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Continental Harmony Project Premiere in Nevada New Composition Celebrates Area's Cultural Heritage

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St. PAUL, Minn., May 17, 2005—Composer Lisa DeSpain's new *Continental Harmony* piece titled "Building from the Past" will premiere June 17 at 8:00 p.m. at Piper's Opera House in Virginia City. Tickets for the concert are \$12 and \$8 with family passes available for \$25. The program also includes an exiting mix of jazz tunes by the Mile High Jazz Band with vocalist Sheryl Adams, and vocal pieces by Bella Voce. The 20-minute piece was commissioned by and will be premiered by the Mile High Jazz Band, a 17-piece big band in the Ellington-Basie tradition, and Bella Voce, a women's vocal ensemble of about 25 voices. DeSpain's five-movement suite celebrates the architectural and cultural heritage of the five northern Nevada communities where historic buildings have been or are being revitalized for use as theaters. For more information, call the band at 775-883-4154.

Performances have been scheduled across five counties in northern Nevada. Two are in urban areas: Carson City (the state capitol) and Reno, where the buildings originally housed churches and are currently undergoing renovation for use as performance halls. Three concerts are in rural towns: Fallon, Yerington, and Virginia City; two of these buildings were originally schools designed by prominent architects and one was a celebrated opera house in the Comstock Mining District. The renovated school buildings recently reopened as cultural centers, and the opera house has been in continuous use throughout its renovation. These five venues provide the inspiration for this project. Additional performances include:

- Tuesday, July 12 at Bartley Ranch in Reno as part of Artown in honor of the Lear Theater, a historic church in the midst of renovation to become a performance space
- Saturday, August 6 at the Ginny Baker Theater in Yerington in the Jeanne Dini Cultural Center.
- Saturday, August 13 in the Barkley Theater in Fallon at the Oats Park Arts Center

(more)

- Sunday, August 20 at Brewery Arts Center in Carson City as part of “Basically Basie” 2005 Jazz Festival, honoring the BAC Performing Hall, another renovated historic church

DeSpain began her work on this *Continental Harmony* project by getting to know the people, the community, and the various spaces involved in this project honoring the cultural heritage of five venues throughout Nevada. She toured the communities and historic sites in each location.

DeSpain also led workshops in area schools. She worked with a group of 5th graders in Reno in a workshop introducing them to the blues and jazz improvisation. She said, “They wrote their own blues heads and then learned to improvise using the blues scale. We also talked about the history of American music, including how spirituals, ragtime, blues, and jazz came into existence. They were a VERY SMART group of kids!” DeSpain also worked with the Carson City High School students in both the band and vocal programs, coaching jazz ensembles and individual students in jazz theory and improvisation, and vocal groups in vocal performance techniques for the musical theater stage.

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 each for the creation of original musical works reflecting the unique history, culture and spirit of 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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