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For immediate release:

Blind Boys of Alabama Christmas Celebration to Return to Mondavi Center

November 20, 2007; Davis, California—The spirit of Christmas will be celebrated with all the energy and soul of old-time gospel music as the legendary **Blind Boys of Alabama** return to the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts** with a performance of holiday favorites. The Blind Boys, two-time Grammy Award winners whose sweet harmonies and exuberant stage presence belie their advancing years, have been bringing audiences the best in American gospel music for more than half a century and continue to be sure-fire showstoppers.

The event will begin at 8 pm on December 20 in the Mondavi Center's Jackson Hall on the **UC Davis** campus. Tickets are available from the Mondavi Center Ticket Office at 530.754.ARTS (2787) or online at MondaviArts.org. The event is presented as part of the Mondavi Center's **Global Beat** series.

Formed at the Alabama Institute for the Negro Blind in 1939 as the **Happy Land Jubilee Singers**, the five original group members were no more than 10 years old when the group first began performing. (One founding member, **Jimmy Carter**, now 75, is still performing.) The group's upbeat style—known as “jubilee” among gospel audiences—was an immediate hit. The ensemble changed its name to the **Five Blind Boys of Alabama**, and set out touring with a “rival” group, the **Five Blind Boys of Mississippi**, playing mostly churches. The two groups would engage in nightly musical “battles,” with the winner being chosen by the congregation. The tours were immensely popular on the gospel circuit, and continued well into the 1960s.

The Blind Boys broke through to mainstream audiences 1983 with an appearance in *The Gospel at Colonus*, the Obie Award-winning Broadway hit penned by **Bob Telson** and **Lee Breuer**. A series of tours with the likes of **Tom Petty** and **Bonnie Raitt** ensued, along with several high-profile recording opportunities, and the Blind Boys found themselves nominated for a Grammy Award for their 1992 album *Deep River*, which featured a transcendent version of **Bob Dylan**'s “I Believe in You.” The group's album *Spirit of the Century* won a Grammy for Best Traditional Soul Gospel Album in 2001, a feat which their *Higher Ground* repeated in 2002.

Several of their renditions of traditional holiday material are preserved on the 2004 CD *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, which features guest performances from **Solomon Burke**, **Tom Waits**, **Aaron Neville**, **Mavis Staples**, and others. Their most recent recording is *Atom Bomb*, which features guest performances by **David**

Hidalgo of **Los Lobos** and bluesman **Charlie Musselwhite**, and finds the ensemble delving into rock-influenced material such as **Norman Greenbaum**'s "Spirit in the Sky" and **Eric Clapton**'s "Presence of the Lord."

As live performers, the Blind Boys still exhibit the rich harmonies, exuberant rhythms, and unshakable faith that defined their first performances. Having spent the better part of a century working to increase the audience for their genre while expanding the time-honored style with contemporary songs and innovative arrangements, the Blind Boys remain compelling performers capable of bringing the true spirit of gospel music to any audience.

The line-up for the Mondavi Center performance includes **Bishop Billy Bowers**, vocals; **Jimmy Carter**, vocals; **Ben Moore**, vocals; **Caleb "Bobby" Butler**, rhythm guitar; **Joey Williams**, lead guitar; **Tracy Pierce**, bass; and **Eric "Ricky" McKinnie**, drums.

"The Blind Boys of Alabama are an American musical institution and a longtime favorite of Mondavi Center audiences," said **Don Roth**, the Mondavi Center's executive director. "We look forward to another exhilarating performance of gospel songs and holiday favorites."

What: **The Blind Boys of Alabama**
 Holiday Show
When: Thursday, December 20, 8 pm
Where: Jackson Hall
 Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts
 University of California, Davis
Admission: \$49/\$44/\$39 Adults • \$24.50/\$22/\$19.50 Students, Children
Tickets/Info: 530.754.ARTS (2787)
 866.754.ARTS (toll-free)
 <http://www.MondaviArts.org>
 530.754.5402 [TDD]

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