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Men's Choruses Unite For Local Premiere of Major Work

Kansas City, MO—Heartland Men's Chorus welcomes their brothers from Wichita, the Heart of America Men's Chorus, to the Folly Theater stage for "**Exile: The Journey Home**," March 29-30, 2008.

"We're excited to have more than 200 men on the stage of the Folly Theater," HMC artistic director Dr. Joe Nadeau said. "It's going to be a powerful sound when all these voices combine as one."

The joint concert will feature each group performing separately and then joining for the Midwest premiere of "Exile," a major work by composer Robert Seeley and lyricist Robert Espindola. The two choruses reunite in Wichita a week later to present the same program at the Orpheum Theatre.

The program begins with a solo set from HMC. Nadeau chose music with a variety of unique tonalities, rhythms and dynamics, including a setting of "Dies Irae," the gospel-flavored "Here's Where I Stand" from the motion picture "Camp," and "Carmina Ricotta," a hilarious new HMC commission celebrating the peaceful coexistence of various cheeses.

The emotional high point of the first act will no doubt be "Last Letter Home." Commissioned by a new consortium of men's choruses, the song's text features a letter by Springfield, Mo. native Jesse Givens to his wife, written days before he deployed to Iraq. "Please, only read it if I don't come home," he wrote. "Please put it away and, hopefully, you will never have to read it."

Givens died in Iraq at the age of 34, May 1, 2003, shortly after his arrival. His letter to his wife, Melissa, and two sons, five-year-old Dakota and unborn child Carson, is poetic in its simplicity and its message of family.

Also included in the repertoire, "Khorumi," named after an Adzaharian folk dance accompanied by a drum and wind instrument, sets this popular Georgian song in 5/4 rhythm. The text of "Khorumi" is a series of phonemes, which propel and invigorate the thrilling dance rhythms.

"We had such an overwhelming response to our "Global Destinations" concert," Nadeau said, "that I wanted to perform another selection from outside the traditional Western European repertoire."

HMC's solo set will give audiences a preview of selections they will take to the GALA Festival in Miami this

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summer. Every four years, the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses produces a festival bringing together GLBT choruses from around the globe. In preparation for the gathering, HMC will present some of its most unique, challenging and beautiful music in this upcoming concert.

Following HMC's set, the men of Wichita will take the stage to introduce themselves to the Kansas City audience.

"The repertoire we'll be singing is all about the power of music," artistic director Howard Webb said. "Music frees us from the constraints of daily life and allows us to express who we truly are."

The chorus will begin with a rousing opener, "Let All Men Sing" by Keith Christopher, followed by the inspirational "When I Hear Music." The men from Wichita will finish their solo set with a showstopper from "Sweet Charity," "The Rhythm of Life."

The concert culminates with the two choruses joining to present "Exile," a song cycle commissioned by the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus featuring men's chorus and a large brass ensemble.

"'Exile' weaves the threads of hope and new ideals with the distinctive strands of our lives as gay people," said Dr. Stan Hill, who commissioned the work when he served as artistic director of San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus. "It sings of renewal, reconciliation, love and the journey towards a sense of community."

Nadeau has wanted to perform this particular work for a long time.

"An enormous amount of repertoire has been created for gay men's choruses by gay composers," Nadeau said. "But a lot of these works, including 'Exile,' have never been published by a major music publisher and have never been archived. I'm hoping to keep this amazing music alive."

"The themes of the work are universal," Nadeau said. "Everyone has felt exiled or marginalized at one time or another."

Songs such as "The Prodigal" celebrate the journey to a home where each of us can live as our authentic selves.

"'Exile' also explores themes of growing older," Nadeau noted. "One song in particular asks the question, 'Was it worth growing old with me, now that we're old?' The themes of the work are so varied; I know they are going to resonate strongly with our diverse audience."

Heartland Men's Chorus performs "Exile: The Journey Home" at the Folly Theater, 300 W. 12th Street, Saturday, March 29 at 8:00 p.m., and Sunday, March 30 at 4:00 p.m. Tickets are available online at www.hmckc.org or by calling 816-931-3338.

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