



Contact: Joe Martin
530.754.5428

Full schedule and images available for download at:
<http://www.MondaviArts.org/pressroom>

For immediate release:

Pianist Lara Downes to Present American Composers at Mondavi Center

November 15, 2007; Davis, California—Pianist **Lara Downes** returns to the Studio Theatre at the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts** with the first of two recitals exploring American music of the twentieth century. Downes' popular *Perspectives* series, which during the previous Mondavi Center seasons has explored the music of **Mozart, Brahms, Schumann**, and more, returns December 9 with *Coming Home, Part I: The Heartland*, a recital featuring works by American composers **Samuel Barber, Virgil Thomson, Aaron Copland, Rubin Goldmark, and Roy Harris**.

Performances will begin at 2 pm and 7 pm on December 9 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.

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.

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 I: The Heartland* 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.

“American music suddenly came of age during the first two decades of the twentieth century, and by the mid-1920s, all of its branches: classical, jazz, and musical theater, were thriving,” said Downes, explaining that the exuberance and prosperity of the ‘20s contributed to a new confidence and willingness to experiment on the part of the nation’s composers, ushering in a period of “ultra-modernism.”

Conversely, the economic collapse of the Great Depression led to a deeper concern for the utilitarian purposes of art, Downes said, with many prominent musicians and composers being employed by the federal Work Progress Administration. “‘Music for the people’ meant using the people’s music, and a great interest in indigenous American music, including folk and jazz idioms, took hold,” Downes explained.

Downes’ presentation will include a backdrop of photographs from the ‘30s and ‘40s by **Walker Evans, Laura Gilpin, Dorothea Lange, Alfred Stieglitz**, and other artists who documented the people and places of the country during this period.

The program for the December 9 recitals includes:

- Samuel Barber: *Excursions*, op. 20;
- Virgil Thomson: *The Plow that Broke the Plains*;
- Aaron Copland: Three Pieces from *Our Town*;
- Rubin Goldmark: *Prairie Idylls*;
- Roy Harris: *American Ballads*.

“The American composers of the twentieth century made an immeasurable contribution to the classical repertoire, bringing to the European tradition a variety of influences that were uniquely of this country and its diverse people,” said **Don Roth**, the Mondavi Center’s executive director. “We look forward to hearing Lara Downes discuss and play the works of Barber, Thomson, Copland, Goldmark, and Harris in the Studio Theatre.”

What: **Lara Downes, Perspectives**
Part I: The Heartland

When: Sunday, December 9 · 2 & 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]

###