

'I began learning the piano when I was five and my mother, noticing my rapid progress, took me to the specialist music school of the St Petersburg Conservatory when I was seven. I remember taking it very seriously and being extremely nervous about the entrance exam; I only relaxed when the teacher came out of the exam room and patted me reassuringly on the head. In 1990 my family emigrated to Germany, just after the Berlin Wall came down. At the time you weren't allowed to emigrate from the Soviet Union, so we had to leave Russia on a visiting visa which meant we couldn't take any bags with us; all I had was my music and clothes. It also meant that when we departed it couldn't look as though we were going forever, even though we were leaving my grandparents behind.

'In 1997 I auditioned for Christopher Elton at the Purcell School and I continue to study with him at the Royal Academy of Music. After a quite formal training in Germany, Christopher gave me the freedom to develop my own ideas about music. He would listen to my interpretation and help me put it into the right context; it has been a wonderful time of exploration and at the same time my musical personality began to really emerge. Stephen Hough has also been a source of inspiration to me; he gave me so much guidance and, being a concert pianist, he has a very practical perspective on how to think about technical matters. He once told me to go home and practise a passage that involved a lot of jumps – in the dark. The idea was that if you switch off one sense, you will sharpen others. It worked beautifully!

'When I first heard Horowitz's recordings of Scarlatti's sonatas I couldn't believe that a composer from this era was capable of thinking in so many colours and with such dynamic range. Until then these works were very little-known in the piano world: while several recordings have been made on the harpsichord – including a complete recording by Scott Ross – only one exists on the piano and this features several pianists and is still ongoing. I decided to add some of these pieces to my repertoire and the more I played, the more addicted I became; I couldn't believe the variety of moods from one to another, or the imagination they require to play them. When BIS asked me to record my CD of Scarlatti sonatas I had the perfect opportunity to really explore them, although it was very difficult to choose eighteen sonatas from around 555 – I spent at least a month deciding.

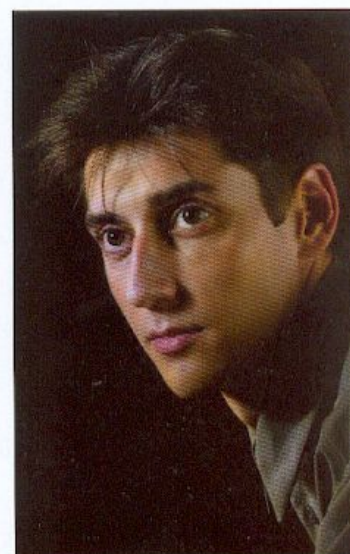
'Scarlatti was a great experimentalist and his keyboard sonatas, despite their vast number, are each completely individual. They also stand as

Scarlatti's own original invention, being different to anything written before, after or around that time, which may explain why they were nicknamed 'original and happy freaks'. While they appear to have been written over an entire lifetime, musicologists believe Scarlatti wrote them during the last 20 years of his life during his appointment as teacher to Maria Barbara, the future Queen of Spain. When the royal court settled in Spain, Scarlatti became increasingly experimental and many of the elements of that colourful life translated into his music. Interestingly, although Scarlatti and Bach were born in the same year, there is little to indicate that Scarlatti was influenced by or even knew much about Bach's music. He was living in a very isolated environment and while some of his sonatas are quite contrapuntal, which Bach developed as a tool for expression, Scarlatti was a true impersonator of life and emotion, and he translated this into his sonatas. He didn't see so much potential in fugal counterpoint and there are only four or five fugal sonatas.

'Each sonata is rich in musical ideas and has its own character, which can develop into something entirely different as the piece progresses. For example, at first sight Sonata Kk20 seemed simply a joyous and flashy piece to me, but within a few weeks my ideas about it had completely changed. To me, the underlying element of anguish became more and more apparent: these 'hidden' elements and double-meanings present themselves in most of the sonatas. Because it is not obvious how you are supposed to play them, you have to use all your imagination to try and make each sonata into something extraordinary, whilst respecting the style of the times. Some musicologists think Scarlatti intended them to be played consecutively in pairs, and indeed some of the sonatas are marked *attacca* at the end, meaning 'go straight into the next piece', which supports this theory. Others think that each sonata had around 50 improvised variations based upon it, because in Scarlatti's day the composer was also the improviser and performer. There is still very little known about him.

My next recording is in complete contrast: Rachmaninoff piano works. This disc will include the little-known *Variations on a Theme of Chopin*, which I feel is a rather underestimated work that has been overshadowed by the *Paganini* and *Corelli Variations*. After Scarlatti, it will be like jumping into completely different waters.' @

[Yevgeny Sudbin's debut CD of Scarlatti keyboard sonatas (BIS-CD-1508) is reviewed on page 66.]



opposite and above
Sudbin will
record a selection of
Rachmaninoff works
later this year.

Photos Clive Bardar