

COVER STORY

'By playing Scarlatti's music on the piano, it essentially becomes a transcription'



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just play from a plain score that has no markings or dynamics. Tempos are completely objective.

'The other reason that I find Scarlatti so compelling is because to his contemporaries he must have sounded quite modern. Our ears will perceive his music very differently, having had such a huge history of composers since then. Sometimes I play it and I hear some Brahms, Chopin, Grieg or Rachmaninov. With that knowledge of history, you have a different way of hearing the music because all those elements are still there somehow, like premonitions.'

I was curious to know the reason and the musical justification for adding his own embellishments to the music, as I had heard him do to such effect in the G minor Sonata earlier that day. 'By playing Scarlatti's music on the piano, it essentially becomes a transcription. So I follow [Ralph] Kirkpatrick's idea that you have to take liberties with it. When Horowitz came to play Scarlatti to Kirkpatrick, the

Russian was afraid because Kirkpatrick was such a big authority on Scarlatti's music; but Kirkpatrick was just the opposite of a stickler. He said you have to play it with much more freedom, and you shouldn't be afraid to add your own stuff.

'I think you can take it as far as you want. You don't embellish just for the sake of embellishment. You have to try and put yourself into the mind of the composer and think what he might have done on a modern piano, to get the voicing right. There are many ways as long as you don't over-impose yourself. Some of the pieces were written for organ, some for harpsichord, some for clavichord. You shouldn't try and imitate the sound of any of these instruments on the piano. You have to find a language, a way of making it work on the instrument at hand. Composers such as Bach and Scarlatti were very aware of registers. The piano doesn't have stops like the harpsichord, so you have to find other ways. It's also about articulation, legato, voicing. There isn't

any Scarlatti sonata that I play exactly as written. With a composer like Scriabin, he always had a specific instrument in mind when he wrote music. He understood that instrument, so you shouldn't change anything. With Scarlatti and Bach, the music wasn't written for a specific instrument, and you have to discover the spirit of it.'

Yevgeny Sudbin's family emigrated to Germany in 1990 just after the Berlin Wall came down. 'It was difficult for my mother, but I found it very exciting – a huge adventure. The Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler had heard of me somehow, so they sent an old upright and put it in the basement where we were staying for me to play. Lyubov Pevsner moved from Russia to Germany two years later, so I could continue studying with her. That was very fortunate. She was a great help.'

In 1997, Sudbin moved to London