

# SOUNDINGS OF A STORM

*A year after Ivan, world premiere of 'Hurricane' featured at Percussion Summit*

By **NANCY STEINSON**

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Last summer was a season of destruction and continuous high anxiety for Southwest Florida, as hurricanes crisscrossed the state.

And last year, around this time, Hurricane Ivan, a Category 4 storm, seemed to be making Naples its destination.

Like many other businesses, the Philharmonic Center for the Arts was faced with a decision: stay open and risk damage from a possible hurricane or close.

Although the annual Percussion Summit was scheduled, with guest percussionists from the Jacksonville Symphony and the Florida Orchestra (from Tampa) as well as hand percussionist Taku Hirano scheduled to arrive, Phil CEO and President Myra Daniels erred on the side of caution and closed the facility.

"As of Thursday morning, they were still predicting we would take a direct hit, and it

## If you go

*Percussion Summit 2005*

**When:** 8 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 10

**Where:** Philharmonic Center for the Arts, 5883 Pelican Bay Blvd.

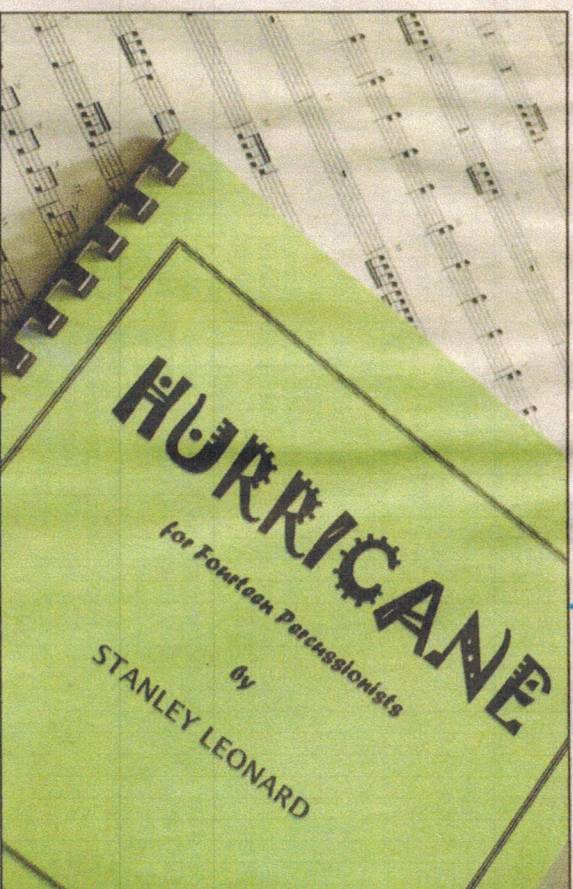
**Cost:** \$22 (\$8 for students)

**Information:** 591-1900. A special clinic for percussion students will be held at 3 p.m. Saturday in the Daniels Pavilion. Clinic tickets are \$12.

was a Category 4 at the time," says John Evans, principal timpanist for the Naples Philharmonic Orchestra and founder and artistic director of the Percussion Summit. "They needed to prep the building. With all that glass and all the artwork (in the Naples Museum of Art) it takes quite awhile to get the ... building(s) prepped for a hurricane. Two days."

"Thank goodness for us, it missed us. But even on Friday, it looked as if it was going

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"Hurricane," written by Stanley Leonard, will make its world premiere at the Percussion Summit on Saturday.



# Summit

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to be coming our way. It was understandable that we needed to prepare for the hurricane, but it was very disappointing to not have the summit."

Saturday, almost a year to the day it was originally scheduled, the summit will finally take place. Percussionists from Jacksonville and Tampa will join those from the Naples Philharmonic Orchestra, and hand drummer Taku Hirano, who's toured with Stevie Nicks, Fleetwood Mac and Bette Midler, will be the guest solo artist. Alan Abel, retired associate principal percussionist of the Philadelphia Orchestra, will perform "Timelines," which was commissioned for the concert.

But there'll be an additional treat: the world premiere of a composition written by Neapolitan Stanley Leonard, who was principal timpanist for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra for 38 years. Entitled "Hurricane," the piece commemorates the events of last summer.

