

ALEXANDRA DOVGAN

SEEN AND HEARD INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEW

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S&H

YOUNG RUSSIAN PIANIST ALEXANDRA DOVGAN TALKS TO GREGOR TASSIE

Alexandra Dovgan in conversation with Gregor Tassie



/Photo Oscar Tursunov

The eleven-year-old **Alexandra Dovgan** was honoured by opening the Ninth Rakhlin International Music Festival in Kazan playing Mendelssohn's First Piano Concerto together with Alexander Sladkovsky's outstanding Tatarstan National Symphony Orchestra, an event (review [click here](#)) which I attended together with journalists from Israel, St Petersburg, and Moscow. Alexandra was born in 2007 in the Russian capital, into a musical family, and when she was just seven-years-old was the prize-winner of the Villahermosa Internet Competition in Mexico. Since which this diminutive girl has won another eight piano competitions, and last summer she won the International Grand Piano Competition in Moscow with the Mendelssohn First Concerto accompanied by Sladkovsky and the State Symphony Orchestra (Svetlanov).

Alexandra has been awarded a prize by the Japanese Yamaha piano company and granted scholarships from the Spivakov Foundation, the Mstislav Rostropovich and the New Names

Foundation. The Russian piano school is unquestionably the richest in tradition in the world – not only for the acclaimed technique – but for its musicality and artistry. The traditions of Rubinstein, Rachmaninoff, and Prokofiev continue despite the earth-shaking events of the twentieth century. A steady stream of dazzlingly gifted musicians is appearing and Alexandra Dovgan – among the latest exponents of the Russian school – has a great career ahead of her. At present, Alexandra studies at the Central Moscow Musical School with Mira Marchenko – one of Russia’s finest piano teachers.

I was privileged to be granted an interview with this modest, and very shy girl who likes to spend her time playing on swings while she isn’t playing the piano at home.

GT: *What inspired you to begin playing music?*

AD: My parents are both musicians – there was an old fortepiano at home, and I began to play on it from the age of three or four years old. I live in Moscow and both my parents are pianists. I love the piano as an instrument – I especially love to play in a concert hall and to give people joy from hearing my playing.

GT: *Do you feel any sense of nerves before going on stage, even some of the great pianists like Emil Gilels feared going on stage before a recital.*

AD: Now it is fine, but before I certainly was nervous, but I always want to play well so it is no problem for me anymore.

GT: *Are there any particular composers that you like most of all?*

AD: I love all the composers whose music I play. Together with my teacher, we choose the composers which most suit my character and my technique. The composers closest to my heart are those that I played today – Mendelssohn and Rachmaninoff – but most of all Rachmaninoff as his music comes through so well for me. I love Bach very much, also I love Prokofiev, Mozart and Beethoven, all their concertos and Haydn too. I prefer the romantics; they are closest to my heart.

GT: *Is this the first time that you have been to Kazan? Did you have time to visit art galleries or the theatre?*

AD: I don’t have time to visit museums or the theatre – but sometimes I make a point of going. Yes, it’s the first time that I am in Kazan, [with my father] we visited the Kremlin – I like it a lot – it’s a very beautiful city.

GT: *What about literature, many musicians are close to Russian poetry, do you have any favourite writers or poets?*

AD: I don’t have any favourite writers, apart from Pushkin and Yesenin.



// Photo Oscar Tursunov

GT: *With your growing concert commitments, you have a busy schedule, has this led to concerts outside Russia? How do you manage your school work?*

AD: I studied German, but I don't go to school now as I have so many concerts and I practice a great deal, so we have an agreement with my teachers who give me homework. I have many concerts both in Russia and abroad. In November, I opened the Russian Seasons in Berlin, and I gave concerts all over the country with another prize-winner. I also gave concerts in Venice, where I accompanied Maestro [Vladimir] Spivakov in a violin recital.

GT: *What new repertoire are you introducing for your future concerts? How do you decide which new concertos to learn? What about new competitions?*

AD: I already know Beethoven's Second Concerto and Mozart's Concerto No.23, and I have plans for the Bach D minor Concerto, and later Rachmaninoff's First Concerto and Chopin's Second Concerto, and several other concertos. Of course, these are all discussed with my teacher. Yes, however, rather than more competitions, I would prefer to play many new works.

GT: *How do you manage your concert schedule, does your family help you?*

AD: My family helps me a great deal, and they accompany me on long trips.

GT: *Do you listen to other musicians in concerts?*

AD: Of course, I really love to hear other musicians. I listen to recordings – but it is great if I can hear and see them live in concert. It doesn't have to be pianists – I love listening to orchestral concerts, and to violinists.

GT: *I noticed that you listened to the second part of the concert tonight; to the Mahler symphony, what were your impressions?*

AD: To be frank, this was the first time that I heard Mahler's First Symphony live, and in such a magnificent performance by the orchestra under Alexander Vitalyevich [Sladkovsky]. I was very impressed that Alexander Vitalyevich conducted this huge musical canvass without a score! My father and I downloaded the music onto our iPad, so I could understand the work fully. Regardless of the vastness of the music – it seemed as if it was performed all in one breath – I was so taken from the first notes. It made a colossal impression on me!

GT: *I am glad you enjoyed the experience of hearing the Mahler symphony. Thank you for your time and I wish you all the very best in your future career, it's so difficult for young people today, and you are an inspiration to many others.*

Alexandra Dovgan's performance of the Mendelssohn Piano Concerto No.1 from the 2018 Grand Piano Competition can be [watched here](#).

A brief interview with Alexandra from last year's competition in Moscow has subtitles in English ([click here](#)).

Gregor Tassie

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