



Maria Kovalevskaia and **Natalia Maximova** met while they were both students at the *Musikhochschule* in Hamburg, where they discovered their common love of music and art in all its manifestations. They are both concert pianists in their own right, but they have also, as a duo, given concerts together and participated in international competitions.

They both worked on a project called „The Night Soul“, initiated by Maria in 2012 in order to realise musical projects which transcend the boundaries of

the classical recital, involving other musicians as well as actors to combine classical music with jazz and literary elements. The idea was inspired by the private musical salons and semi-spontaneous artists' evenings common in the Vienna of Schubert's time. As „The Night Soul“, they have become known for their musical soirées and performances at various venues in and around Hamburg and by participating in the *Elbjazz* Festival.

It was Professor Lilya Zilberstein who in 2014 encouraged them to form a piano duo, which in turn led to their enrolling in a post-graduate course with Professors Hans-Peter and Volker Stenzl in Rostock, where they were recently awarded a first-class masters degree.

As ART PianoDuo they give classical concerts in a variety of venues, e.g. musical afternoons at „Meßmer Momentum“ in the Hamburg *Hafencity*, where in 2012 they won a prize for the best concept. In June 2017, they won first prize in the category „Piano four hands artistic excellence“ as well as the Grand Prix at the Concours Musical de France in Paris.

Maria KOVALEVSKAIA was born in Moscow in 1985 and began playing the piano at the age of 6. She started her formal musical education under the guidance of Professor Tigran Alichanov at the preparatory school for the Moscow Tchaikovsky conservatory. At age 16 however, she came to Hamburg with her parents to continue her studies in the class of Professor Evgeny Koroliov, eventually passing both her piano diploma and her concert exam with the highest honours. She was supported throughout by a scholarship from the Oskar und Vera Ritter Stiftung and received a bursary from the Masefield Foundation.

Maria initiated a number of projects while still a student, the most successful being „The Night Soul“. She has participated in a number of piano competitions, master classes and music festivals. Among others, at age 12 she won first prize at the Beethoven Competition for Young Pianists in the category „piano duo“; in 2002 she was a finalist in the International Piano Competition Adilia Alieva in France, and in 2011 won first prize in the Elise-Meyer Competition in Hamburg.

Natalia MAXIMOVA was born in St. Petersburg in 1988. From age 7 she developed an energetic interest in the piano and began studying this instrument. Her formal education began at the School for Music and Art Shostakovich in St. Petersburg and continued in 2004 at the Mussorgsky College under the guidance of Professor Tatiana Osipova, moving on to the St. Petersburg conservatory Rimsky-Korsakov to study with Professor Egorov just a year later. In 2009, she moved to Hamburg to study in the class of Professor Johanna Wiedenbach at the Musikhochschule, where she, too, was supported by a scholarship from the Oskar und Vera Ritter Stiftung and a bursary from the Masefield Foundation.

Chamber music has a special place in Natalias musical universe, and when in 2013 she met a like-minded person in Maria Kovalevskaia, they were soon making music together as a piano duo. Natalia has taken part in various master classes and festivals, e.g. the Sergey Rachmaninoff Festival in St. Petersburg. She has also won a number of prizes in piano competitions, taking first prize in the Baltiiskij Competition in St. Petersburg in 1997 and the prize for the best etude in 1999 and 2000. She was a finalist of the International Shostakovich Competition in Moscow in 2008, and won first prize at the Concours Musical de France in Paris in 2011.