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## *Continental Harmony* Premiere in Arkansas City and Wichita, Kan., New Composition Celebrates American Tallgrass Prairie

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St. PAUL, Minn., April 25, 2003— Following on a series of successful commissioning projects celebrating the unique and beautiful ecosystem of South Central Kansas, Cowley College extends this theme in partnership with the Chamber Music at the Barn series. The new musical work is a triple concerto for piano trio and two quintets. The piece will celebrate the ecology, uniqueness, and beauty of the American tallgrass prairie as part of the Chamber Music at the Barn season and to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of PrairieFest and will be premiered in June. Written especially for Wichita and Arkansas City by composer Philip Aaberg of Oakland, CA. and Chester, MT, “Headfirst into the Blue Fields of Grace” is the product of Aaberg’s residency in Wichita and Arkansas City, made possible by the American Composers Forum’s *Continental Harmony* program.

The new piece will be performed June 4, 5, and 6 at the Chamber Music at the Barn series and June 7 at PrairieFest. Tickets for the Chamber Music at the Barn concert are \$20 for air-conditioned barn seating or \$12 for garden seating. There is also a full buffet dinner available for \$12 starting at 6:30 p.m.; both the barn and garden open for seating at 7:45 p.m. Also on the program are Handel’s “Water Music” and Francaix’s “Divertissement for string quartet and bassoon.” Tickets for the Chamber Music Series can be ordered by calling 316-264-4662 or by visiting the website at [www.cmatb.org](http://www.cmatb.org). The PrairieFest performance of the piece will start at 7:00 pm at the Bonfy Farm and will be followed by a performance by The Tallgrass Bushwhackers Band (Aaberg with violin Darol Anger on violin; Eugene Friesen, cello; Howard Levy, harmonica; and Glen Velez, percussion). Wristbands for PrairieFest are \$5 and are available for purchase at the Cowley College Bookstore 1-800-593-2222 ext 5217, Graves

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Drugstore, Union State Bank, Home National Bank, Denton Art Center, and the Chamber of Commerce. For more information on the PrairieFest performance, visit [www.prairiefest.org](http://www.prairiefest.org).

"The two very different concert events are examples of what both PrairieFest and Chamber Music at the Barn do best. At the Barn, Aaberg's work will be part of a diverse and interesting evening of chamber music. At PrairieFest, the work will be part of a rollicking evening of mystery, fun and enchantment of the prairie which also features the soloists performing their own music as a remarkable improvisational band, the Tallgrass Bushwackers. The PrairieFest concert will also feature two other groups: At 5:00 p.m., The Waybacks (jazzgrass sensations) and at 6:15 p.m. and the Winfield Regional Symphony performing five works composed by members of the Tallgrass Bushwackers," states Connie Bonfy of Cowley College and coordinator of the Continental Harmony project.

The title of the piece comes from a poem by Salina poet Harley Elliot called "Waking in Some Good Person's Yard." According to Aaberg, "Since I was awarded the *Continental Harmony* commission, [the] piece has of necessity changed from being a triple concerto with 3 soloists and orchestra, to what might be called a triple trio: the 3 of us as soloists with string quintet and woodwind quintet. At the Barn, or "Barnegie Hall" as young chamber music students call it, the 3 groups will be arranged antiphonally." The *Continental Harmony* commission and residency has given Aaberg the opportunity to spend time in Kansas and get to know the communities involved in this piece. He said, "Until PrairieFest and Chamber Music at the Barn chose me as recipient of a *Continental Harmony* Composer Grant, my experience of Kansas was pretty slim. Mostly, I got close to the border in the "other" Kansas City...I've met many good people, worked with students, seen a lot of the surrounding area, and spent a fair amount of time at and near the site of PrairieFest. I've seen Chamber Music at the Barn fulfill many of their dreams in an incredible burst of energy, and I've been able to meet and play with many area musicians. I know for a certainty that these people and places have entered my composition, as has...internal/international dissonance...Kansas City blues...Wichita chamber music...the 101...big bluestem...wind...an emu running beside my car...a barn flying though the air...bluegrass shifted West...some good people...a ghost orchestra, haunted by big frogs...limestone surrounding, limestone flowing, limestone supporting...crops and art...pigs and bison...bridges and Hedges...basketball and okra pickles...Anger and Friesen...friends, patrons, and country musicians...the Cherokee strip, Flint Hills, Ponca, and underneath and behind everything ... the Prairie."

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Aaberg has carried out residencies and workshops throughout the United States, including a Cultural Trust Fund residency in northern Mont., and a week in Gloucester, Mass. His album "Live from Montana" was nominated for a 2002 Grammy Award, and his performance on PBS's "All-American Jazz" was nominated for an Emmy. Hal Leonard and Sweetgrass Music have published more than 60 of his piano pieces.

The mission of Chamber Music at the Barn is to enhance the variety of summer cultural events available in the Midwest by offering professional chamber music concerts of artistic excellence performed in an intimate, yet casual, country setting, and provide educational opportunities for persons of all ages and diverse backgrounds.

PrairieFest, a celebration of the arts, is a project of the Cowley County Community College and the Arkansas City Area Arts Council and is celebrated annually. Since the 1600s, the term prairie has been used almost exclusively in reference to the North American grasslands. The French arrived at the "sea of grass" in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. They too were overwhelmed by its magnificence, and christened it with the only name they thought appropriate: prairie. This French term means "meadow" or "farm field." Prairie arises from the Latin term *pratum*, also meaning meadow. Both are progenitors of our western word, prairie.

*Continental Harmony* has been recognized as a model of local community artistic initiative. The initiative has been launched by the American Composers Forum in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts as a way of bringing composers and communities together for the creation of original musical works reflecting the unique history, culture and spirit of each community. Each host site identifies a theme, an occasion, and local performers for a musical work that will be meaningful to its citizens. With the assistance of American Composers Forum, the community group then selects the composer best able to write the music and carry out the residency.

During the inaugural round of the program in the year 2000, American Composers Forum discovered that *Continental Harmony* projects bring people together, heighten community feeling and sense of place, and encourage the formation of collaborations among groups. At the same time the artistic resources of the area are often strengthened and validated. As a result of this inaugural round, Twin Cities Public Television created an award-winning documentary and website. To learn more about *Continental Harmony*, visit [www.continentalharmony.org](http://www.continentalharmony.org).

*Continental Harmony is a leadership initiative of the American Composers Forum and the National Endowment for the Arts, with additional funding provided by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, and Marshall Field's Project Imagine with support from the Target Foundation.*