

ATLANTA IS UNITED FOR UKRAINE

A BENEFIT CONCERT

\$50,000 RAISED - THANK YOU



Olga Schpitko shares with concert goers about the devastation in her home country, Ukraine.

An incredibly moving article written by SPC member and concert organizer, Virginia Respass Fairchild.

The famous cellist Pablo Casals once remarked, "Why should love stop at the border? Our family is one. Each of us has a duty to his brothers. We are all leaves of the same tree, and the tree is humanity."

When Emily Floyd (former Music Director) and I first spoke about the possibility of a benefit concert to help the people of Ukraine, I could not have imagined what would unfold over the next few weeks. We had wondered aloud: could we turn \$50 into \$5000 with a benefit concert? Could we pull this off in a short amount of time? Could we find musicians in our community willing to perform for free? The answers turned out to be: yes, yes, and yes! The staff at Shallowford offered their unwavering support, the Chancel and Chapel Choirs jumped on board immediately, and every organization we reached out to responded with eagerness.

We knew from the beginning that the International Rescue Committee (IRC) would be the beneficiary of the concert's donations. As an international non-profit organization, the IRC provides comprehensive help to people affected by global humanitarian crises. The Atlanta chapter of the IRC provides direct support for families resettling in the community. Between the conflicts

in Afghanistan and Ukraine, the number of families needing support has increased tenfold in the past year.

Shallowford and the IRC recently worked together to help the lovely Nikzad family, refugees from Afghanistan, settle into a home in Clarkston. Serendipitously, the IRC Atlanta headquarters is just down the road at Northlake, and its Executive Director, Justin Howell, attended and spoke at the benefit concert.

I was filled with gratitude on the night of the performance as musicians arrived from the Atlanta Chamber Players, Atlanta Opera, Atlanta Pipe Band, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Youth Orchestra, Choral Guild of Atlanta, Franklin Pond Chamber Music, Lakeside High School Music Department, and Shallowford choirs. The pews quickly filled with Shallowford members and people from all over the Atlanta area. There was even a local TV crew outside! The musicians sang and played with a tenderness and compassion that brought the audience to tears; I still get choked up each time I watch the performance on the church website. But what was most moving to me were the testimonies from two musicians with very personal and direct ties to the Ukraine war: Olga Schpitko, a Ukrainian-American violinist in the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, and Philip Greenberg, conductor for the National Orchestra of Ukraine in Kyiv.

Olga spoke with a palpable urgency for her home country...

"All of us leading our peaceful lives here in the United States," she said, "should realize that Ukrainians are fighting to protect all of us from sociopathic dictatorships everywhere, and because of that I humbly ask all of you to support Ukraine by demanding from our leaders that humanitarian and military aide to Ukraine is stepped up dramatically, as my beautiful Ukraine is running out of time."

Philip Greenberg reflected on his colleagues in the National Orchestra of Ukraine, who were broadcast all over the globe performing on the steps of Maiden Square in Kyiv, "They love their music, they love their country, they love their freedom. They literally would rather die than go back under Soviet domination." His voice broke as he spoke these words, knowing it was not hyperbole but the harsh reality.

When the performance was over, a woman and her elderly mother approached me. The woman had tears in her eyes, and the mother would glance at me kindly before looking down to wipe away her own. They are Ukrainian-born, I learned, the mother having fled Crimea when Russia first invaded the

area. With a thick Eastern European accent, the woman spoke about the incredible stress of not knowing if their family and friends back home were alive or dead, the pain of watching helplessly as their country was decimated. But, she remarked, coming to this concert and seeing the community come together to support and honor her country gave her some much-needed strength and hope.

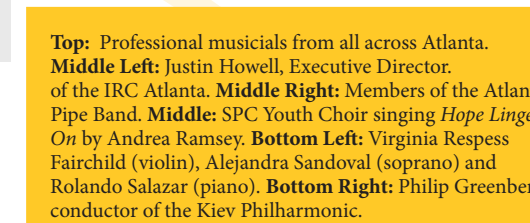
We raised \$25,000 that very evening. A few days later, I received an email from a family friend who had attended the concert and wanted to let me know her family had made a matching donation. **In total, the benefit concert raised over \$50,000 for the IRC and IRC Atlanta.** I will forever remember this day and the lesson I learned about what can happen when a community comes together. I am so proud of my Shallowford family!

I think it's fitting to close with words from Justin Howell, Executive Director of the IRC Atlanta,

"You don't have to be the richest person in the world to serve; you don't have to be the leader of a country to serve. It can be things that come to you sitting at a breakfast table; it can be things that come to you watching TV that motivates you to move, to do the smallest things."

And I would like to add to that: with support from loving community, sometimes a small thing can become a big thing.

As long as people suffer worldwide, there is a need for support. Visit the International Rescue Committee's website (help.rescue.org) to learn more about how they support displaced people and to make a one-time or recurring donation.



Top: Professional musicians from all across Atlanta. Middle Left: Justin Howell, Executive Director of the IRC Atlanta. Middle Right: Members of the Atlanta Pipe Band. Middle: SPC Youth Choir singing *Hope Lingers On* by Andrea Ramsey. Bottom Left: Virginia Respass Fairchild (violin), Alejandra Sandoval (soprano) and Rolando Salazar (piano). Bottom Right: Philip Greenberg, conductor of the Kiev Philharmonic.