



A M E R I C A N C O M P O S E R S F O R U M

NATIONAL OFFICE:

332 Minnesota Street, Suite E-145 • Saint Paul, Minnesota 55101-1300 USA

Telephone: [651] 228-1407 • Fax: [651] 291-7978

E-mail: mail@composersforum.org • Web site: www.composersforum.org

Continental Harmony Premiere in Wise, Virginia New Composition Celebrates 50th Anniversary of UVa-Wise

April 7, 2005

For Immediate Release

For more information, contact:

Dr. Patricia Shifferd, American Composers Forum, 651-251-2818, harmony@composersforum.org, or
Jane Meade Dean at The University of Virginia's College at Wise, 276-328-0130, ejm8e@uvawise.edu

St. PAUL, Minn., April 7, 2005—*Continental Harmony*, the nationwide composer-commissioning program of the American Composers Forum, announces the upcoming premiere of a new piece of music. "Miners and Millhands" was written for the Wise, Virginia community by composer Ron Short, and will be performed under the direction of Michael McNulty and Jonathan Taylor of the UVa-Wise theatre department April 22, 2005 at 8:00 p.m. at the theatre building on campus. Additional performances are scheduled for April 23, 29, 30 at 8 p.m., and April 24 and May 1 at 2 p.m. The University of Virginia's College at Wise (UVa-Wise) and its community partners, who include Roadside Theater, were selected through a competitive process to be Virginia's representative in the *Continental Harmony* program.

Short worked in residence with Roadside Theater, the students, faculty 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. This commissioned work not only celebrates the 50th anniversary of UVa-Wise, it reaffirms the College's commitment to the people of the region and to its Appalachian heritage. Short's ballad draws 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. "It is the stories of the people who have helped make that history that are most important," Short says. "It is in the stories of our lives that we find drama and all good music is filled with drama."

"Miners and Millhands" weaves musical and theatrical expression into a patchwork story of about mountain culture and the college, which sprang from it. Short, a 1971 graduate of UVa-Wise and a driving force behind Roadside Theater for more than 27 years, has worked for the last year to gather stories about how the College has impacted individuals and the entire region. The College's history is important not just for its own institutional identity but because that history is now an important part of many people's lives and a part of this region's cultural identity," Short said.

UVa-Wise is ranked among the nation's top ten public liberal arts colleges by U.S. News and World Report. The only branch campus of The University of Virginia, UVa-Wise is home to 1,800 students and offers under graduate and professional programs in the liberal arts tradition of Thomas Jefferson.

(more)

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. 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.

###