

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier
University



New Orleans pianist will perform in hurricane benefit concert

For Immediate Release

**December 05, 2005
85-05**

Contact: Daniel Lichti
Associate Professor, Voice
(519) 884-0710 ext. 2646

or Michael Strickland
Manager, Media Relations & Information
(519) 884-0710 ext. 3070

WATERLOO – A Soviet-born pianist and composer who lost her home to Hurricane Katrina will perform in a benefit concert and teach a masterclass at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Faina Lushtak will perform a variety of works, including some of her own compositions, during a concert at 8 p.m. on Friday, January 6, in Laurier's Maureen Forrester Recital Hall. Net proceeds from ticket sales, estimated at \$4,000, will be donated to the Mennonite Central Committee's Hurricane Katrina response efforts.

The program includes works by Mozart, Chopin, Liszt, Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff. Laurier voice professor Daniel Lichti, who invited Lushtak after meeting her at the Schlern International Music Festival in Italy this summer, will perform the Michelangelo Lieder by Hugo Wolf with Lushtak. She will finish the concert with her own compositions.

"Considering the tremendous loss that she and her family have suffered, I think it's incredibly brave that she is performing this way immediately," said Lichti. "The fate of Ms. Lushtak's home is still in question, but she has lost a great deal, including a prized Steinway piano."

Lushtak's home in New Orleans was among those devastated by Katrina. She and her neighbours are waiting to learn if their homes can be repaired or if the neighbourhood must be demolished. Though her home is standing, the first floor and its contents were destroyed.

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“We lost photo albums and a great many personal effects, but the greatest loss was of my piano,” said Lushtak. “Steinways are all different. Like people, they all have different personalities.”

But no sooner was the damage reviewed, than Lushtak was confirming existing engagements and booking new ones. “One has to have a certain degree of optimism in order to leave the Soviet Union,” she explains.

Lushtak was born and raised in the Soviet Union. A child prodigy, she began her piano and composition studies at the age of six. She graduated from the Stolyarskii Special Music School for Musically Gifted Children and later earned her degrees in piano performance and composition from the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory.

Since her debut at the age of 10, Lushtak’s concert performances have inspired audiences throughout her native Russia, in Western halls from Austria to Italy, and in the United States. She has performed both as a solo recitalist and as a guest artist with numerous symphony orchestras under the batons of William Henry Curry, Maxim Shostakovich, Alfred Slavia, John Paul and Larry Cullison.

A dedicated teacher, Lushtak is on the faculty of the Schlern International Music Festival in Italy. She is also Downman Professor of Music at the Newcomb music department of Tulane University, where she heads the piano division and is music director of Tulane’s concert piano series. She hopes to be back teaching and directing at Tulane on January 17.

Tickets for the concert are \$30 per person; \$20 for students and seniors. Laurier’s faculty of music is suggesting that patrons, whether supportive of music or Katrina victims, might give tickets as gifts this Christmas. They are available from Laurier’s faculty of music at (519) 884-0710 ext. 2150.

Lushtak will also teach a masterclass in the recital hall on Saturday, January 7 from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Though targeted at senior piano students, the class is open to the public and admission is free. Audience members will see and hear how a renowned piano instructor teaches students to interpret music.