THE "PERSONAL MOTIVES"

I composed first of all the music for the dances in the episode of the great Court Ball. A polonaise, a waltz and a Scotch dance stand out among the dances, but the waltz is doubtless the most important piece. In a general way the dances composed for the Court Ball have the flavor of early Romanticism; they are written in a style which may be defined as Schubertian with its delicacy and guilelessness (interspersed with Russian themes, however). The waltz which Natasha and Andrey dance together during the grande soirée carries the whole story of their love. It always appears again throughout the film as a hint or remembrance whenever their love becomes stronger or weaker or flares afresh, up to its tragic end. At a certain point — when Natasha gets ready to flee from Moscow with her family and has a last look at the gown she wore at the grande soirée — the waltz is taken up again and developed throughout the entire sequence.

In contrast with the theme of the waltz (which stands for European, Western spirit, the taste of an aristocracy inclined to conform with the musical fashion of the period) there is the theme of the tune sung during the sleigh ride. It's a simple little tune built on melodies which are typical of Russian folk music. There already exist many famous pieces of music, in which Russian folk songs were used more or less in their entirety. We need only think of the many compositions of the Petersburg "Group of Five", and especially of the first creative period of Moussorgsky. More recently, Stravinsky quite frequently used in his compositions motives and airs which the peasants and little people have been singing in Russia for centuries, of course with the elegant orchestration peculiar to him. What was difficult for me therefore was above all to find melodies which had not yet been used by composers of world-wide fame, such as Borodin or Rimski-Korsakov, and would not be recognized as "original" themes created by these composers.

One passage in the "sleigh ride song" takes over the beginning of a Russian folk song such as it is; the song reflects throughout the character of the Russian people in its colorful lively moods, which at times turn soft and sweet in melancholy abandonment or unexpected tenderness. It also enlivens the festive atmosphere in the Rostov home (especially in the sequence of Nikolay's return from Austerlitz), is developed in the hunting scene, and later accompanies the encounter of Petya with the French drummer and, right after that, his death. Towards the end of the film the waltz motive and the sleigh ride song merge in a melodic mixture which clearly symbolizes the fusion of the artistic with the popular spirit.

Another leitmotiv of the film — among the "personal motives" — is the melody which Natasha plays on the piano when Pierre comes back from the Rostov's after his quarrel with Helene. The piece bears all the marks of pre-romanticism (it may remind the listener of certain passages in Schumann at his most candid) and remains associated with the idea of Pierre in its variations and thematic recurrences. It is this motive which is picked up again in the final sequences of the film, when on the screen the promise of a new life together arises for Pierre and Natasha.

A traditional gypsy melody which the orchestra varies gaily, vividly underscores the whole sequence of the orgy at the Dolohov home. This motive is drenched with frivolity, excitement and insinuations. Much of its spirit is found again in the story of Anatole: for instance, during the reception at Anna Scherer's house, in the sequence in which Anatole tries his powers of seduction on Natasha, and again in the scenes at Dolohov's home shortly before the attempted rape of the young daughter of the Rostovs.

THE "ENVIRONMENTAL MOTIVES"

For the opening scene of the film, while the map of Napoleon's campaign in Russia appears on the screen, I composed a very rhythmic melody which is interrupted by and interspersed with the roll of the drums. All through the film this melody, enriched by fragments from the Marseillaise, accompanies the advance of Napoleon, as if to mark its frightfulness. As soon as the action begins, the parade of Alexander's troop departing for Austerlitz is given particular weight by a triumphal march that rises like a hymn; it is typically Russian in character, expansive, fluent, with an abundance of pathos which slowly recedes and ends on a note of solemnity. This is the real theme of Russian heroism,

of the abnegation and patience of a whole nation, and for this reason the march leads over to a counterpoint reinforced by the chorus which joins with a song of almost religious passion and austerity.

When the camera moves from the marching soldiers to the windows of the Rostov Palace, this march is followed by another heroic melody: the same march which later accompanies Andrey to the battle of Austerlitz and follows him (sung to the sounds of balalaikas and thus becoming a symbol of sadness and nostalgia) to the little village where he dies.

The "march of the parade" which opens the action of the film also closes it musically with its joyful crescendo. It submerges even the remembrance of the "Napoleonic rhythm" which had rung through the very first sequence; — with its note of victory it brings out the contrast between the two melodies.

The background music for the battles reaches the same emotional intensity. The battle of Austerlitz is dominated by passages from the Marseillaise among the merged motives of the "march of the parade" and the "Napoleonic rhythm." During the battle of Borodino a sudden rest in the music follows the scene in which the infantry troops of the two opponents march toward the enemy to the menacing rhythm of the drums. It is from this rest which intensifies the foreboding of the oncoming catastrophe that a motive arises, a cry of war with the rage to exterminate, the hatred and the irrational violence of men who are close to the blind fury of the beast. At times louder, at times lower, but always tempestuous, this motive accompanies the fight with its vehemence and ferocity, the charges of the dragoons and the frenzy of the artillery soldiers stationed at the guns; the anguish of the infantrymen on the attack and the turmoil of the deadly battle at its hottest. Later when the battle is over, the motive of the "heroic march" arises again in the scenes of the wounded and dying, now expanded, however, in a slow tempo and played in a sad mood of lament and pain.

The background music for the battle on the Berezina is a crescendo of the orchestra over an extremely expanded variation of the Marseillaise, the musical texture of which has wide lacerations, gashes through which come the sounds of the rhythmical mournful cadenzas of a funeral song. The theme of the famous anthem becomes more clearly recognizable when the flags of Napoleon's army are burned on the banks of the river: the last sign and the last voices of the collapse of the Grande Armée and the end of a gigantic ambition.

The background music for WAR AND PEACE was written mainly to create an atmosphere authentic in locale and period. This quality of authenticity had to lie in the character and spirit of the music, while orchestration and form were given the benefit of modern orchestration and musical eloquence. Purely historical background music would, in any case, never be able to have a grip on modern audiences, at least not on the average audience. Besides it would have been difficult to find in historical scores the type of music to fit all the situations in the film, in which, obviously, the makers of the film were concerned not so much with recreating the conditions of the period to the letter as with shaping them in line with the ideas we have of them now. Wherever possible the background music has also been "restored" in its form, however: as for instance in the songs and dances which have all the inflections and effects of the instruments typical of the stage music of the early nineteenth century.