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NEWS RELEASE

BOSNIAN-BORN COMPOSER DREAMS OF BROADWAY DEBUT OF SARAJEVO CIRCLE, MUSICAL OF HOPE BORN OUT OF HORROR OF WAR

DAYTON, Ohio — It wasn't that long ago that Dino Zonic heard the crack of mortar shells and screams of anguish as he helped defend Sarajevo as a commander of a small platoon during the war in Bosnia.

Today, the 34-year-old composer hears only enthusiastic applause whenever he stages excerpts from his rock opera, "Sarajevo Circle," a musical of hope born out of the horror and devastation of war in Bosnia.

His nightmares about surviving war have turned into dreams about succeeding on Broadway. That is, when he's sleeping.

Thanks to the belief and backing of musician and Dayton native Mark Frazee, Zonic is literally working night and day to prepare a scaled-down version of the highly acclaimed piece to audition tentatively Jan. 29-30 at the Irish Theatre in New York City before an audience of prospective investors and producers. Dave Coleman, founder and lead trumpet of the nationally touring brass quintet Top Brass, is serving "as a sounding board" as Zonic scores the piece for a symphony orchestra and is helping to handle contractual, business, marketing and logistical concerns. Rounding out the production team is attorney Chuck Smiley and Bosa Kosovich, a Broadway manager.

"I was up until 7 this morning," an unshaven Zonic apologized to a visitor in his office in the Center for International Programs at the University of Dayton. "The telephone isn't ringing. There are no faxes. I have complete peace, but I'm really exhausted. The inspiration (for a Broadway musical) is giving me incredible energy."

In his spare time, Zonic is also composing a new piece that the Air Force Band of Flight will premiere Saturday, Nov. 18, when the first Dayton Peace Prize is awarded as part of the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords. The 10- to 12-minute "Symphony Entrada" will exemplify the struggle and steps toward reconciliation in the Balkans, according to Zonic. "It's a symphony about a beginning," he said. "It symbolizes the Dayton Peace

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Accords and the rebuilding.”

Zonic describes “Sarajevo Circle” as an autobiographical story, as a struggle between two loves — homeland and family. Zonic taught music composition at the Srednja School in Sarajevo, but found himself defending the war-torn city as an officer in charge of hundreds of men — even though he had no military training. “You love your town, and you must go and fight and defend it. But this is war, and you must be ready to kill without an explanation,” he recounted softly. “You must also be a normal, gentle guy who can transform and love your mother, your wife. How can you transform? A lot of people die in this way. First, the heart dies. Then, the bullet is the easy part.”

The 32-member cast features a single narrator and musicians, dancers and singers from the Balkans who perform 17 songs that evoke both war and reconciliation. The songs form “a circle that reunifies people,” beginning with “Love is the Law” and ending with “A Prayer,” according to Zonic. The show was performed in Dayton on the first anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accords, in Sarajevo and Croatia and at festivals throughout Europe.

“I find Dino’s writing in Sarajevo Circle to be highly inventive and deeply original,” Coleman said. “He combines popular melodies with a strong classical content, and his formal training as a composer is evident in every part of Sarajevo Circle.

“Like writers, composers should focus on areas that they know and have lived. Dino lived through the longest siege in modern military history. ... He has experienced the tragedy and brutality of modern mechanized warfare, lost many beloved friends and family, and is, quite frankly, lucky to have survived. There are few schooled composers who have lived through an experience such as this. He is the voice of a generation of young Bosnians, a great many of whom perished in that horrible genocidal war.”

Most people who meet Zonic are mesmerized by how he uses music to heal wounds, and many have helped him make Dayton his new homeland. Frazee, a professional musician who owns a recording studio, gave Zonic, his wife and child a place to live in Kettering and a recording studio. Once he got to know the composer, who speaks with spellbinding emotion and conviction about the power of music, he realized, “He’s such a genius. Dino knows no rejection. His enthusiasm is amazing, but what’s really amazing is that he’s a genuinely talented person. He’s the real thing, and I have faith in him. This is a Cinderella story, and it’s not over yet.”

Zonic calls Frazee his muse: “He gives me rhythm of the heart. He’s my hero on a white horse. I have faith in him, too.”

Jerry Hauer, owner of Hauer Music Co., provided studio equipment to Zonic. Bruce and Rebecca Hitchner worked with Catholic Social Services to sponsor the family, who left Zagreb,

Croatia, in August 1999 with only a couple of suitcases. The Hitchners helped Zonic bring "Sarajevo Circle" to the U.S. and managed his concert appearances.

"What he does symbolically represents all that the Dayton Peace Accords Project stands for," said Hitchner, director of UD's Center for International Programs and chair of the Dayton Peace Accords Project. "Music can be used as a vehicle for reconciliation, peace and human values. Dino's music will resonate with American audiences. This will be timely 20 years from now."

Zonic, who suffered terrible nightmares about the war, said he channeled his memories into "Sarajevo Circle" as a way to heal. "War gave me some kind of power to move me like nothing else," he said. "My music and inspiration belong to humanity. Everything I write is about humanity."

Living thousands of miles away from war-ravaged Sarajevo also has been therapeutic for Zonic, who expressed amazement at his new life in Dayton. "I'm like a baby in this community, completely taken care of," he said. "It's like a beautiful, beautiful dream. I'm completely healed here. I don't have stress, I live in peace.

"I owe it to this town."

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For media interviews, contact **Dino Zonic** and **Bruce Hitchner** at (937) 229-3652; **Mark Frazee** at (520) 749-0222 or userfred@aol.com; and **Dave Coleman** at (937) 427-3545, 830-3340 or topbrassmusic1@juno.com.