

A CONVERSATION WITH...



Yevgeny Sudbin

From fatherhood and photography to tackling Beethoven's concertos with the Minnesota Orchestra, the Russian pianist is taking everything in his stride, finds **Caroline Gill**

It's all very calm in the Sudbin household, and there are a number of reasons why this is surprising. The most immediately obvious is the presence of their baby daughter, Isabella, who should be screaming for attention rather than gurgling happily at the stranger who has turned up on her doorstep to talk to her father. A more existential reason might be that when one turns up to interview an artist who has recorded the sort of dazzlingly wide repertoire within a very short period of time as Yevgeny Sudbin has, one expects to meet a restless Man On A Mission, and not someone exuding quiet harmony.

Later on in our conversation we discuss Sudbin's myriad other interests (although he professes not to be a multi-tasker beyond his diverse musical tastes), all of which have in common a need for minute attention to detail. High on the list is photography. "I yearn for permanency," he says. "Photography, like recording, is a document of what happened at the time, that you can always refer back to."

This seems to be key with Sudbin, and although he enjoys live performance, he makes several references in our conversation to preferring recording. That dazzlingly wide repertoire (Sudbin stresses the middle syllable of "repertoire", accenting the strong Russian accent behind his flawless English) he maintains, and continuously broadens, has yielded discs as diverse as Scarlatti – his first recording, and the one which garnered the reviews that led BIS to offer him a seven-year, 14-disc contract allowing him total artistic freedom to choose his programmes – Haydn and Scriabin. This musical journey has led him to his most recent release, the Fourth and Fifth Beethoven piano concertos, which will be the first in a complete Beethoven concerto cycle (although the next discs will be of Russian cello sonatas and solo

Chopin), recorded with the Minnesota Orchestra and Osmo Vänskä, a conductor with whom Sudbin professes to have one of his best working relationships. "He is fantastic," he says. "There's nothing quirky about his interpretations: they're completely natural but sound fresh."

Recording two of the most influential concertos in piano literature is a brave undertaking and although Sudbin is mindful of the fact, he also professes strong feelings about the long and commonly held preconceptions about the personalities of these concertos. He talks a lot about what he considers to be the fundamentally introverted nature of both works, and maintains that this view gives the pieces much more power. "It's a bit like speech," he says. "If you speak softly you're

more likely to get attention. I don't like the title *Emperor* because a lot of the lyricism can get lost if you concentrate on the heavy elements.

Of course virtuosity is there but it's

just a tool to try to communicate and bring in all the other qualities that are also there. It can be hard in concerts because not everyone gets it."

The inherent "personality" of the music is something that obviously concerns Sudbin deeply and he talks a lot about the idiosyncrasies of old recordings – of Moiseiwitsch, Friedman and Hofmann in particular – to illustrate how he feels it is important to explore as many perspectives of a composer as possible (he is particularly anxious about this process in relation to Chopin's music).

"With Tchaikovsky or Rachmaninov you have time to warm up in the first few pages but with this Beethoven you have nowhere to hide," he says. "I've always thought that talent lies not in our musical abilities – that's just hard work – but in our ability to focus on what you think is important and finding the most efficient route to get the result you want." ●

Read the review of Sudbin's Beethoven disc on page 63

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