

ENTER RUSTEM HAYROUDINOFF

Rustem Hayroudinoff is a fighter for musical as well as personal truth. Paul Cutts meets the Russian pianist making his Wigmore Hall début in January

When it comes to expressing opinions, Rustem Hayroudinoff is not backwards in coming forwards. On subjects as diverse as pianism and Marxism, the young Russian artist has a strong point of view. And he's needed all the steely determination he can muster to deal with the challenges life has thrown in his path.

Born to a musical family (his father studied cello with Mstislav Rostropovich), Hayroudinoff's experience was shaped by two influences – music and Communism. Trained at a specialist music school in Kazhan, he went on to study at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatoire under Lev Naumov, at a time 'when everything in Russia was collapsing; although it was perestroika, it was still a Communist regime'.

'Sometimes for great concerts in Moscow, the Communist party apparatchiks would get three quarters of the tickets for themselves,' he continues. 'That's why common people sometimes had to queue for days and nights to hear artists. It was when Vladimir Horowitz returned to Russia to perform in Moscow that the tradition was born of breaking into concert halls. But I was really getting sick of that situation, and that's when I decided I would like to try something new in terms of musical experience.'

BREAKING FREE

'Something new' was a move to London in 1992, where he pursued his studies at London's Royal Academy of Music under the expert guidance Christopher Elton.

'I wanted to hear more music,' Hayroudinoff explains, 'not just by Russians but also different approaches. In terms of concerts, London is still the capital of the world. But because of my visa status I was not allowed to work, play or teach for money. I'd played at the Barbican, at the Queen Elizabeth Hall and for radio. Then the Home Office said, "Pack your bags and go". My choice was either to clear off in 28 days or appeal. I chose the latter.'

The situation dragged on for three years.

'I thought, "I can't play the piano for three years and not play a single concert",' Hayroudinoff recalls. 'I was the age when most people are making careers, concerts or entering competitions. It was

the darkest period of my life. Then out of the blue, the Home Office said they had looked at my papers and given me exceptional leave to remain.'

After years of false starts, it was the beginning of a career for Hayroudinoff. He decided to enter a few piano competitions to increase his profile and expose himself to audiences. But the experience was rarely happy, and often frustrating. He recalls one competition where he was a highly



placed finalist: 'One of the pupils of an official at the competition got the first prize,' Hayroudinoff remembers. 'I was more angry than nervous. Another competition I entered, I found out three years later, had decided they needed an American winner. I'm now convinced that wherever there's a competition there's corruption, because it only takes one corrupt juror for the event itself to be corrupt. Competitions are not about music.'

HELP FROM THE EAST

Despite his anger, one of the competitions proved a blessing in disguise: 'A Japanese juror went back

to the country and told a newspaper that I should have won the event. The next thing was that I had been contacted by someone in Japan saying they would like to hear me play – and that's how my career there began. I now have a Japanese agent and I perform in there regularly.'

Audiences in other Far East territories, in his native Russia, in the USA, in Germany, the Republic of Ireland and here in the UK have also been impressed by Hayroudinoff's penetratingly musical performances, while radio listeners from as far apart as Australia, Yugoslavia, Sweden and Chicago have heard him in performance.

Hayroudinoff is also well represented on CD. A disc of music by Schubert, Chopin, Rachmaninoff and Johann Strauss (released in Japan in 1999) was highly acclaimed. His CD featuring the music of Shostakovich was released by Chandos in April 2001. The Shostakovich CD features the world-première recording of *Theatre Music* by Shostakovich, a work he's bringing to London's Wigmore Hall in January. He'll follow it up with a disc of music by another Russian, Sergei Rachmaninov. Of earlier influences he singles out the impact of Rachmaninov's own recordings, as well as those by Vladimir Horowitz.

INFLUENCE OF HOMETOWN

So are Hayroudinoff's Russian roots still important to him?

'Absolutely,' he insists. 'In Russia the musical traditions are still the best. It's interesting that here, where there are so many concerts,

there's no real system that would be able to compete with a Russian musical education.'

He also singles out two pianists as particular influences, one of them Russia's Vladimir Ashkenazy: 'I have enormous respect for Ashkenazy. Apart from his artistry and achievements, I do not think I have ever come across a more humble man. I am also really grateful to Murray Perahia, because from a musician's point of view he knows exactly how he wants to interpret every single note.' ■

Rustem Hayroudinoff's Wigmore Hall début is on Sunday 2 January (16:00), when he plays works by Frank, Schumann, Shostakovich, Ravel and Rachmaninov