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Continental Harmony Premiere in Gaston, N.C., New Composition Explores the Life of Admiral Charles Wilkes

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St. PAUL, Minn., January 22, 2003—Composer Jerré Tanner's original composition for the Gaston Symphonic Band titled "*High Seas to High Shoals: Theme and Variations on the Life of Charles Wilkes*" will be premiered Saturday, February 15 at 7:30 pm at the Pamela Kimbrell Warlick Performing Arts Center, on the campus of Gaston Day School in Gastonia.

The piece which is focused on Admiral Charles Wilkes, a sometime North Carolinian, was commissioned by the Gaston County Museum and the Schiele Museum of Natural History and the Public Library of Charlotte/Mecklenburg County, as part of *Continental Harmony*, the nation-wide community-based composer residency program of American Composers Forum, St. Paul, Minn. Additional support for the performance and marketing came from The North Carolina Arts Council and Earl Tindol Ford, of Gastonia. Tickets for the performance are \$8.00 for Museum members and students, and \$15.00 for general admission.

Tanner's work is based on the theme "The Flag of the Constellation" written by Charles R. Crosby, an American Naval patriotic piece written in the mid-1800s. According to Tanner, "The piece includes eleven variations, each centered around people and events in Wilkes' life from childhood to old age...While working on the project my respect for Charles Wilkes grew exponentially. Yes, he was a curmudgeon, a maverick; but he lived by high ideals. He was stern with his men but also a loving husband and indulgent father. I found much to admire in the man and came to see him as exemplifying the true American spirit. I think he was a hero and left the world a better place."

The *High Seas to High Shoals* exhibits, jointly opening January 26 at both the Schiele Museum of Natural History and the Gaston County Museum, feature aspects of Wilkes' life. Wilkes had

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established the Naval Observatory and been a gold-mining entrepreneur in Charlotte. He commanded America's first international scientific exploring expedition from 1838-1842 and was commended and court-martialed during Civil War. He then returned to live in High Shoals, Gaston County, North Carolina, running an Iron company while editing publication of the research and protecting the core Smithsonian collections from his expedition. Historic artifacts, scientific specimens and many never-before-exhibited drawings and paintings and scientific illustrations and images from Wilkes' illustrated reports of the expedition will be on display.

The Schiele Museum features permanent exhibits on the native animals of North Carolina. It also holds a 152-seat planetarium and nature trail featuring an 18th Century Backcountry farm. The Farm contains a log cabin and kitchen, barn, blacksmith shop, woodworking shop, and several other outbuildings. The Catawba Indian Village is also located along the Nature Trail. Reproduction buildings and houses tell the story of the Catawba Indian people from late prehistoric times through the 1800's. The village contains a replicated prehistoric bark-covered house, a large council house, and two log cabins.

The Gaston County Museum holds over 5,000 objects, 20,000 documents, over 400,000 photos which span the period from the 1500s through the 20th Century. The museum is located in the 1852 Hoffman Hotel on the Historic Courthouse Square National Register District and many of the rooms have been restored to that time with period furnishings and a hands-on-parlor. The Museum's *The Ties that Bind*, is its newest permanent exhibit, documenting the region's textile history. The Gaston County Museum also houses North Carolina's largest collection of horse-drawn vehicles.

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

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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. To contact the composer, email arts@ilhawaii.net.

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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