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Continental Harmony Premiere in Aberdeen, S.D., Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge Celebrates Centennial with New Music

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St. PAUL, Minn., June 2, 2003— The Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Columbia, S.D., is celebrating their centennial with a brand new piece of music. The work will debut at the annual Fourth of July celebration in Wylie Park and will be performed by the Aberdeen Community Municipal Band. Written especially for the occasion by composer Dan Rager of Chesterland, OH, “Prairie River Reflections” is the product of Rager’s residency in Columbia and Aberdeen, made possible by the American Composers Forum’s *Continental Harmony* program. The performance is free and will begin at dusk prior to the annual fireworks display.

“Prairie River Reflections” celebrates the James River that flows through the refuge and into the Missouri River. “The Jim,” as locals know it, is an important part of the landscape and the lifeblood of Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The piece has four movements: The Jubilant Refuge, The Migration of Fowl and Water, The Hymn of the Prairie, and The Plains of Aberdeen. The symphony’s four movements each highlight a different aspect of the river and the region. According to Rager, “The symphony is a picturesque view of Sand Lake Refuge, the prairie and the plains woven together by the ‘Jim’ that meanders through each movement in many forms. The excitement of the opening fanfare motif represents the refuge. Variations of this theme abound in all 4 movements and changes each time it is played. Our journey portrays life in the American heartland both past and present. The symphony ends exactly the way it began taking the listener full circle, back to the refuge. This *Continental Harmony* project has connected the participants in the same way the ‘Jim’ connects the heartland.”

Rager has published more than 100 compositions and arrangements, ranging from large-scale works for orchestras and symphonic bands to works for soloists and chamber ensembles. Many of these pieces have been performed and recorded by the likes of The Cleveland Orchestra,
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The Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Saratov Wind Orchestra of Russia, Apollo String Quartet, The Lakeland Civic Orchestra, The United States Navy Band, and The Cleveland Philharmonic Winds. His Symphony No. 1, "Bridge To A Millennium," has earned him international acclaim with performances in Cleveland, Amsterdam, Russia, and Japan. He also composed the opening fanfare for his hometown of Cleveland's 1996 bicentennial celebration.

Established in 1935, the 22,000-acre Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge provides critical habitat for millions of migratory birds and other wildlife. Dozens of species of birds nest in the area or are provided cover during migration. In honor of the centennial of the National Wildlife Refuge system, the U.S. Postal Service has created a commemorative stamp, which was available for sale at the recent Eagle Day Festival at the Refuge. The stamp features a pelican that is symbolic of the country's first wildlife refuge on Pelican Island, Fla.

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 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.

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.