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Continental Harmony Premiere in Bangor, Maine, New Composition Celebrates the Penobscot River

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St. PAUL, Minn., September 29, 2004—Composer Thomas Oboe Lee’s original composition entitled “Symphony No. 6: The Penobscot River” will be premiered by the Bangor Symphony Orchestra and area choral and dance groups Saturday, October 23 at 7:30 p.m. at the Bangor Auditorium. Admission is FREE. For tickets and more information, contact the Symphony box office at 800-639-3221 or 207-942-5555. Along with the Bangor Symphony, the Maine Folklife Center, University of Maine Oratorio Society, Bangor Area Children’s Choir, Bangor Public Library, Bangor Region Arts and Cultural Council, Robinson Ballet Company and Thomas School of Dance, Bangor Band, and Maine Discovery Museum are collaborating partners in this commissioning project as part of Continental Harmony, the national community-based composer residency program of American Composers Forum, St. Paul, Minn.

The theme of the composition is *Back to the River: Discovering Bangor’s Roots*. The composition will celebrate the area’s rich cultural heritage that includes songs of the North woods, American Indian dance and song, and Franco-American jigs and reels. The Robinson Ballet, University of Maine Singers, University of Maine Oratorio Society, Bangor High School Chorus and Maine’s All-State Musicians will join the Bangor Symphony in this multidisciplinary premiere. Lee will return to Bangor the week before the premiere to visit and talk with middle school students about Bangor’s history and how it inspired his composition. At Bangor High School, he will rehearse the choral parts of the symphony with the Bangor High School Chorus and discuss composition with the music theory class. He will also hold public lectures at the Bangor Public Library and other venues to familiarize listeners with the new piece and talk about the literature and history of Maine.

Lee said, “It has been a wonderful two years of thinking, learning, and working on my *Continental Harmony* project with the Bangor Symphony Orchestra. It is a rare occasion that a composer in the 21st century would receive a commission to write a musical work of such scale: a 40-minute piece for symphony orchestra, 200-plus chorus and a ballet company. At the Bangor Public Library I found some wonderful evocative 19th century texts for the chorus about the city of Bangor and its environs: the Penobscot River, Mt. Ktaadn, the logging industry, the Native American culture, etc. At times I felt overwhelmed, but most of the times I was exuberant and quite inspired by the music that came forth in

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the process. The premiere is less than a month away, and I am looking forward to it: my magnum opus. Susan Jonason, of the Bangor Symphony has made the occasion a very public one: a free concert on a Saturday evening! I hope the audience would go home humming the tunes from the work as they walk into the crisp, cool Bangor night.”

Bangor’s existence is attributed to the Penobscot River. The Penobscots lived and traded on the river; the first sawmills were built along the river in the 1700’s; Henry David Thoreau found inspiration for his work *The Maine Woods* on a Penobscot River sojourn. Without the river, millions of acres of timber could not have been logged as it was the means by which the logs reached Bangor from the wilderness: the Penobscot River Drivers (also called the Bangor Tigers) were the brave American Indians and French, Irish and English immigrants who drove the logs from deep in the Maine woods to Bangor where they were milled and loaded on ships in Bangor’s harbor to be shipped all over the world. The Bangor Symphony Orchestra itself was born at the height of the lumber boom in 1896.

The newly commissioned piece will reminisce about those days on the Penobscot and pay homage to a rich and proud heritage. The choral text is adapted from works such as Thoreau’s *Ktaadin*, Fanny Hardy Eckstorm’s *The Death of Thoreau’s Guide*, John Greenleaf Whittier’s *The Loggers Boast*, and concludes with Bangor’s Centennial Hymn. The piece will be part of the Bangor Symphony Orchestra’s legacy to the citizens of central and northern Maine. “We are grateful not only to have the opportunity to showcase the wonderful heritage of the Bangor region, but also to showcase the talents of many extraordinary artistic and cultural resources that we have right here in our community through the production of this concert and its related events,” said Bangor Symphony Orchestra Executive Director Susan Jonason.

The piece will be performed again on the orchestra’s Penobscot River Tour in the spring of 2005 that will take a 35-piece orchestra to two communities on the river, and send musician ensembles and the composer to perform educational outreach in a third.

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. For more information, visit 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.

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