

◀ 'What is it about Scriabin that makes his venom so poisonous?', and answers by examining the composer's visionary and mystical traits.

Looking at CD and concert reviews, it is difficult to find examples that are anything other than glowing. His technique, naturally, attracts plaudits, forming, as the *Daily Telegraph* put it, 'an integral part of the musical discourse'. His 'liquid tone' (*Evening Standard*) has also been noted. *International Record Review* hailed him simply as 'one of the most important pianistic talents of our time'. Any artist, young or otherwise, could be forgiven the temptation to bask in the glory, but Sudbin remains level-headed and focused. 'I made the decision not to read reviews – the good ones never make me feel as happy as the bad ones make me feel unhappy! When you have too many good reviews, people just begin to get annoyed and start writing bad reviews: it goes in waves. There are so many colleagues of mine who go through phases where critics absolutely love them – because everyone likes to discover somebody new. And then it becomes a little bit boring, because if you don't continue to surprise people, they can turn on you in a few hours.' Does that mean Sudbin is already preparing himself for a critical backlash? 'I've been preparing for that possibility since before I even started getting reviews, good or bad. I'm generally more of a glass-half-empty person. In the end it's about

he has dedicated so much of a recital to the composer, whom he finds difficult to perform, 'because everyone has such strong conceptions of how Chopin should be played'. Intriguingly, Sudbin has chosen to pair the Fourth Ballade ('one of his most demanding pieces in terms of form, structure and material') with Ronald Stevenson's *Fugue on a Fragment of Chopin*, based on the central canonic episode of the same Ballade. 'It's an interesting work which I thought would work well in the recital, moving away from Chopin into more contemporary waters.'

Perhaps because of his instinctive adventurousness, Sudbin reasons hard before arriving at a recital programme. 'Often I find myself realising that pieces that I would really like to play are not necessarily pieces that are best for me.' He goes on to explain that he has tended to pick too many calm, barcarolle-type pieces whereas he would be more comfortable 'somewhere a bit more extreme, furious; somewhere less meditative.' On the other hand he's been surprised at how well Scriabin's Sonatas nos. 5 and 9 turned out to suit him. He talks about his apparent misjudgements quite openly and objectively – for him, it seems, there's nothing to hide – self-evaluation is all part of the musical journey.

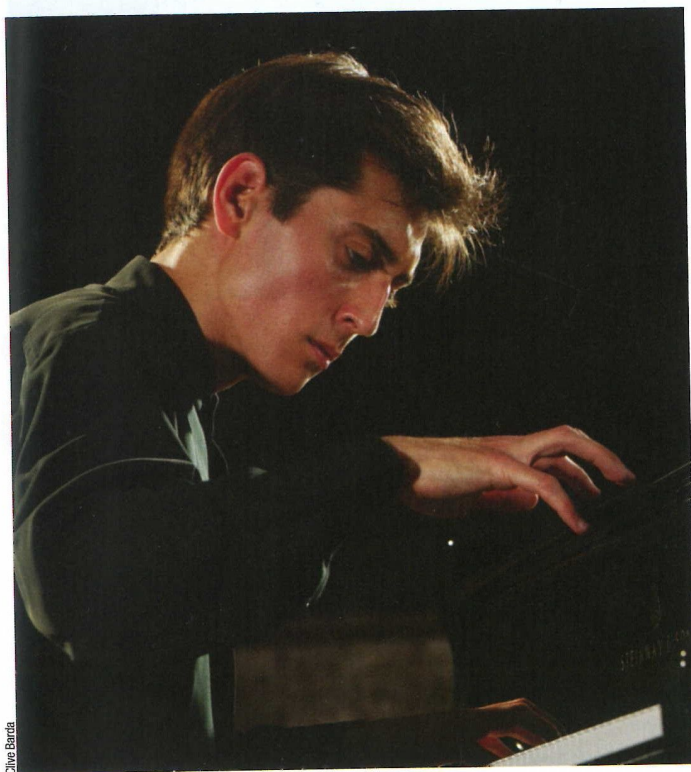
It is a journey whose pace has quickened in recent years. How has he coped with the huge shift in attention and demand since the Scarlatti

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disc? 'There have been phases where I have been travelling quite a lot playing similar repertoire. It's very exhausting and when I come home there's not a lot of energy to start new repertoire. So I try to make sure things don't get too busy. The trouble is you have either too few concerts or too many. It's very hard to control these things. I worry of course that if I don't accept certain things, then I might not have the opportunity to play in good halls in future. Then I worry that if I play too much I will become completely exhausted after a couple of years and have some sort of a breakdown – as everybody seems to have.' He laughs, perhaps without realising the poignancy of his words.

For now at least, life on the road seems manageable: 'You do spend an awful lot of time on your own, in hotels, in planes, but I always think the price is worth paying.' Sudbin's artistic ambition is coupled with a view of the musical world that is at once perceptive, pragmatic and philosophical. 'I must tell you, it's an illusion if artists think they're in control, because actually they're not. I think about my life now and how it was ten years ago. My playing hasn't dramatically changed, but the perception of my playing seems to have changed. You know, this is something that is not controlled by the artist: how many concerts you play, where you play, who you play with – how your career goes. A lot is down to chance, and if people think they can have much control over it, maybe they are deluding themselves. I can control how many concerts I play, but I cannot control how my career will progress. I just want to make sure my recordings are as good as possible and that the concerts are as good as possible. That is the only thing I can control, more or less.' ■

Yevgeny Sudbin will perform works by and inspired by Chopin on 25 March 2010 at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London as part of Southbank Centre's International Piano Series. www.southbankcentre.co.uk.



making good music and also making good recordings – and if you have an off night in a performance, what can you do? Everybody's human.'

Sudbin is in the process of finishing an all-Haydn disc, due for release in June, and he's recorded Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto, which, along with the Fifth, will form the first instalment (released this autumn) of a Beethoven concerto cycle with the Minnesota Orchestra under Osmo Vänskä. After that, there are planned recordings of Chopin, Medtner, Prokofiev and Ravel. BIS's initial two-disc deal soon expanded to five, and last summer, just after his Proms debut, he signed a contract to record 14 further releases.

On 25 March Sudbin will make his debut in Southbank Centre's International Piano Series, with an all-Chopin first half – the first time