

COVER STORY

only make submarines!), so my parents had to share it. When I started playing, I had to share it too.' More competition for access to the family keyboard came along in the shape of Sudbin's sister, born when he was seven years old. 'By then, though, we had moved to Germany, and we had more pianos!'

Sudbin's parents never had significant concert careers. His father died after a struggle with multiple sclerosis, but his mother still teaches piano, and guided Sudbin through his earliest years on the instrument. 'My parents didn't actually want me to be a pianist because they were professionals themselves and thought it would be too difficult. They wanted me to have a "proper" job. But I made progress very quickly, so one of my mother's friends told her to take me to play to someone who was considered a piano guru. It was very difficult to get an appointment, but somehow, I got to play for her. The first thing I noticed when I went to her apartment was that her room was completely plastered with presents

from everybody: her students, people who wanted to study with her, bribes perhaps – there was stuff that you couldn't normally get in the Soviet Union. I was very lucky: she took me on, and I didn't need to offer her anything. She was a fantastic personality, tiny but very scary. She was really famous: her name was Lyubov Pevsner.'

Sudbin enrolled at the Specialist Music School of the St Petersburg Conservatory to study with Pevsner. It was a challenging time for a five-year-old facing the rigours and the endless hours of practice that are part and parcel of a Russian musical education. 'The thought of stopping or not being able to cope never really crossed my mind,' he recalls. 'My parents never pushed me. It was just something I wanted to do myself.'

Each year, the Specialist School sent two pianists to a competition in the Czech Republic. 'I was seven or eight when I won this piano competition. It was quite prestigious for the school – and for me. I was one of the youngest competitors. My technique was terrible at the time. I

remember struggling with the Kabalevsky pieces that I played, which were quite demanding. To improve that, I had to go and study part-time with another teacher who was solely responsible for technique. But I didn't learn technique from playing scales and exercises. I did it from playing the right sort of repertoire. I still can't play scales and I don't play studies. I could learn so much more from a Chopin Mazurka how to play legato, much more than, say, a Czerny Etude.'

After the Czech competition, Sudbin began giving recitals. 'I remember the first one in Lausanne when I played really badly. I was so nervous – I'm still nervous

'Playing for one person is just as satisfying as playing for ten thousand'

before a concert. Then I gave my first concerto performance. That was in Prague. I remember that also, but for a different reason: it was good! Afterwards, I thought to myself, yes, I really want to do this. It was the Mozart Concerto in A major. I felt quite happy and alive. These moments are rare, but when they come they are worth waiting for.'

I wondered how Scarlatti had come into Sudbin's life. What was it about his music that captured his imagination? 'Scarlatti is almost a Russian composer, in the sense that every Russian plays him' he explains. 'It's just standard fare in the conservatoires. Maybe Horowitz introduced it. One reason why I find Scarlatti incredibly interesting is that, at first glance, it's relatively simple, but offers so many possibilities when it comes to interpretation. He left no instructions whatsoever. The pieces were written for harpsichord, so there are no dynamic markings. There are some editions that are highly misleading, where an editor has added dynamics – terrible! You should



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