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April 5, 2000
Contact: Pamela Gregg
gregg@udayton.edu

NEWS RELEASE

NEW MAGNIFICAT TO DEBUT DURING PRESIDENT'S CONCERT AT UD

Note: An all-ensembles rehearsal of the Magnificat will be from 4:30 to 5:15 p.m. April 14 in Boll Theatre, and photographers are welcome.

DAYTON, Ohio — Poet Herbert Martin had never before written a religious piece, but he had created various forms of spirituals through his poetry. So it was not hard for the University of Dayton poet-in-residence to imagine creating the text for a new Magnificat — the Virgin Mary's hymn of praise — at the request of music professor Phillip Magnuson, who would compose the musical setting.

What did prove a bit challenging to the 66-year-old writer, however, was assuming the persona of a young woman — a tack he took before embarking on his literary journey.

The premier performance of their joint effort will highlight the UD President's Concert, to be held at 4 p.m. Sunday, April 16, in the Kennedy Union Boll Theatre. Admission is free and open to the public.

The Biblical Magnificat, from Luke 1:46-55, describes Mary's reaction to the Angel Gabriel's announcement that she would bear the son of God.

"I tried think of what such an announcement would mean to a modern woman, and I tried to respond to that as personally as I could," Martin said. "That's how the text began to evolve.

"Trying to hear the voice of a woman and imagine her response involves switching one's persona and identity, which isn't easy. There is also a belief that men writers — and men in

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300 College Park Dayton, Ohio 45469-1679
(937) 229-3241 (937) 229-3063 Fax
www.udayton.edu

general — do not hear the voices of women convincingly.”

“And the original, Biblical text already has a male bias to it,” Magnuson added.

Magnuson said he was inspired to create a new Magnificat at least 10 years ago, when his thoughts first turned to the University’s 150th anniversary — being celebrated through May 2001 — and how we would personally commemorate the event.

“I wanted to do something long before becoming aware of the official celebration the University would put together,” he said. “I decided on a new Magnificat because of the strong Marianist foundation here at UD.

“And I asked Herbert to create a new text because the original had been done so many times. I was looking for something a little more personal to UD.”

The artists had successfully collaborated five years earlier in producing an opera — *It Pays to Advertise* — which premiered on campus in 1996. Their individual talents set them up as a good match from the beginning.

Martin, who has been at UD since 1970, is a prolific and award-winning author whose most recent collections include *Galileo’s Suns*, published by Bottom Dog Press, and *The Log of the Vigilante*, a journal of slave captivity. The *Log* has been awarded first prize in a poetry competition held by Mellen Press, which will publish the collection this spring.

Magnuson, who is principal viola in the Springfield Symphony Orchestra and performs with the Marian, Valley and Springfield Symphony string quartets, is published by Shawnee Press Inc. His compositions, which have earned awards from Duke University, the National Federation of Music Clubs, Broadcast Music Inc., the Cornish Institute and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, have been performed throughout the United States.

In creating the Magnificat, Magnuson said he wanted to make sure the music would be “immediately accessible” to any listener. “It was very crucial that the piece wouldn’t seem to be competing with Bach’s or any other version,” he said.

The Magnificat will be performed by the University’s orchestra, symphonic wind

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ensemble, choral union, chorale and Ebony Heritage Singers and conducted by Patrick Reynolds, associate professor of music. Each group will also perform separate programs during the President's Concert.

Magnuson said he'd never composed for "so many forces" before — and laughed when he added that the challenge of rehearsing is proving greater than that of composing. "Each group has been rehearsing separately and at different times," he said. "There will be two jointrehearsals right before the concert, though, so we should be okay."

No matter what the outcome, Magnuson remains focused on the intent of the sesquicentennial performance — "We're doing this for love, not for riches."

The concert is part of the University's celebration of its sesquicentennial anniversary. Founded in 1850 by the Society of Mary, UD has become a national leader in Catholic higher education, graduating students who are prepared to succeed professionally and who know the value of service and leadership to community. The celebration, which will run through May 2001, will include song and dance, religion and humor, and events that range from film to philosophy.

A calendar of events being held in celebration of UD's sesquicentennial can be found on the Web at <http://www.udayton.edu/150/>.

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For media interviews, contact **Phillip Magnuson** at (937) 229-3907 or via e-mail at magnuson@yar.udayton.edu and **Herbert Martin** at (937) 229-3439 or via e-mail at martin@checkov.hm.udayton.edu.