

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier
University



Laurier offers first concert featuring antique Streicher piano

One of a few in playing condition, Laurier's fortepiano draws international attention

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WATERLOO – Southern Ontario music lovers are being offered an opportunity without compare: the chance to attend the first North American public performance of an antique pianoforte, created 150 years ago by the renowned Streicher firm of Vienna.

Handmade by Johann Baptist Streicher circa 1848, the pianoforte recently acquired by Wilfrid Laurier University is one of only a few functional instruments of its kind in North America. The Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York has already arranged to borrow the instrument for a concert in July.

The Faculty of Music at Laurier will debut the Streicher piano at 8 p.m. on January 18 with a concert of early 19th-century Viennese music in the Maureen Forrester Recital Hall. Faculty members and students will perform five pieces from the period.

"All of the pieces on the program were created around the same time as the Streicher piano, so the instrument influenced the music," explains Laurier professor and fortepianist Heather Toews. "The last piece on the program, for example, is Robert Schumann's *Carnaval*, Op. 9. Schumann's wife Clara was famous for her performances of *Carnaval* and she played the piece on a Streicher piano that was identical to the one we have."

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The program also includes Toews and James Parker playing Schubert's *Marche Militaire in E flat Major*, D 733, No. 3 for piano duet; soprano Jane Archibald singing *Bei der Wiege, Neue Liebe, Fruhlingstraum* and *Suleika* by Mendelssohn; cellist Cathy Anderson playing Schumann's *Phantasiestucke*, Op. 73; and the Penderecki String Quartet performing Beethoven's *String Quartet in A minor*, Op. 132. This will be the first performance by the Penderecki since violinist Jeremy Bell replaced Piotr Buczek.

Admission to the concert is \$15; seniors, Laurier faculty and staff pay \$10; students attend for free. The CBC radio program *Music Around Us* will record and later broadcast most of the concert.

Laurier acquired its fortepiano in September from the Edwin Beunk Collection in the Netherlands. The piano has seven octaves and includes a walnut case, a wooden frame and a Viennese action (the inner workings). The strings are strung in parallel lines, which provides greater clarity of individual notes than does modern cross-stringing.

Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann and Brahms all preferred the Viennese action over the English, German or Austrian versions. Streicher fortepianos are known for their sweet and mellow tones. Laurier's Streicher has been used for several European recordings, including one of the Schumann piano concerto.

The Streicher firm dominated piano building in Vienna from the 1780s to the 1870s. Andreas Stein founded the firm and Mozart favoured the legendary Stein pianos. Stein's daughter Nanette (Stein) Streicher took over the firm and was Beethoven's preferred builder. Johann Baptist Streicher continued the success of his mother and grandfather by building pianos for Mendelssohn, Schumann and Brahms.

In September, 1999, Laurier will host a conference on the role of the fortepiano in postsecondary education. Malcolm Billson, arguably the best fortepianist in the world, Bart van Oort from The Hague in the Netherlands and other international performers have already indicated they hope to attend.