Leonard wrote it for 14 percussionists. There are no melodic percussive instruments involved, such as xylophone, vibraphone or marimba. But it does include Chinese cymbals; three brake drums of various sizes; a slapstick (which makes a cracking or whip sound); gongs; and a bull roarer, which is a piece of wood attached to a rope that the musician swings to make a roaring sound.

"I wanted it to be solely a drum piece," Leonard says. "The whole point was, the hurricane did us in last year. This year I wanted to pay a sacrifice to that hurricane, and maybe it won't come back.

"It's an energy piece, with rhythm, imitating some of the energy, power and sound of the destruction."

The piece was written prior to Katrina's devastation in the New Orleans area and isn't meant to trivialize that horror, both men say.

"He started with a slow section," Evans says. "It looks like it's before a storm. Then things start to build, and in the second part of the piece, there's a section where

it sounds like rain, gradually getting stronger and stronger, and then there's a very fast section at the end of the piece, fast and loud."

Leonard sits in his Naples home, between two brass timpani from Brussels, Belgium. They are the drums on which he learned to play timpani. They're now used as end tables/conversation pieces. He holds his yet-to-be-performed composition in his hands.

"It's divided into three sections," he explains. "I'm always careful about the form of a piece. The first is a slow introduction. You hear a little rumbling. There might be some lightning strikes. The steel pan is just in there for a little touch; it's almost a melodic instrument. I wanted a touch of the Caribbean, because that's where the hurricane came from.

"It swells in intensity, and the rhythm comes crashing out to start the fast part, which is the second part. The last third is in triple meter, and almost sounds kind of African."

"When he wrote it, it was before Katrina," says his wife, Peg, sitting on a sofa underneath a geometric abstract painting that looks like a futuristic musical score, using color instead of notes.

"It's supposed to represent energy and power," Leonard says of the piece, "just hurricanes in general. It's not about Katrina or any specific one. Katrina's pretty awful, a tragedy."

Leonard used to hear the music in his head, and would write compositions by hand. If he'd make a mistake or decide to change something, he'd have to cut and paste, or start over again with fresh paper. Now he composes on computer, which allows him to make changes easily. It's also a way of hearing the score, although a computerized rendition doesn't compare to hearing a percussion ensemble perform it live.

The first time anyone will hear the piece performed live is two days prior to the concert, he says, when the musicians gather to rehearse.

If you didn't know that Leonard was a percussionist, you'd get numerous clues from his Naples home. In addition to the timpani

end tables in the living room, there's a stained glass picture of timpani in the small window above the front door. And the timpani he plays are crowded into a tiny studio, dominating the space like an elephant stuffed in a bathroom.

The walls of his studio contain posters advertising the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra when they toured various countries, such as China, Russia and Greece. And photos of the orchestra, including one of them performing in New York City's Carnegie Hall in 1958.

Andre Previn, a former director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra during Leonard's time there, once wrote that Leonard is "not only a virtuoso timpanist, but also a consummate musician."

While in the orchestra, Leonard had the opportunity to work with musicians such as Arthur Rubenstein, Isaac Stern and Vladimir Horowitz, and worked with guest conductors such as Leonard Bernstein, Eugene Ormandy, George Solti and composer Henry Mancini.

Leonard was also adjunct professor of percussion at Duquesne University and Carnegie-Mellon in Pittsburgh. He often writes compositions for his former students, many of whom are now percussion teachers at various universities.

His "Hurricane" isn't the first he's written for the Percussion Summit. His composition "Travelling Music" was performed at the 2002 Percussion Summit.

"We performed it, and it went over really well," says Evans. "This group is an incredible group of musicians, that's why I think composers are anxious to write for us, when you know you're going to have a great group perform your work."

Leonard says he's looking forward to hearing the premiere Saturday night.

"Most percussion concerts are sponsored by universities," he says. "This is for the public, for the real world. These are professional percussionists. Having a mass concert like this that pulls in from professional players like this from all over Florida is great. There's no other state I know of that does this. People come, and they fill the hall."