

# Stormy

## relocation rebuilds a musical life

When Deleen Davidson left New Orleans with her four cats to ride out Hurricane Katrina in Hot Springs, Ark., the classically trained soprano never imagined she would lose everything in the storm ... including her piano. What she didn't lose, however, was her dream.

Ms. Davidson recalls walking into a Red Cross shelter that first week and being asked by a volunteer if she needed a job. When she said she was an opera singer, the agency immediately put her in touch with directors of the annual Hot Springs Music Festival, providing an entrée into the musical fabric of this cultural-rich community.

Trained in the dual disciplines of fine arts and vocal music,

Ms. Davidson was encouraged by her new neighbors to make Hot Springs her permanent home. Toward that end, she set about finding a place that could serve double duty as her home as well as a venue to conduct salon events and teach master music classes.

Once she found the right location, Ms. Davidson's next step was to acquire a piano. She knew the piano had to be designed by Steinway, so she turned to Colaanni Piano in Little Rock, the exclusive dealer for the family of Steinway-designed pianos in Arkansas. To help with the purchase, Hot Springs' arts patrons came to her aid by raising funds for her piano purchase through a variety of events, including a \$50-a-plate luncheon. The result was a Boston grand piano (GP-163), which she slept under the night it was delivered because it was the first piece of furniture in her new home.

Now, the 5-foot-8-inch ebony grand piano acts as the centerpiece for The Muses Inc., Ms. Davidson's non-profit arts organization dedicated to preserving classical art and music through performance and education.

"I love this piano," she says. "As a singer, I need a piano that is clear, with agility, that moves easily. The Boston is light, but rich, and suits my voice perfectly."

A New Orleans native, Ms. Davidson studied painting and music in Germany and Austria, with internships at the Karlsruhe Opera House and Feldkirch Musik Hochschule. She made her professional opera debut as Zerlina in Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona*, followed by main stage roles with the New Orleans Opera in *Rigoletto* and *Cavalleria Rusticana*, and in 2005, sang Susanna in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* in New York.

For Ms. Davidson, "Precision in pitch and tuning is essential in a piano" and her Boston piano "keeps me honest in my pitch."

Ms. Davidson is rebuilding her life in Hot Springs in good company. Her mother, opera singer Marilyn Davidson, already had a home here and made it her permanent residence after Hurricane Katrina also destroyed her New Orleans home.

She says "it's an honor and a thrill" to have her mother as an accompanist when she sings. "A singer accompanies differently," she observes, "because she knows how I'll phrase and then where I'll breathe."

The first event at the house of The Muses – a performance honoring the organization's key patrons – happened to fall during a lunar eclipse on the anniversary of Katrina's devastation of New Orleans. An irony that doesn't escape Ms. Davidson.

"The Muses represents hope, restoration and renewal," she reflects, "so it seems fitting that The Muses was conceived in New Orleans, but I gave birth in Hot Springs with the help of a Boston piano."

*Opera singer Deleen Davidson is accompanied by her mother, opera singer Marilyn Davidson.*

