

NEW ON THE SCENE

# Unorthodox Russian

YEVGENY SUDBIN



**Born in 1980 and still a student at the Royal Academy of Music, the Russian pianist Yevgeny Sudbin is poised to make his mark with a second disc for BIS, featuring an all-Rachmaninov programme. Here he speaks to Colin Anderson**

**Did you always want to be a pianist?**

Both my parents are pianists and I heard them practising and really wanted to play myself. At age four or five I was sitting improvising at the piano and my mother noticed that I had perfect pitch. She took me to a music teacher and I made rapid progress. I auditioned for the specialist music school in St Petersburg and was accepted. From that point things went quickly. I didn't have a difficult choice to make about a profession. I always wanted to play the piano or have something to do with music, and that passion never really changed.

**What were your influences when you began playing?**

I started the piano playing by ear and was reading the notes by the age of six. The first LP I heard was Gilels in Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1, which overwhelmed me. It was mainly Gilels and Richter that we had LPs of at home.

**Tell me about your musical training.**

The training in St Petersburg was intense, that's for sure. Things were stressful in Russia; everybody dreaded the exams. When I was nine I went off to an international competition in the Czech Republic, which I won. I was 10 when we left for Germany. I also had a Russian teacher there, and later my teacher from St Petersburg immigrated to Germany, so I was able to continue studying with her.

**Does the term 'Russian Piano School' mean anything to you as a Russian pianist yourself?**

I still don't really know what the 'Russian School' is. To me, every Russian pianist sounds quite different!

**Why did you choose Scarlatti sonatas for your first disc?**

I thought it would be a nice introduction for an audience that has never heard of me. I had to sight-read through all of the sonatas to choose the ones I'd play! If I had a hundred

more years to live then I could do a whole bunch of them, but there are so many things I want to play.

**Your response to Scarlatti was full of imagination.**

With Scarlatti, you could end up just playing the notes. There is a theory that Scarlatti would improvise different versions of his sonatas. I started off being very experimental but my teacher thought it was over the top!

**And now you turn to Rachmaninov...**

I have always felt an affinity with his music. It's the intense emotional quality and also the wonderful structure; there's a sense of architecture within each work that is very logical. This logic and emotion really complement each other. To me, there's not a single unnecessary note. I think his music is misunderstood. I feel that certain music intellectuals in the Western world are afraid of his direct language.

**Do you know Rachmaninov's own recordings?**

Yes, and I have been shocked by them. I admire them but I don't copy his interpretations. I am hugely impressed by them, but I wanted to stick with my own view.

**Tell me about the version of Rachmaninov's Sonata No 2 that you're playing on the disc – there are, of course, two versions: the original 1913 and the revised 1931.**

I play Vladimir Horowitz's version. He plays something of both, but it's more based on the original. Horowitz changed his version from concert to concert. I learnt Rachmaninov's revision first, but it was never terribly satisfying, and then I looked at the original, which has so much more. For the 1931 revision Rachmaninov thinned the textures – he thought there was too much going on in the counterpoint and voices – and he cut a lot of wonderful music. When I heard Horowitz's rendition, I was fascinated. He has the best of both versions. However,