

Russian-born pianists light up Seattle

By John Sutherland

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It was quite a week for Russian-born pianists in Seattle, one an accomplished young phenom, another approaching the status of grandmaster.

The UW President's Piano Series brought Yevgeny Sudbin to Seattle, and the 27-year-old pianist brought with him the spirits of the underplayed composer Alexander Scriabin and the often-ignored Nikolai Medtner.

Sudbin is not a particularly flamboyant pianist. Rather, he is a wise soul in a young body who steps aside to let the composer's work shine through whenever he can. In Wednesday night's recital, the composer who shone brightest was certainly Scriabin; the entire second half of the program was dedicated to his work

The Sonata No. 2 was consciously written as an attempt to capture the visual mood of the seashore at night, and there is no substitute for an expert live performance of this sonic portrait of moonlight. Sudbin brilliantly captured these fits of ecstasy moderated by oases of contemplative beauty.

The famous "Messe Noire," which ended the program, is dominated by diabolical darkness; but it begins gently, as though the composer were dipping tentatively into curious experiments with sorcery. Sudbin brings out all the magical trills, the dark descending figures, and the clawing chord clusters that make this piece unique and remarkable.

Earlier in the program Sudbin played the Sonata "Remeniscenza" by Medtner, the greatest Russian composer you've never heard of. Sudbin's performance of this wistful, expressive piece, reinforced the notion that this composer is one you should seek out.