



Contact: Joe Martin
530.754.5428

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For immediate release:

Lara Downes to Play Gershwin, Ellington, and More in Mondavi Center Concert of American Music

March 26, 2008; Davis, California—Pianist **Lara Downes** returns to the intimate Studio Theatre at the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts** on April 20 for a special recital exploring American music of the twentieth century. Downes' popular *Perspectives* series, which during previous Mondavi Center seasons has featured composers including **Mozart, Brahms, and Schumann**, returns with *Coming Home, Part II: Blue Notes and Jazz Nights*, a recital featuring works by American composers including **Aaron Copland, George Gershwin, and Duke Ellington**.

There will be two performances, at 2 pm and 7 pm, on April 20 in the Mondavi Center's Studio Theatre 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 **Classical Sundays Series**.

The Mondavi Center Arts Education Program will also present Lara Downes as part of the 2007-08 **Wells Fargo School Matinee Series** at the Mondavi Center on April 17 at 11 am in the Studio Theatre. The School Matinee Series is made available for teachers and students, including homeschooled students. Performances in this series support the California Department of Education Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards. Teachers, educators, and others interested in purchasing tickets may contact the Ticket Office at 530.754.4689.

Downes is director of the Mondavi Center Young Artists Competition and UC Davis ArtsBridge, and a Mondavi Center artist-in-residence. She is strongly committed to the idea of bringing classical music to new audiences through arts education and new styles of concert presentation. Her *Perspectives* series has been popular with Mondavi Center audiences, many of whom seem to particularly appreciate the background information Downes presents verbally to accompany her musical performances. She tours nationally with her series "88 Keys: Perspectives from the Piano," and this year begins work on a long-range recording project of classical DVDs for young audiences in collaboration with V.I.E.W. Video. Her nonprofit foundation, 88 KEYS, fosters opportunities for music experiences and learning in America's public schools by facilitating the donation of used pianos to public schools.

Downes has attracted attention as one of the most exciting and communicative of contemporary pianists, and has been called "a most delightful artist, with a unique blend of musicianship and showmanship" by **National Public Radio**. Her intense musicality, brilliant virtuosity, and appealing presentation have won over audiences at some of the world's leading concert venues, including **Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Kennedy**

Center, and the **Vienna Konzerthaus**. Downes' debut CD, *Invitation to the Dance*, was called "a magical little recording" by National Public Radio, and her second release, *American Ballads*, was featured on NPR's *Performance Today* and was ranked by Amazon.com as being among the four best recordings of American music ever made.

The music to be performed in *Coming Home, Part II: Blue Notes and Jazz Nights* comes from a turbulent period in American history that includes the Roaring '20s, the Great Depression, and the World War II years. During that time, American composers, who had previously been strongly indebted to European models, began to forge a uniquely American identity, drawing upon the sounds of jazz and street life, and evoking images of the day-to-day lives of Americans in cities, factories, farms, and fields. The compositions on the April 20 program were all profoundly influenced by—or part of—the jazz and blues traditions being forged by African Americans during the early part of the twentieth century.

"American music, what we identify as an 'American' sound, is what it is because of the many different voices that have come together to make it," says Downes. "The confluence of the European classical and African American musical traditions that took place on the American concert stage in the 1920s was a catalyst for what American music would become. Our easy crossing over of stylistic boundaries today comes out of that pivotal moment. George Gershwin wrote about wanting to 'express our manner of living, the tempo of living, the tempo of our modern life with its speed and chaos and vitality.' That 'chaos and vitality' is central to American music, and it reflects our unique heritage, musical and otherwise."

Downes' April 20 performances will feature soprano **Nicole Raynor**, a 16-year-old Berkeley resident and a recent winner of the Mondavi Center's 2007-08 Young Artists Competition, and arrangements of Duke Ellington compositions by **David Kyle**, a UC Davis associate professor of sociology and jazz pianist.

The program for Downes' performances will be:

- **Florence Price**: *Fantasia Negre*
- **Aaron Copland**: *Four Piano Blues*
- **Dana Suesse**: *Cocktail Suite*
- **Duke Ellington**: "Come Sunday" (arr. D. Kyle), "Mood Indigo" (with Nicole Raynor, soprano)
- **George Gershwin**: "Summertime" (with Nicole Raynor, soprano), *Rhapsody in Blue*

"The early part of the twentieth century is a fascinating time in the history of American music, as composers brought to the European tradition a variety of influences that were uniquely of this country and its diverse people," says **Don Roth**, the Mondavi Center's executive director. "We look forward to hearing Lara Downes discuss and play the works of Copland, Gershwin, Ellington, and others in the Studio Theatre."

What: **Lara Downes, Perspectives**
Coming Home
Part II: Blue Notes and Jazz Nights

When: Sunday, April 20 • 2 pm & 7 pm

Where: Studio Theatre
Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts
University of California, Davis

Admission: \$33 Adults • \$16.50 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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