

The Russians rule at pianist Jade Simmons' visual recital

By Mark Hinson
DEMOCRAT SENIOR WRITER

No, synesthesia is not a Casio-driven pop band from England in the '80s.

It's a neurological phenomenon that happens when one sensory pathway in the brain is stimulated and triggers a second, involuntary reaction. Some people hear music and automatically see colors. Very trippy.

"I took several courses during undergrad in music cognition and I've always been fascinated (by) the ties between art and psychology/ artists and mental illness/music as therapy," concert pianist Jade Simmons said in an e-mail. "So when I found out about the phenomenon of synesthesia I became curious about the artists who might have been affected by it. Discovering that both

(composer Alexander Scriabin and (painter Wassily) Kandinsky were synesthetes ... led me to the creation of this project combining music and art."

On Sunday afternoon, Simmons will present "Hearing Color, Seeing Sound: The Music of Scriabin and the Paintings of Kandinsky" as part of a recital for the Artist Series. The opening half of the concert will feature an all-Russian program that includes works by Sergei Prokofiev and Sergei Rachmaninoff.

For music and art fans who want to learn more about Simmons' approach to "Hearing Color, Seeing Sound," she will give a free hourlong talk at 3 p.m. Saturday in Lindsay Recital Hall at the FSU College of Music.

Surprisingly, for a pianist who likes to

IF YOU GO

What: Concert pianist Jade Simmons presents an all-Russian recital as part of the Artist Series

When: 4 p.m. Sunday

Where: East Hill Baptist Church, 912 Miccosukee Road

Cost: \$30 for the general public, \$10 for students, free for children 12 and under

Contact: Call 224-9934 or visit www.theartistseries.com

show paintings as she plays, Simmons does not consider herself an art expert.

"I'm not as much of an art buff as I would like to be," Simmons said. "I am the founder of The Impulse Artist Series, which provides performance opportunities and career building assistance to emerging concert pianists, and



Jade Simmons gives a talk on Saturday and a concert on Sunday.

we host our concerts in Wade Wilson Art, a local gallery in Houston. The purpose is to have our audiences have simultaneous artistic experiences at once."

The multitasking Simmons is a native of Charleston, S.C., who studied music at Northwestern University, where she co-founded the percussion-and-dance ensemble Boomshaka! She also was crowned Miss Illinois and became the first runner-up at the 2000

Miss America Pageant, where she wowed judges and millions of viewers with a Chopin etude during the televised contest. Simmons went on to get a master's degree from Rice University in Texas.

The intellectually curious Simmons said she always has had a fascination with Russian culture — even reading "War and Peace" while awaiting the arrival of her first son, Jaden, two years ago.

With so much demanding, dramatic Russian music swirling in the air this weekend, will audiences feel a little overwhelmed? Or will they — and the artist — require a stiff shot of vodka?

"The audience will be bombarded, in the best way possible, by the passion of the Rachmaninoff pieces, the spell-binding nature of the preludes and the 'machinery' of the Prokofiev," Simmons said. "But, yes, as easily as this music comes to me, when it comes to expression, these pieces are bears. Even the minor preludes each offer their own challenges. I don't drink, actually, but when I finish this program — and sometimes before I start it — I always think, 'This might be a good time to start.'"