



# BILLINGS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA & CHORALE

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CAPTURE THE SPIRIT OF THE BILLINGS SYMPHONY'S 2008-2009 SEASON

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE August 28, 2008

### **Billings Symphony opens its 58<sup>th</sup> Season with dramatic Russian flair**

Billings, MT — The Billings Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Maestra Anne Harrigan, enters its 58<sup>th</sup> Season presenting **Opening Night with Valentina Lisitsa**, which showcases well-loved Russian composers and selections of music, on Saturday, September 13, 2008, at 7:30 p.m. at the Alberta Bair Theater. "Concert Cues," a half hour interactive discussion of the evening's musical selections led by special guest, Frank Dans, artistic administrator of the Cleveland Orchestra, with Valentina Lisitsa begins at 6:45 p.m., and is free to all ticket holders.

Known by critics as an "electrifying pianist," internationally renowned Ukrainian-born Valentina Lisitsa performs Sergei Rachmaninoff's demanding Piano Concerto No. 2. (Piano Concerto No. 2 is heard in the movie *The Seven Year Itch* when Tom Ewell's character plays a recording of the concerto in the hopes that the passionate music will seduce Marilyn Monroe's character.)

The Chicago Tribune raves "...Lisitsa impressed with an unerring dynamic sense. Soft passages were so delicate, you were afraid to breathe, while Rachmaninoff's chords thundered effortlessly from Lisitsa's fingers."

The Fort Worth Star-Telegram says, "her performance produced a universe of emotions and a catalog of distinctive piano tones within the confines of good classical-era style."

This dynamic evening begins with the orchestra performing Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *Russian Easter Overture*, which represents the elegant power of Orthodox tradition. Overture's somber

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fragments of liturgical chants, superseded by themes of joy and celebrations, is followed by Igor Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite* (1919), which depicts the eternal struggle between good and evil. Commissioned as a score for a ballet, *Firebird* is based on Russian folk tales of the magical glowing bird of the same name that is both a blessing and a curse to its captor.

**Opening Night with Valentina Lisitsa** is sponsored by The Oakland Companies with additional guest artist funding provided by David and Cynthia Hummel.

For more information or to purchase tickets, call the Symphony office at (406) 252-3610 or visit [www.billingssymphony.org](http://www.billingssymphony.org). Ticket prices range from \$20 to \$43. Student discounts are available with a valid I.D.

**About Valentina Lisitsa:** Born to a family of non-musicians, Lisitsa began playing the piano at age three and performed her first solo recital at age four. But unlike most music prodigies, Lisitsa did not think about a career as a concert pianist. She wanted to become a professional chess player. With a minimum of practice time and by relying on her extraordinary sight-reading abilities and photographic memory, she sailed through the Kiev Conservatory, winning competitions along the way. It was only when she met Alexei Kuznetsoff, a fellow student at the Conservatory and her future partner in life as well as in duo-pianism, that Lisitsa started thinking about music seriously. Kuznetsoff, a very serious and knowledgeable musician, became the major influence on Lisitsa's transformation from dazzling virtuoso into extraordinary musician.

The first major enterprise undertaken by the young couple turned out to be not only a great success but a turning point in their lives. They decided to prepare for the most important two-piano competition in the world, "The Murray Dranoff Two Piano Competition" in the United States. In one year of intense work, they achieved something which ordinarily takes decades--becoming a seamless duo-piano team. Their "reward," in addition to winning first prize in the 1991 Competition, was an opportunity to move to the United States and launch careers as one of the most highly-esteemed piano duos in the country, beginning with their orchestral debut at the Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center in New York.

Although they didn't know it, the solo career of Lisitsa was about to take off as well, thanks to a bit of "luck," if one can call it "luck," to find one unplayable piano at a scheduled two-piano recording session. Rather than calling the day off, it was suggested that Lisitsa record some solo works. This impromptu recording session resulted in two more CDs - but this time solo CDs - and the launch of Lisitsa's highly successful solo career. Soon she was performing in the world's most prestigious concert venues, from New York's Carnegie Hall and Avery Fisher Hall, to Vienna's Musikverein and Amsterdam's Concertgebouw.

Having well over 30 concerti in her repertoire, she crisscrossed the globe performing with such orchestras as the Sao Paulo Symphony in Brazil, the New Zealand Philharmonic, and the Prague Chamber Orchestra.

**About the Billings Symphony Orchestra & Chorale:** *Since the founding of the Billings Symphony Society in May of 1951, the organization's mission has been to enhance the quality of life in this part of the Rocky Mountain Northwest by offering musical enlightenment and intellectual stimulation to traditional audiences, as well as those who are geographically isolated, economically challenged and culturally underserved. Today, fifty-seven years later, that mission remains the driving force behind the Billings Symphony Orchestra & Chorale (BSO&C), the only symphonic orchestra and chorale serving a regional population of 400,000 people located throughout south central Montana and northeastern Wyoming. Music Director Anne Harrigan, along with the 135+ members of the BSO&C present an annual season from September through June, featuring six subscription concerts, two performances of Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker with the accompaniment of a renowned ballet company, a New Year's Eve event, four performances of an annual free Family Concert and a free Symphony in the Park concert. Each season, the BSO&C perform for more than 35,000 people, and help introduce music to children, youth, adults, and seniors in the region through Explore Music!, the organization's music education and community engagement program.*

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