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For immediate release:

Speak Theater Arts Brings Controversial and Popular N*W*C to Mondavi Center

December 21, 2007; Davis, California—The Los Angeles-based company **Speak Theater Arts** will present **N*W*C**, an award-winning and controversial mix of drama, hip-hop, slam poetry, and stand-up comedy, at the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts at UC Davis**. With a title standing for three well-known racial epithets, **N*W*C** is an entertaining, incisive, and humorous look at race relations that won the 2003 award for Best Play from American Readers Theatre Association and has been received enthusiastically by audiences and critics around the country. Patrons should be advised that the production includes offensive language.

There will be a series of performances Wednesday-Saturday, January 23-26, each beginning at 8 pm 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 **Theater Series**. A moderated **Post-performance Q&A** with members of the cast will follow each performance. These events are sponsored by the **UC Davis Office of Campus Community Relations**.

N*W*C, which is short for **N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK**, has been met with both controversy and rave reviews during its three years of performances around the country. The work's prominent use of racial slurs brought picketers to the first performance at the **University of California, Los Angeles**, while other performances reportedly have brought protests from the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People** and threats from a neo-Nazi group. Audiences and critics, however, have been almost unanimously positive about the play and the way it frankly confronts racial issues.

Writing of a recent performance, *The New York Times* held that "the comedy, whose three-word title consists simply of those racial slurs, seems remarkably well-timed to land in the middle of the national discomfort zone. In the age of **Don Imus** and **Michael Richards**, in light of the renewed scrutiny of hip-hop lyrics and shock-jock blabbermouths, **N*W*C**...examines the power of timeworn taboos, attempting to deflate them through a frontal, often funny, assault."

Co-creators **Rafael Agustin**, **Allan Axibal**, and **Miles Gregley** originally intended to stage the play for just one weekend at UCLA, where they were students. An immigrant from Ecuador, Agustin found himself being

rejected for leading roles in the university's production of works by **Shakespeare** and **Tennessee Williams** by directors who could not envision a Latino as leading man in those plays. Agustin determined to write his own play and enlisted the help of friends and fellow students Axibal, who at the time was doing slam poetry, and Gregley, who was doing stand-up comedy. With help from Agustin's former debate coach **Liesel Reinhart** and her boyfriend, writer **Steven T. Seagle**, the group began to shape a work based on the experiences and cultural heritages of Agustin as a Latino, Axibal as an Asian, and Gregley as an African American.

The initial production was greeted with such enthusiasm that the creators realized the play needed to be more widely seen, and within a few months, a set of performances in Los Angeles was scheduled. The local run was also successful and led to engagements around the country. *N*W*C* has since played in 24 states over the past two years. Along the way, the production has evolved, with new bits being added and some older ones dropped, but the audience response has continued to be strong.

In a written statement to be printed in the event playbill, Speak Theater Arts members offer their thoughts as to why, in the years since the play's creation, *N*W*C* continues to have such an impact on audiences: "The co-creators of the show have since come to better understand how this production with such modest roots has become a national phenomenon. It gives voice to a generation who have been largely silenced in the race dialogue by both political correctness and the painful legacy of the past. *N*W*C* invites audiences to experience the catharsis of laughter while, in the words of the *Los Angeles Times*, 'presenting an inspiring vision of the world they'd like to see.'"

Rafael Agustin has appeared in Los Angeles stagings of *Blade to the Heat*, *Quills*, *Short Eyes*, *Roosters*, and *La Victima*. He is a past winner of the ACTF regional acting competition and the Dell'Arte Fellowship Award from the Kennedy Center, and holds both a BA and an MA in theater from UCLA. He also wrote and directed the dramatic dance play *The Last American Bar*.

*N*W*C* is Allan Axibal's first stage credit, and he received the Jury Prize for Best Actor at the ARTA National Theater Festival for this show. Axibal writes and performs original slam poetry throughout southern California and was a national champion in intercollegiate speech. He holds a BA in communication studies from UCLA and suspended his graduate studies in order to tour with this production.

Miles Ellington Gregley was featured in the Los Angeles productions of *Tracers*, *Short Eyes*, and *The Last American Bar*, and performs frequently with his hip-hop group, **The Elevators**. His stand-up comedy has been seen at the **Icehouse**, **Improv**, and the **Laugh Factory** in the Los Angeles area. Miles is a former national and international champion in collegiate speech competition in both dramatic and comedic categories. He received his BA in theater from UCLA.

"As a university presenting organization, we at the Mondavi Center feel a particular responsibility to bring to the campus and community events that promote thoughtful consideration of the important issues of our time," said **Don Roth**, the Mondavi Center's executive director. "We feel that the Speak Theater Arts production of *N*W*C* confronts issues of racial discrimination in a way that is personal, thought-provoking, moving, and insightful."

What: **Speak Theater Arts**
*N*W*C*

When: Wednesday-Saturday, January 23-26, 2008 · 8 pm

Where: Studio Theatre

Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts
University of California, Davis

Admission: \$36 Adults • \$18 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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