

# Slenczynska returning to perform at SIUE



Segue • SIUE

**Friday, January 5, 2018**

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is pleased to welcome Ruth Slenczynska, world-renowned pianist and former artist-in-residence, back to campus for a special, sold-out concert performance.

In preparation for her upcoming performance, SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke, PhD, shares an amazing telephone interview he had with the musician on this week's episode of Segue, which will air at 9 a.m. this Sunday, Jan. 7, on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound.

Slenczynska's sold-out concert will take place at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 9 in the Dunham Hall Theater. From 3-5:45 p.m., on Wednesday, Jan. 10, the pianist will also host a special master class that will be open to the public.

During the episode, the duo shares a captivating conversation about Slenczynska's expansive career as a musician and her time as artist-in-residence at the University that both Pembroke and Slenczynska called home in the 1970s.

Slenczynska's path to stardom began at just 3 years old, when her parents instilled a relentless practice schedule on her. Having received lessons from other well-known pianists like Artur Schnabel, Egon Petri, Alfred Cortot, Josef Hoffmann and Sergei Rachmaninoff, she performed her debut in Berlin at age 6. At 7, she performed with a full orchestra in Paris.

"I was horrified of the idea of playing as a soloist with the Paris orchestra," admits Slenczynska, now 92 years old. "I didn't think I was good enough to play with such a fine orchestra. My parents told me that Yehudi Menuhin, a young, famous violist, performed a much more difficult concerto with an orchestra at 5 years old.

"Here I was, a great big girl of 7 years old, objecting to play this 'easy' concerto by Mozart. I was so humiliated that I had to walk on and play."

The rest, of course, was history. Slenczynska became an instant music sensation in Europe and was heralded as the first child prodigy since Mozart. For personal reasons, however, Slenczynska stepped out of the limelight at 15 years old.

"After your earlier experience in the music industry, you stepped away from it all for a while," Chancellor Pembroke says. "Was that a difficult choice to make and was it difficult to return?"

"Whatever choices you make in life are difficult to make for various reasons," Slenczynska says. "Music was a form of self-expression. I didn't devote myself to it because I loved it; I devoted myself to it because I felt like it was important. At the time, it didn't feel like it was very important anymore.

"As I became interested in other subjects, I realized once again that music was important. I went back to it and have never regretted my decision."

After graduating from the University of California, she established herself once again as a pianist of impeccable technique and considerable music insight. The young woman traveled the world, performing at concerts and for

various radio stations. She published a book of memoirs, *Forbidden Childhood*, in 1957, which deals with life as a child prodigy, and a book on piano technique, *Music at Your Fingertips: Aspects of Pianoforte Technique*, in 1961.

“I returned to New York City to rest between trips, and one night, I woke up and didn’t feel right. I called my doctor, and he said I had an ulcer and couldn’t perform for at least a year, and I had to eat a terribly bland diet,” she says.

During her downtime, she was able to answer and return phone calls she had missed while she was on tour. One call was from SIUE’s Lloyd Blakely, who invited the musician to become an artist-in-residence at the young, midwestern university. In 1964, she accepted a full-time position on campus. During her time at SIUE, Slenczynska provided hands-on piano instruction to over 400 students. In fact, Pembroke was one of Slenczynska’s pupils.

“When I had the opportunity to study with you in the 1970s, I remember you talking about your studies with Rachmaninoff, and how he would practice so slowly and deliberately,” Pembroke says. “It seemed to become one of the most foundational elements of your teaching—not just practicing, but practicing correctly.”

“I was taught by Rachmaninoff that practicing very slowly permitted one to detect everything that a composer wrote into the music,” Slenczynska says. “The slower you practice, the more likely you are to catch everything the composer intended. It makes the music more beautiful and meaningful, just like how the composer wrote it.”

“We were quite fortunate that you came to SIUE,” Pembroke says. “You always showed there was nothing we couldn’t accomplish if we put our minds to it. For that, I thank you!”

“That’s one of the many duties of a teacher,” Slenczynska says. “I’m proud in each case where my students have progressed, even when they don’t necessarily become marvelous musicians. They have used what they gained in our lessons in other ways and to me, that’s very exciting.”

Showing no signs of stopping, Slenczynska continues to share her talents with the world by teaching private piano lessons, giving master classes and acting as a juror for various piano competitions.

To hear Pembroke’s conversation with his former instructor and world-renowned musician Ruth Slenczynska, tune in at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Jan. 7 to WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound.

*By Madelaine Gerard, SIUE Marketing and Communications.*