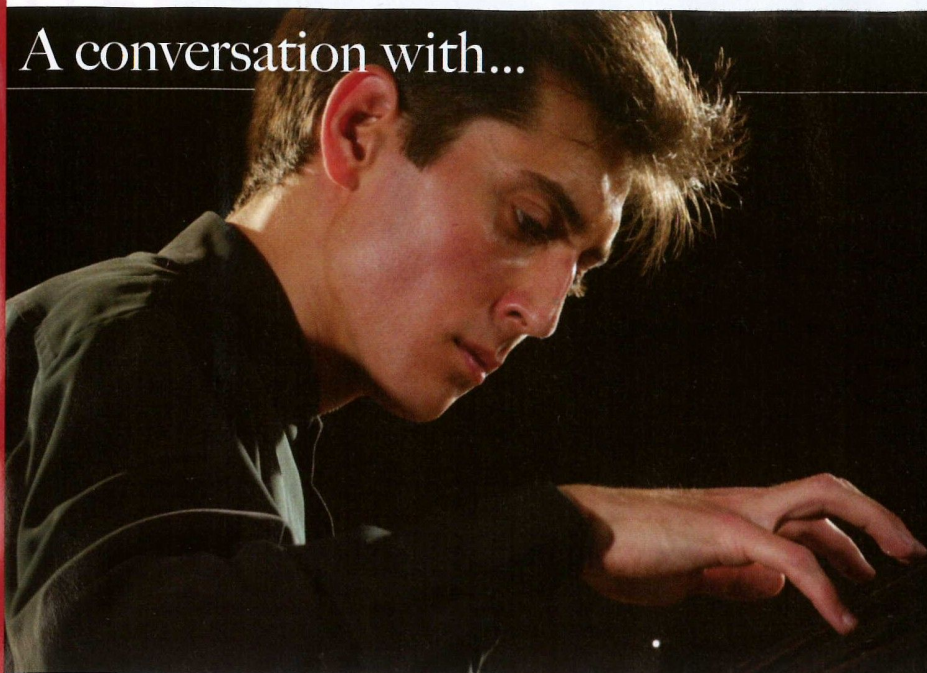


A conversation with...



# Yevgeny Sudbin

**Jeremy Nicholas meets the young Russian pianist as he releases his first concerto disc, featuring one of the pinnacles of the popular repertoire and a challenging coupling**

**W**ith a new young pianist arriving fresh on the block every time you open *Gramophone*, how do you stand out from the crowd?

In the case of Yevgeny Sudbin you record a debut CD of Scarlatti sonatas (BIS, 5/05) that attracts rave reviews and then release a second disc (BIS, 11/05) of completely different repertoire (Rachmaninov's *Chopin* Variations and Second Sonata) that attracts an equally enthusiastic response. Now, as part of his five-year exclusive contract with the Swedish label, comes Sudbin's first concerto recording: the Tchaikovsky B flat minor paired with Medtner's rarely heard First Concerto.

The first question had to be, with 149 other versions available, why the Tchaikovsky? The likeable young Russian (he was born in 1980, moved to Germany with his family in 1990 and has lived in London since 1997) answers with a wry smile of acknowledgement. "It's a good question, but this concerto has always been special to me, the work that got me interested in classical music and the very first recording I ever heard – the version by Gilels. That was when I was four or five. So since that time I've always wanted to play it, but as with all great pieces one always hopes to contribute something different, something individual. The dilemma I faced is that you have to be aware of all the recordings that have been made and at the same time take it to new heights

without being cynical about it. It's a question of balancing past recordings with contributing individual thought."

If he loves the Tchaikovsky, Sudbin talks with missionary zeal when it comes to the Medtner. "It's probably one of the most difficult concertos I have ever played. Chopin No 1 is difficult but this is in a different league. First, playing with the orchestra is extremely hard

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because you have a lot of dialogue going on with different instruments. You must be a very good chamber musician to pull it off. Medtner's rhythms are unique and you have to make sure you are dancing the same dance as the orchestra instead of treading on one another's feet. Then there were a few passages which at first I didn't know how to master, like in the great coda for example. There's a metronome marking, supposedly by Medtner. If you want to play it at that speed you just have to have a third hand! It took me a few months to learn the work. From a technical point of view, for me, if I haven't

managed to absorb a piece in three weeks then I usually move on. So far there's only one piece that's defeated me – Ligeti's Study No 1."

As he discusses his musical decisions and ideals, one senses that behind Sudbin's amiable doe-eyed, floppy-haired exterior there runs a backbone of steel. "The São Paulo orchestra had never played it before. I had to do a lot of work with the conductor to ensure that we were on the same level musically. We are both quite strong personalities and when I arrived in São Paulo there was a lot of tension. We disagreed about tempi but finally agreed to compromise and he made a lot of positive suggestions. In the end, this contributed really well to the outcome. You have to keep the tempo relationships consistent because the concerto's in one movement with a lot of sections and variations, and once you lose the tempo you lose the line and the whole work falls apart."

The new disc will be another step in Sudbin's inexorable progress to the forefront of his generation of pianists. If that was not enough, rather irritatingly for people like me, he also writes elegant English and provides his own booklet-notes. Next up will be a disc of Scriabin with the Sonatas Nos 2, 5 and 9, the Op 38 Valse ("great piece") and the Op 10 Mazurkas. Mr Sudbin may have his feet firmly on the ground, but his career is flying. ●

**Yevgeny Sudbin's disc of Tchaikovsky and Medtner concertos is reviewed on page 88**