



**"When it comes to refinement, Scarlatti holds more dangers than most composers I've encountered. The texture is very transparent and there is nothing to hide behind"**  
*Yevgeny Sudbin*

**SUDBIN:** As pianistic as in any other work. Why be less generous or more restricted in Scarlatti? The pedal is just a tool to help ideas blossom, to pick up on Konstantin's analogy. On the harpsichord, the technique is entirely different; a pedal-like effect can be achieved through sustaining certain fingers on the keys but on piano, the practical challenges differ quite dramatically.

**KATIN:** Again, if you're playing on a modern piano, the pedalling won't be the same. It's not a matter of being 'pianistic', but of being discreet – it's fairly obvious that the kind of pedalling used in romantic music won't do for Scarlatti, but I'm sure that it only takes intelligence to sort it out.

**FRITH:** There are passages which cry out for the colour and vibrations that can be produced, just as there are those that beg for the austerity of dry, pure finger-legato or staccato. In this, the pianist can be very creative. The contrast between 'wet' and 'dry' can bring contrasting sections totally to life! I'm pianistic in the passages that foreshadow future piano music, but the employment of flutter pedalling can also be a lovely substitute for the natural vibrations of a harpsichord.

**SCHERBAKOV:** I tend to use rather little pedal anyway. To me, nothing speaks better about the quality of a pianist than his ability to handle a 'simple' piano tone. Scarlatti's music provides plenty of opportunities to vary piano tone without using the usual 'pianistic' accessories such as dynamic gradations or pedalling. The use of the pedal really boils down to two functions: as an additional colouristic enhancement and as a technical tool for supporting legato (but only when this isn't achievable by the fingers alone). Of course it's also very useful as a vehicle for underlining the harmony (if acoustically needed and aesthetically correct) and this is as

important in Scarlatti as in any other composer. And finally in this little list, it's also essential in creating the 'sound perspective' which is so often needed in Scarlatti's works – that sense of foreground and background, of nearness and distance.

**JS:** Do the great number of sequences and repeated passages pose any particular challenges?

**SCHERBAKOV:** Not for me, no. Musically they're always well placed and integrated in the form. But that's not to say that it's wrong to vary them, within reason. With due attention, you can always find small details that can be played each time a little differently.

**FRITH:** As in our everyday lives, repetition is everywhere in so *much* music, by no means only in the baroque. Scarlatti obviously loved to end his binary sections by repeating closing phrases down through the registers. Actually, this is one of his musical fingerprints. It's only by the composer setting up expectations, after all, that he can eventually spring some surprises. The commonplace *can* be a very effective prelude to a magical effect or mood change. Scarlatti needs his compositional building blocks to give the works the required structure. But I do think it's important not to over-interpret sequential patterns and repeated phrases. In fact I think this is one of the most telling facets of musical artistry.

**STAIER:** This touches a sensitive point, I think, because the fact is that it embraces a problem that's common to all 18th-century music – good or bad, Mozart or Bach, later or earlier. One has always the problem that there is so much redundant, purely grammatical stuff. A piece, for instance, by Brahms or Debussy, is always much less foreseeable than a piece by Mozart or Scarlatti. There's so much normal, grammatical stuff in 18th-century music, so much that's predictable, so many conventional structural devices (the stupid little Alberti basses, the endless sequence of four-bar phrases, the same standard vocabulary of foreseeable patterns etc) and there are really just as many sequences and repeated passages in Mozart and Haydn as there are in Scarlatti, so the problem is general more than specific. But Ben has put his finger on the essential point: without a firm grammatical basis there isn't the possibility for surprise, wit, play with forms, expectations, etc. Without such a grammatical background, where would the wit, invention and adventure of such geniuses as Scarlatti or Haydn be?

**JS:** In connection with all these sequences and repetitions, is the echo-effect a two-edged sword? It's certainly a much-used one.

**FRITH:** Any effect, of course, can become tiresome if it's overused, but with the amount of repeated phrases in Scarlatti's work, the 'echo' has to be an option, obvious though it is. The pianist can also imitate the slight hesitation produced by the hands reaching for the upper manual.

**LESTER:** Fernando Valenti, the great Spanish/American harpsichordist, used to abhor echo effects, saying that once you've made a statement, playing an echo at the repeat merely acts as an apology. But there's no generalisation to be made here and echo effects in some cases can be very effective. Where the harpsichordist has the luxury of 'going upstairs' to the manual above for a contrasting tone colour, the pianist has the luxury of a subtler touch or the use of the 'soft' pedal to add an extra colouristic dimension.

**SUDBIN:** I never think in terms of echo but rather try to evaluate the mood and use my instincts to add a certain colour. If an 'echo' effect presents itself, so be it – but it'll have been unintentional.

**JS:** Tempo markings in Scarlatti are plentiful but minimal. How do you interpret them?

**SUDBIN:** Pretty loosely. You can interpret them in almost any way you like. There's no reason why an *andantino* can't be a little more on the *allegretto* side, and vice versa – provided the character allows. Some sonatas don't have any tempo indications at all.

**SCHERBAKOV:** I believe that tempo belongs to music in the same way as the notes and rhythms that make it up. It's integrated in the music and really doesn't need verbal comments. The moment you open your score you know which tempo this particular music should be played in.