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Continental Harmony Premiere in Denver, Colo., New Musical Celebrates Westside Community

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St. PAUL, Minn., November 4, 2004—Composer Daniel Valdez' original composition entitled "The Westside Oratorio" will be premiered by El Centro Su Teatro and students from L'Academia de la Gente and La Escuela Tlatelolco December beginning at 7:30 PM at newly constructed Concert Hall at Kenneth Kendall King Center, on the Auraria Campus. Admission is \$15. For tickets and more information, contact El Centro su Teatro at 303-296-0219. Along with El Centro Su Teatro, the Denver Inner City Parish and La Escuela Tlatelolco 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 Westside—the city's oldest Chicano barrio—once centered around Ninth Street and St. Cajetan's Church, the cultural and religious core for the Mexican-American community. In 1967, the area was depopulated and dispersed to build the Aurora Higher Education Center—displacing families that had lived in the area for generations. Today, the remainder of the neighborhood, now called La Alma/Lincoln Park, holds annual events to commemorate, celebrate, and nurture its connection with the community's history.

Valdez' composition honors this community, culture and its traditions through his new musical. A mix of music, narration, and dramatic interludes, the work will incorporate Mexican musical traditions such as Corridos and Guapangos, and will utilize both Spanish and English text.

Students from area schools have worked with playwright Anthony J. Garcia to gather oral histories and create the libretto. The students will also perform with the professional musicians and singers of El Centro Su Teatro. "What is being created in actuality is an historical presentation for voice of the Mexican-American's migratory path through the Southwestern United States." Garcia says, "It is not just the journey of this neighborhood, but of so many Mexican-American families".

Composer Daniel Valdez adds, "We are finding that the stories are universal in that they speak of the need for security, family and love. A better life for their children. Everybody wants the same things.

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Chicanos are no different.” Valdez continues,” This process has taught me that even in the simplest of experiences that there is something greater that elevates our lives to a level of historical significance. This work is about simple people, our parents, with simple experiences that have tremendous historical repercussions on future generations, namely us. “

El Centro Su Teatro is a professional multi-disciplinary cultural arts organization, producing year-round programming including theatrical productions, art exhibitions, poetry and literacy programs, and arts and film festivals.

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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