

JS: How difficult is it to transfer his keyboard style into pianistic terms, as opposed to the very different styles of Rameau, Couperin, Handel and Bach?

KATIN: I don't find it difficult at all! You're *not* transferring his keyboard style. If one accepts that one is playing him on a modern piano, another quite different but legitimate range of styles becomes possible.

KONSTANTIN SCHERBAKOV: Those who were born in the 20th century and who studied and played Beethoven, Chopin, Debussy and Rachmaninov are perfectly equipped, by this fact alone, to grasp and project Scarlatti's pianistic idiom. To 'style' Scarlatti's tone, as it were – to make us forget about the age of his music – is not at all difficult, provided a pianist has sufficient fantasy and pianistic skills. Scarlatti is very 'modern' in terms of his musical ideas, material layout and sonorities. His music is colourful and rich in myriad pianistic 'novelties', of harmony, keyboard and tonal space, orchestration of textures, and so on. It's much less polyphonic (in the most common sense of the word) than Bach's, spiritually less sophisticated, perhaps, and thus musically more easily accessible.

STAIER: Let's not forget, by the way, that Scarlatti actually *knew* the piano. He visited Florence several times, and without any doubt he knew Cristofori – and there were pianos ordered for the Spanish court.

JS: But Cristofori's pianos were hardly the same animal as the modern piano. Can you, as a harpsichordist and fortepianist, listen with actual pleasure to Scarlatti played on a modern concert grand?

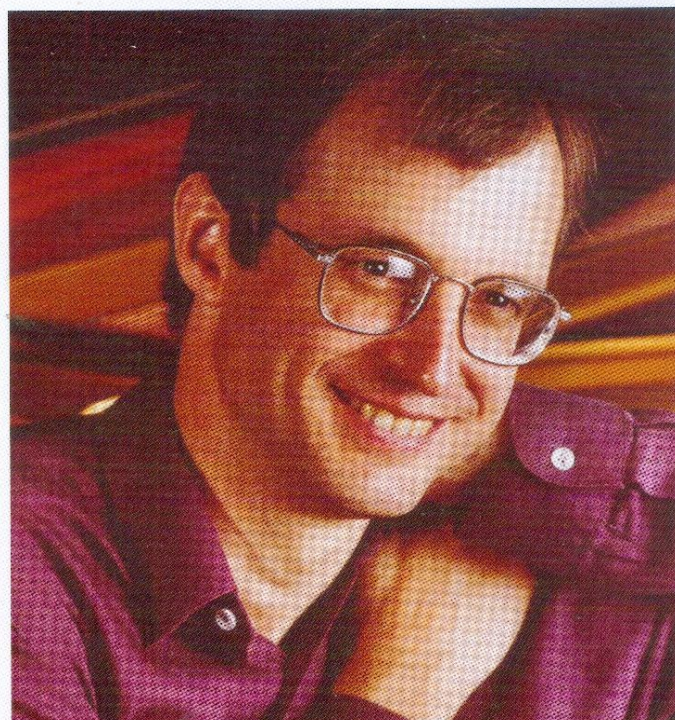
STAIER: Oh yes. Certainly. Horowitz made some absolutely beautiful recordings of Scarlatti. Of course it can be done. It will always sound different on a modern piano than on a Cristofori. But there are many sonatas that might just have been written for the piano in the first place, who knows? We must remember, of course, that those pianos were not much more similar to the modern piano than the harpsichords Scarlatti had. But one must be very selective in choosing the repertoire. Horowitz had wonderful judgement in his choice of which sonatas to play. They are all beautifully suited to the piano – unlike the very many sonatas which make great play with acciaccaturas, which in my opinion, *never* sound good on the modern piano, no matter how you do them, but which *can* be done convincingly on a fortepiano.

SUDBIN: I'm not sure whether this is altogether an appropriate answer to this particular question, but I actually have always felt that baroque music has something universal about it. It doesn't matter what instrument is used to bring the ideas across. I think the effect comes from somewhere else. I'm not sure what it is, but take Bach for example: it lends itself wonderfully to transcriptions (and of course he made many many transcriptions himself). You can knead and mould the music all you like, but the music will always speak with Bach's language. Sometimes it may have a rather unusual accent (as in dialect), like when Jacques Loussier has a hand in it, but it will always be Bach, with the same power of impact. And Scarlatti seems to me similar in many ways, like a lot of other baroque music. All pianists will have to make their own adjustments, but no matter what, it'll always be Scarlatti at the core.

SCHERBAKOV: But there will always be limits, and of course there are degrees of adjustment. Finding the right colours and articulations will always be of prime importance – and the dynamic range will have to be kept fairly modest if you don't want to get out of the historical sound frame. And then of course there's the question of rubato. Here again, only very limited possibilities are provided. The challenge is to make the rubato work without its being noticed. However, searching for nuances with the help of modern piano is a very gratifying task: you will always be able to find the necessary means for clearly articulating your ideas.

JS: Given that translation to the piano is already a major transgression of historical style, how concerned are you with historical accuracy when it comes to such things as ornamentation?

DEMIDENKO: Oh, a bit – but I don't get paranoid about it. If you compare the harpsichords of Scarlatti's times and the modern piano, you have to be flexible in these matters, because some things work better than



"It's extraordinary how prescient Scarlatti was. So much of subsequent modern piano technique is contained in these sonatas"
Benjamin Frith

others. Instrumentally. Trills, for instance, are actually much more difficult to perform on a harpsichord, whereas fast light passages and repetitions are far more difficult on a modern instrument.

KATIN: I don't think one can slavishly observe historical ornamentation. Whatever 'authentic' ornamentation one may use, it won't sound the same on a modern piano, and one has to decide how to treat each case on its merits.

SUDBIN: It's interesting – during my student years, I studied ornamentation for various styles of music in great detail, but when it came to Scarlatti sonatas, I simply trusted my instincts. Not a scholarly way to do it, I admit, but I find that ornamentation is a little bit like pedalling; the less time you spend time worrying about it (and the more you use your ears), the more organic it should come out (ideally).

LESTER: Baroque ornamentation is a vast subject. French ornamentation, for example, is a complicated lifetime study, but related to Scarlatti's music, the concerns are relatively small. By that, I mean that he employs the accepted signs (upper mordent, trill etc) and one interprets those within the context and character of the piece. Certain rules based on historical evidence govern the execution of these ornaments (beginning on the upper auxiliary for example), but there are question marks that hang over his use of acciaccaturas and appoggiaturas in the manuscripts which in many cases are applied inconsistently; and over the word 'tremolo', too – that elusive term which crops up now and again and still hasn't received a convincing explanation. Unwritten ornamentation also includes the free decoration of melodic lines that can enhance the repeat of a section at the discretion of the performer. None of these reasons, though, should obscure in any way their successful transmission to the piano. Sensitivity to the expressive text is what's paramount.

SCHERBAKOV: An ornament has to be a 'flower' on a note. It has to organically grow from it, supporting all the qualities of its melodic and dynamic context as well as its tempo and articulation. But the fact is, I'm very little concerned, I have to confess, about 'historical' truth or accuracy.

JS: What's your approach to pedalling in Scarlatti? How 'pianistic' are you prepared to be?