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Continental Harmony Premiere in Dothan, Alabama New Composition Celebrates Wiregrass Festival of Murals

April 6, 2005
For Immediate Release

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St. PAUL, Minn., April 6, 2005—*Continental Harmony*, the nationwide composer-commissioning program of the American Composers Forum, announces the upcoming premiere of a new piece of music. “The Wiregrass Symphony” was written for the Dothan, Alabama community by composer Richard Pearson Thomas of New York City, and will be performed by the Tri-State Community Orchestra May 6, 2005 at 7:30 p.m. at the Dothan Opera House. The Tri-State Community Orchestra and its community partners, who include Wiregrass Festival of Murals and the Downtown Group, were selected through a competitive process to be Alabama’s representative in the *Continental Harmony* program.

Dothan is centrally located in the Tri-State region of Georgia, Florida and Alabama known as “The Wiregrass.” The Festival of Murals began in 1992 as a way to tell the stories and history of the Wiregrass (named for a native plant) on prominent walls of buildings in the historic downtown area. Local artists were commissioned to design these paintings that depict people, places and events that have impacted the Dothan community. The Downtown Group plans to have 20 murals completed within 3-5 years, and presently the Festival of Murals is the most visited attraction in Dothan. This piece celebrates the historical and cultural themes of the murals. Thomas toured of the Wiregrass area and the Festival of Murals as part of his residency for the project. He also visited local schools, lectured at local colleges, and performed a recital of his music at a “Meet the Composer” reception.

“The Tri-State Community Orchestra and Downtown Group have a fabulous composer in Richard Pearson Thomas. Together, they will premiere a work that is truly representative of the proud heritage that emanates through this partnership,” said Dr. Krystal Banfield, Education Director of the American Composers Forum.

The Tri-State Community Orchestra was founded in 1995 by a group of local wiregrass musicians who wanted the opportunity to play, learn, and help educate others about the joy of orchestra music. Since inception, the TCO has grown in size and has a membership of over 55 string, brass, wind and percussion players from Southeast Alabama, Eastern Georgia and the Florida Panhandle. Ages vary from elementary students to retirees. All of the orchestra members are volunteers who meet every Thursday to

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rehearse, enjoy the fellowship of one another and share their common love of music. There are three main concerts per year, and other outreach concerts in settings such as Retirement homes.

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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