

# The Magic in Deal Concert

by Jack Woolford



In an attempt to promote and augment harmony amongst member societies, a piano recital by Moscow born and London trained Sophia Lisovskaya, an internationally acclaimed virtuoso, known to us in Kent through the Whitstable Music Society (which happens also to be chaired by KFAS Chairman John Walker) was held in Deal Town Hall on Saturday October 4 2008. Although the numerical response suggested that not all amenity society members are (classically or romantically) musical (and several non-members, from Dover and Whitstable, happily gatecrashed) the evening was as magical as it was predictable.

Already known from her earlier Whitstable recital, Sophia particularly delights in playing the Chopin nocturnes, preludes and studies, which are less well known than the waltzes and polonaises. Though slight in build and almost

crouched over the keyboard, the sheer physical power and equally sheer tiniest whisper of sound, both mirrored in her beautiful facial expressions, are spellbinding. How such faultless control of blindingly difficult technical problems can co-exist with deep emotional response and commitment is unfathomable, and consequently enchanting. Sophia (witness her CDs as well as recitals) particularly champions the preludes and studies, etc, of the less well-known Scriabin, contemporary of Rachmaninov and Stravinsky. Although musically a descendant of Chopin, with nods in the direction of Debussy, he developed a powerful individual style of prodigious technical difficulty, alternating wild harmonic savagery with melting, lyrical, tenderness. The preludes and studies are disarmingly brief but *Vers La Flamme*, with which Sophia climaxed her recital, is as full of fire as its name suggests.

Romantic Chopin and Scriabin we knew from Whitstable, but what of classical Beethoven, with whose Sonata Pathétique (Op 13) Sophia dared to begin her recital in Deal. Shades of Schnabel, Brendel, and Barenboim... Beethoven's very name arouses expectation beyond the ordinary and demands courage as well as competence, to stand up to inevitable comparison. Sophia need have no fear. From the explosively dramatic opening chord, through the warmly comforting slow movement to the diabolically fiery finale she was superb, establishing a rapport with the audience unique in my nonagenarian experience.