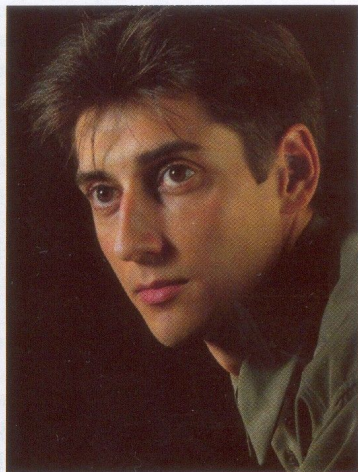


# Up close and personal

Pianist **YEVGENY SUDBIN** discovers that getting too caught up in Scriabin's music can bring you to the brink of madness



**You're driving me crazy! Yevgeny Sudbin faces up to Scriabin**

I was influenced hugely by an encounter with the music of Alexander Scriabin. Not my first encounter – I had known his music before and thought it beautiful. But I came to him again through an inspirational professor, Alexander Satz. Studying Scriabin with him was an experience like no other. It changed my view, not only of this composer, but of playing music in general.

Satz, who died this year and to whom I have dedicated a new recording of Scriabin, had an unusual teaching method. He would simply sit at the piano and play parts of Scriabin's output to me. Then he would talk about the pieces and their context.

Scriabin was a deeply mystical person. Especially towards the end of his life, he was obsessed with the idea of experiencing God through the musical performance. He even came up with a "mystical chord". The last piece he wanted to write was to be performed in the Himalayas, with the audience participating, and through the use of this mystical chord the world would, he thought, be recreated and new, nobler beings would emerge.

Before that he went through so many phases and changes. But even in his early period, which interests me tremendously, you can still hear this craziness which would fully emerge later. You often read of the effect Scriabin's music can have on

people. They sometimes describe literally seeing lights dancing in the hall, and the composer certainly wanted to directly project his music so that you can taste it and smell it. If the effect is very strong for the listener, it is a hundred times more intense for the performer. When I became involved with this music, it was a physical as well as spiritual experience. For weeks after playing Scriabin, I would feel physically sick.

After Satz taught me, I was completely obsessed. For many months I did not do anything but breathe Scriabin. It took over my life to an unhealthy extent.

Performances for me used to be about trying to relive emotions rather than re-enacting them. My Scriabin obsession taught me that if you give in to the emotions every time, you can go completely mad. So I learnt to distance myself emotionally from composers.

Scriabin's later works have a lot of that sense of being indoctrinated into a musical cult. Indeed, his Ninth Sonata is a Black Mass! But then, the early period is Chopinesque, extremely charming – but always with those dark undertones that will dominate his later pieces. I was overcome to such an extent that I had to force myself to stop playing and listening to Scriabin for a while. ©

**Yevgeny Sudbin's new Scriabin disc on BIS is released this month.**