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For Immediate Release

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**COMPOSER LISA DeSPAIN SELECTED FOR GARY, IND., CONTINENTAL  
HARMONY PROJECT  
Artist Will Collaborate With Gary Art Works**

St. PAUL, Minn., July 22, 2002—The American Composers Forum announced today the next phase of Gary Art Works' participation as Indiana's representative in the Forum's nationwide music program, *Continental Harmony*. In the program, which has been recognized as a model of local community artistic initiative, 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.

Composer Lisa DeSpain of New York City has been selected by Gary Art Works to write a piece for local jazz musicians accompanied by an orchestra composed of members of the Gary Civic Orchestra and Northwest Indiana Symphony. The music will celebrate two facets of Gary: the industrial might that helped shape the nation and the beautiful terrain of the Lake Michigan shoreline. Ms. DeSpain will begin her residency in Gary by getting to know people, researching local history and culture, working with students, and making presentations to community groups of all sorts.

Ms. DeSpain brings a strong background in composition and community engagement to Gary's Continental Harmony project. She is an active conductor, pianist, and composer whose work focuses on jazz. She received a jazz fellowship grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and won second place in the 1998 Julius Hemphill/Jazz Composers Alliance Competition for her jazz orchestra composition, "Hawk." Her compositions have been performed by various university and professional jazz ensembles, including performances at the Riga and Parnu Jazz Festivals, Alandia Jazz Festival, Nortelje Jazz Festival, and in concert at clubs throughout Russia, Europe, and the United States. She tours as conductor-musical director for the Big Apple Circus and works as a freelance keyboardist for Broadway shows.

Ms. DeSpain graduated from the University of North Texas with a bachelor's degree in composition and from the Manhattan School of Music with a master's degree in jazz piano performance. She studied piano under Elaine Elias, Ellis Marsalis, Kenny Werner, and JoAnne Brackeen, and composition with Newell K. Brown and Mike Abene. She is a member of the BMI Jazz Composer's Workshop. Besides composing in the jazz idiom, her works include string-piano quartets and other chamber pieces, choral, solo vocal, harp, piano, and commercial music.

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Gary Art Works has put together a coalition of community groups, including Gary Community School Corporation, Lake Street Gallery, West Side Theater Guild, FAME (fusion of Art and Music in Education), and Gary Arts Planning Workshop to carry out the residency and have the music performed. The performance of Gary's music will be March 29, 2003, at the West Side Theater. Ms. DeSpain will conduct.

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.

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. Additional funds are provided by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Target Foundation.

*For an electronic version of Lisa DeSpain's picture, contact Patricia Shifferd, [harmony@composersforum.org](mailto:harmony@composersforum.org). To interview Ms. DeSpain, contact her at (212) 579-5767.*

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