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**COMPOSER RICHARD PEARSON THOMAS SELECTED FOR
ALABAMA CONTINENTAL HARMONY PROJECT**
New Piece will celebrate the Wiregrass Festival of Murals

St. PAUL, Minn., January 30, 2004— The American Composers Forum, St. Paul, Minn., announced today the next phase of the Tri-State Community Orchestra's participation as Alabama's representative in the Forum's nationwide *Continental Harmony* program. Representatives of a coalition of community groups in Dothan have selected composer Richard Pearson Thomas, New York, NY, to serve a residency culminating in an original musical work to be performed by the Tri-State Community Orchestra. Thomas will begin his residency in Dothan by getting to know people, researching local history and culture, working with students, and making presentations to community groups of all sorts. The new music will premiere in May 2005 in the Dothan Opera House.

Continental Harmony is an initiative of the American Composers Forum in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts as a way of bringing composers and communities across the country together for the creation of original musical works reflecting the unique history, culture and spirit of each community. Tri-State Community Orchestra and its community partners, which 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 growing among the pine forest of the area that looks

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like green strands of wire) 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 will celebrate the historical and cultural themes of the murals in one or more movements in an orchestral work. Because of the diversity of the murals, many musical styles could be incorporated; including gospel, folk, blues, jazz and country western, and the piece might also include vocals. The orchestra is made up of volunteer musicians from throughout the Tri-State area, and also has smaller chamber ensembles within the organization.

Richard Pearson Thomas' concert works have been performed by the Boston Pops, Covent Garden Festival, Houston Grand Opera, Chautauqua Opera and Riverside Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir. His songs have been sung in Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, Wigmore Hall, Joe's Pub, and before the U.S. Congress by artists such as Audra McDonald, Sanford Sylvan and Kurt Ollmann. His commissioned works are performed frequently by Mirror Visions Ensemble throughout the U.S. and Europe.

He is recipient of a Klinsky commission and Michael Stewart Foundation Award for his musical *Golden Gate*, which is currently in development at Second Stage Theater in New York City. *Ladies in a Maze*, an Off-Off Broadway musical, was produced by Encompass Music Theatre. *Cafe Vienna*, a musical, was chosen as a selection of the Opera/Music Theater Conference of the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center and produced by theatre companies in Canada and the U.S. He has contributed music to several productions of the Skylight Opera Theater in Milwaukee and the Banff Centre. His music for *In Thinking of America: Songs of the Civil War* has been heard in more than 100 cities nationwide.

Thomas is composer-in-residence of the Gold Opera Project, Young Audiences/New York. In that capacity, he has composed more than 75 operas with students in New York City public schools. His work with children was featured on CBS' *The Early Show*, and singled out for praise by President Clinton when Young Audiences/New York was awarded the National Medal

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of Arts. Additionally, Thomas has concertized with singers worldwide and has served as coach/music director for the Aspen Music Festival and the Yale School of Music.

Mr. Thomas is a native of Montana and a graduate of the Eastman School of Music and the University of Southern California.

Continental Harmony 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.

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.

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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