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**COMPOSER RON SHORT SELECTED FOR VIRGINIA
CONTINENTAL HARMONY PROJECT**

New Musical Theater Piece will celebrate the Cultural Heritage of Central
Appalachia and 50th Anniversary of the University of Virginia at Wise

St. PAUL, Minn., January 30, 2004— The American Composers Forum, St. Paul, Minn, announced today the next phase of the University of Virginia's College at Wise's participation as Virginia's representative in the Forum's nationwide *Continental Harmony* program. Representatives of a coalition of community groups in Wise have selected composer and UVA-Wise graduate Ron Short, Big Stone Gap, VA, to serve a residency culminating in an original musical work to be performed by Roadside Theater, members of the community, and the College's concert band. Short will work with Roadside Theater, the students and staff at UVA-Wise, and the people of the region to develop a musical theater work based on the Appalachian ballad form using myth, legend, personal histories and stories of the region. The new music will premiere May 2005 with additional performances at various community arts venues.

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. UVA-Wise and its community partners, which include Roadside Theater, were selected through a competitive process to be Virginia's representative in the *Continental Harmony* program.

The region of Central Appalachia where the College is located is rich in history, culture, and

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especially music. Everywhere there is music—churches, festivals, and homes where family bands gather to celebrate the music and their own lives. The history of bluegrass and country music is written in the lives of the people. Southwest Virginia is home to many legendary musicians of these genres, including blues singer Dock Boggs whose powerful ballad “Oh Death” became the centerpiece for the film “O Brother Where Art Thou.”

This commissioned work will not only celebrate the 50th anniversary of the University, but will reaffirm the University’s commitment to the people of the region and the Appalachian heritage. This ballad will draw upon the personal stories of area citizens while engaging and educating theatre and visual arts students in how to translate local voices into musical development, theatre, and movement. The production will be performed both at the college and local schools as well as town performance halls. It will provide a cross-professional exchange between the faculty of the University and the professionals of Roadside Theater, as well as give the students training with the professionals of Roadside.

For the past 27 years Ron Short, a native of the Appalachian Mountains of Dickenson County, Virginia, has provided a vital, authentic, musical voice for Roadside Theater. He has performed in 18 Roadside touring productions, and has written the scripts and musical scores of eleven musical plays that the company has toured across the U.S. and in Europe. His music has been performed at Lincoln Center, the Smithsonian, the U.S. Olympics; at theater festivals in the Czech Republic, England, Wales, Denmark and Sweden, and at churches and schools throughout America. His powerful vocals, proven songwriting skills, and accomplished musicianship (on a dozen instruments) have been nurtured by the central Appalachian Mountain culture in which he was born and grew up, and strengthened by his collaborations with artists from other cultures.

He has been instrumental in developing Roadside’s cross-cultural collaborative projects which include full length, musical plays with Idiwanan An Chawe, the Zuni language theater from Pueblo Zuni, NM and Junebug Productions, the nationally recognized African American theater from New Orleans, LA. He is Roadside’s playwright and composer on *Promise of a Love Song*, a collaborative musical production with Junebug Productions and Teatro Pregones, the premier Puerto Rican theater from the South Bronx. Currently, he is collaborating with Steinway artist Beegie Adair on the script and music for *Betsy*, Roadside’s newest musical play that explores the

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intersection of jazz and bluegrass and how the two musical traditions communicate and continue to shape an American cultural identity.

Short has recorded and produced four albums of music and story (*Wings to Fly*, *Cities of Gold*, *Singing*, and *Mountain Tales and Music*), but it is in live performance that his skills and experience shine. His music is grounded but unique — influenced by the slide guitar phrasings of Mississippi blues; the power of a cappella Old Regular Baptist, lined-out hymns; the spirit of the conjunto sounds of Texas; and the timelessness of the Scots-Irish fiddle tunes and frailed banjo styles of central Appalachia.

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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