



PRESS RELEASE

Karen P. Thomas, Artistic Director and Conductor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Media Contact: Laura McFarland
(206) 781-2766
laura@seattlepromusica.org

SEATTLE PRO MUSICA PRESENTS

An American Christmas

Our first concert of the American Masterpieces season showcases American music for the winter season, including Spirituals and Shaker music, as well as favorites by leading American composers Eric Whitacre, William Hawley and Grammy-nominee Morten Lauridsen.

The 3:00 pm family concert on December 9th at Town Hall in Seattle is designed for children and families. This Seattle Pro Musica annual tradition is a shorter performance for young audiences, with explanations, stories, and a rollicking sing-along of favorite carols for children and their families.

Saturday, December 9, 2006 3:00 pm & 7:30 pm (2 performances)

Family concert at 3:00 pm

Pre-Concert Lecture at 6:30 pm by Seattle Pro Musica Artistic Director & Conductor Karen P. Thomas

Town Hall • 1119 Eighth Avenue, Seattle

Saturday, December 16, 2006 3:00 pm & 7:30 pm (2 performances)

Pre-Concert Lecture at 2:00 pm & 6:30 pm by Artistic Director & Conductor Karen P. Thomas

Chapel at Bastyr University • 14500 Juanita Drive NE, Bothell

Seattle Pro Musica Ticket Information

Single tickets range in price from \$15 to \$23. Season subscriptions are currently available and range in price from \$40 to \$55. Special family pricing for the December 9, 3:00 pm performance – one child (14 & under) free with one general admission adult; additional children's tickets \$5.

For more information contact Seattle Pro Musica at **(206) 781-2766** or **www.seattlepromusica.org**

Seattle Pro Musica | 2006-2007 American Masterpieces Season | supported in part by The National Endowment for the Arts, ArtsFund, The Boeing Company, the Washington State Arts Commission, 4Culture, and City of Seattle, Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs.

Seattle Pro Musica 1756 NW 56th St Seattle, WA 98107 206.781.2766 www.seattlepromusica.org

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An American Christmas features recent works by some of America's most important living composers, as well as arrangements of beloved spirituals and early American Shaker music. Following is background on some of the composers and their works to be included in these concerts:

Morten Lauridsen, Composer-in-Residence of the Los Angeles Master Chorale from 1994-2001, occupies a permanent place in the standard vocal repertoire of the 20th and 21st centuries. His seven vocal cycles and his series of sacred a cappella motets are featured regularly in concerts by distinguished ensembles throughout the world. His works have been recorded on over a hundred CDs by ensembles including the Robert Shaw Singers, Dale Warland Singers, and Seattle Pro Musica. For these concerts, we perform his *O Magnum Mysterium* and *O nata lux* (from *Lux Aeterna*), which have become the all-time best-selling choral octavos distributed by Theodore Presser, in business since 1783. **Mr. Lauridsen will be the guest composer at the Seattle Pro Musica American Masterpieces Choral Festival June 15-17, 2007.**

An accomplished composer, conductor and lecturer, **Eric Whitacre** has quickly become one of the most popular and performed composers of his generation. Many of Whitacre's works have entered the standard choral and symphonic repertoires – *Lux aurumque*, *Water Night*, *Cloudburst* and *Sleep* are among the most popular choral works of the last decade. We perform *Lux aurumque* on these concerts, a work typical of Whitacre's choral sound, with its shimmering clusters, beautiful voice leading and carefully-judged emotional effects.

Alice Parker is an internationally-recognized composer, conductor and teacher. Her many settings (with Robert Shaw) of American folksongs, hymns and spirituals form an enduring repertoire for choruses all around the world. She travels in the United States and abroad, conducting workshops, concerts and **SINGS** in which all participants, children or adults, professionals or amateurs, learn to make music with remarkable joy and clarity.

Aaron Jay Kernis is one of today's most-performed living composers and one of the youngest composers ever to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for music. His compositional style is a mix of various genres – classical, jazz, pop, medieval chant and Jewish cantillation. *Dorma, ador* is a choral lullaby written using Portuguese nonsense syllables and traditional Portuguese elements.

Frank Ferko is established as one of Chicago's leading composers. His compositions based on the life, music and writings of Hildegard von Bingen have recently gained international attention. Of the *Six Marian Motets*, the composer writes: "The texts were selected according to specific associations with Marian festival days and consist of five English texts which are translations of Eastern Orthodox liturgical texts, as prepared by the Sisters of St. Basil the Great, and one Latin text by Hildegard von Bingen. The general concept behind these motets was that they would be performable by a small choir for liturgical use but also adaptable to concert performance."

Charles Ives was trained at Yale University as a composer and organist, but spent most of his professional life working in the insurance industry, composing in his free time. Inspired by his father, a conductor and composer who experimented with polytonality and quarter-tone music in the 19th century, Ives created a uniquely individual and iconoclastic style of composition which is marked by his uncanny ability to evoke the sounds and feelings of life in New England. Many of his early and mid-career works were unperformed until late in his long life – his Third Symphony was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1947, forty-two years after it was written. (Ives gave the prize money away, observing that "prizes are for mediocrity.") The majority of his sacred choral music was written early in his career, when he was working as a church organist. A *Christmas Carol* was originally composed for solo voice with keyboard, probably in 1894.

Carol Barnett was composer-in-residence with the Dale Warland Singers from 1992 to 2001. *McKay* is the middle movement of Barnett's *An American Thanksgiving*. The composer writes: "*An American Thanksgiving* was commissioned by the Dale Warland Singers for their final season. I chose three hymns from the original *Sacred Harp* Collection based on their compatible texts and compelling melodies. I have tried to stay close to the wonderful spirited rhythms and elemental, forthright harmonies of the original settings."

Seattle composer **John Muehleisen** specializes in composing works for voice and choral ensembles. His works have been performed in the US, Canada, and in Europe by numerous ensembles, including the Dale Warland Singers (composer-in-residence for their 03-04 season) and Seattle Pro Musica. Muehleisen writes: *The Great "O" Antiphons* are filled with rich musical symbols and text painting. Musical devices used throughout the "*O*" *Antiphons* include cascading entrances and shimmering harmonies used to illuminate the themes that dominate these texts — themes of darkness and light, of watching and waiting."

The **Shakers** evolved from a dissident Quaker sect led by the charismatic young Ann Lee (Mother Ann). They fled religious persecution in England and arrived with a small group of followers in New York in 1774. Singing and dancing were integral to Shaker meetings – today there are over 10,000 extant songs (thousands more were likely sung and never notated). Early Shaker songs were wordless, monophonic melodies sung by the community with no instrumental accompaniment. The early Shakers danced, ran, jumped, whirled, shook, trembled and fell into trances as part of their worship; each individual dancing, prophesying, shouting or singing "in tongues" as moved by the spirit. By the mid-19th century, the meetings had become more orderly, with specific dance steps done in lines (in an ordered ceremony called "laboring"); Shaker songs began to use texts and some later songs were harmonized in hymn-style. The Shakers believe all their songs to be spiritual gifts, whether consciously composed or given by inspiration to a member through a visitation from the Holy Spirit, Mother Ann or another spiritual being. While the celibate lifestyle and spare furnishings of the Shakers imparts a picture of austerity, their music and dancing is emotional and deeply expressive of joy, exuberance, love, sorrow and spiritual zeal. Today the only functioning community of Shakers is a small group at Sabbathday Lake in Poland Spring, Maine. The songs heard on these concerts are still part of their living tradition.