



## AMERICAN COMPOSERS FORUM

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### *Continental Harmony* Premiere in Sheridan, Wyoming New Composition Celebrates the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ucross Foundation

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St. PAUL, Minn., September 1, 2006—Composer Philip Aaberg's new *Continental Harmony* piece titled "Pop. 25" will premiere September 30, 2006 at the historic WYO Theater in Sheridan, Wyoming at 7:00 p.m. Tickets are \$15 for adults, \$13 for seniors and military, \$8 for students and \$5 for kids 12 and under. For tickets, call WYO Theater Box Office at 307-672-9084x30.

Performers include composer/performer Aaberg along with the other two members of the Montana Trio: Tracy Silverman (Turtle Island String Quartet), and cellist Eugene Friesen (The Paul Winter Consort). Joining the trio will be the Sheridan County Youth Chorale, and Wyoming Poet Laureate David Romtvedt. The new piece celebrates the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ucross Foundation, a non-profit organization which operates an internationally known artists' retreat in northeastern Wyoming.

"This program offers communities — from rural towns to metropolitan areas — the unique opportunity to be a part of new musical works which celebrate their history and culture," says John Nuechterlein, President and C.E.O. of American Composers Forum. "These exceptional musical celebrations strengthen social bonds and renew the collective spirit."

Aaberg began his *Continental Harmony* project by visiting the communities surrounding the Ucross Foundation and getting to know the people in the area. After gaining the knowledge of the richness of this region, he went to work writing a piece of music that weaves together the many cultures represented in this community, as well as the mingling of its inhabitants with the surrounding nature. The piece is titled for the population sign that greets visitors to Ucross.

According to Aaberg, " 'To cast a reflection into the future, of the cultural mirror of our life and times.' This quote from the Ucross mission statement, my own time in the Powder River landscape, and the poetry of Wyoming's Poet Laureate, David Romtvedt, who lives down the road in Buffalo, are what informed my composition. Commissioned to celebrate 25 years of the foundation, "Pop 25" (25 minutes long and named brilliantly by Ucross composer-in-residence

Andrea Clearfield as we drove past the road sign announcing the entrance to the residence) alludes to popular music trends in both the so-called pop and classical worlds. The score calls for musicians without boundaries, so The Montana Trio (cellist Eugene Friesen, six string violinist Tracy Silverman, and me on piano) will perform the premiere with David Romtvedt and the voices of the future --- the youth chorus of Sheridan, Wyoming."

This project is sponsored by the Ucross Foundation in partnership with the WYO Theater, as part of the American Composers Forum's *Continental Harmony* project. Ucross Foundation Executive Director Sharon Dynak said, "During the past year, Ucross has been honored to work with Philip Aaberg and all of our community partners to help bring "Pop 25" to fruition. Nearly 1,200 creative individuals have worked at Ucross as artists-in-residence, and the majority – who have come from the largest urban centers in the world, such as New York, Los Angeles, London, Berlin – are deeply affected by the power of Wyoming's land and open space. Aaberg's music is a perfect match to our place. Part of the mission of the Ucross Foundation is 'to cast a reflection into the future of our cultural lives and times,' and this original musical composition is such a wonderful way to fulfill that goal. We are grateful to the American Composers Forum for providing us with this opportunity."

WYO Theater Executive Director Nick Johnson stated, "The Continental Harmony grant was a great impetus for collaboration between the WYO Theater and Ucross. We present the performing arts and Ucross encourages and facilitates artistic creation so the fit is perfect. Phil Aaberg's upbringing in the West makes him the perfect composer and performer to represent our western locale. I think his style both as a composer and performer will connect well with our audiences."

The American West is by definition a place of transition. For instance, the Powder River Basin, where the Ucross Foundation is located, is currently in the midst of a massive energy boom involving the development of coal bed methane gas. The residents of this area of Wyoming live here because of a deep love of the land and an appreciation for a rural way of life. The new piece of music celebrates these aspects of landscape and community, and explores the relationship between a changing landscape to both the natural and human communities.

### ***About composer Philip Aaberg***

Composer Philip Aaberg writes music that connects a global audience to the sweeping landscape of the West. By translating Montana's farms, ranches, and native cultures into musical concepts, he's forged a unique keyboard style that paints an audible portrait of his home state. Although classically trained, Philip celebrates many traditions with his compositions. He weaves strains of blues and bluegrass as well as rock and new music throughout his melodic tapestries.

Besides playing piano with the Boston Pops and participating in the Marlboro Chamber Music Festival, Philip has appeared with Peter Gabriel, Elvin Bishop, and the Doobie Brothers. He has cut eight solo

albums, one of which, *Live From Montana*, received a 2002 Grammy nomination. As a guest artist, Philip has performed on over 200 albums and on PBS's *All-American Jazz*, which earned him an Emmy nomination. "He is a true composer, as well as a great interpreter," says fellow pianist George Winston. "His music so deeply captures the essence of Montana and yet it is so universal."

### ***About the Ucross Foundation and WYO Theater***

**The Ucross Foundation** was incorporated as a nonprofit organization on June 1, 1981. The primary objectives included the restoration of the historic Clear Fork headquarters of the Pratt and Ferris Cattle Company (the complex of buildings known as Big Red and built in 1882), the promotion of the preservation of other historical sites in the area, and the creation of an artists-in-residence program. The 22,000-acre Ucross Ranch is a developing model for ecologically sound, holistic ranching practices. In 1999 the Foundation placed a conservation easement on more than half the ranch with the Wyoming Chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

The mission of the Ucross Foundation is to foster fresh and innovative thinking in the visual arts, literature, and music by providing residencies, workspace, and uninterrupted time to individual artists, writers and composers. The Foundation seeks residents whose work reflects a depth of individual creative exploration and the potential for significant accomplishments. Ucross hosts eight individuals at any one time, selected by an outside panel in a competitive selection process; approximately 85 artists working in all disciplines spend time at Ucross annually. For more information, visit [www.ucrossfoundation.org](http://www.ucrossfoundation.org)

**The WYO** was originally built in 1923 as the Lotus, a vaudeville theater. The theater entertained Sheridan families for nearly 60 years with both live performances and films before closing its doors in 1982. Faced with the loss of this venerable landmark the citizens of Sheridan came together to rescue the building. Community leadership coupled with the generous gifts of time and money by individuals, businesses, and private foundations not only saved the theater, but renovated it to become an architectural centerpiece and important performing arts facility for downtown Sheridan. Since reopening in 1989 the WYO has brought countless hours of live entertainment, cultural enrichment, and educational opportunities to the greater Sheridan community.

### ***About Continental Harmony***

**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](http://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 support from the Target Foundation.*

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