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### **American Spiritual Ensemble Chosen to Perform Opening Concert**

The American Spiritual Ensemble will entertain choral music professionals from 11 states Wednesday evening when it performs the opening concert at the annual meeting of the Southern Division of the American Choral Directors Association in Memphis.

The Spiritual Ensemble, led by Dr. Everett McCorvey, will perform at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 10 in the main performance hall of the Cannon Center for the Performing Arts, the home of the Memphis Symphony.

‘I am thrilled to bring this outstanding ensemble to the membership of the American Choral Directors Association Southern Division and to our friends in Memphis,’ said Dr. Bradley L. Almquist, president of the Southern Division of the ACDA.

‘The conference celebrates the tapestry of traditions that have influenced the choral art in the Southern United States. What better way of opening that celebration than with African-American Spirituals? Who would one ask to open such a conference than the American Spiritual Ensemble?’

The concert is free and open to the public.

‘This is a tremendous honor,’ said McCorvey, who holds the Lexington Opera Society Endowed Chair in Opera Studies and is Professor of Voice and Director of Opera at the University of Kentucky. ‘To celebrate these folk songs of the American Negro Slaves with these extraordinary choral directors will be a highlight of our 15 years of performing.’

McCorvey founded the Spiritual Ensemble in 1995 with the mission of keeping the American Negro spiritual alive. The group, with its dynamic renditions of classic spirituals, jazz and Broadway numbers highlighting the Black experience, has thrilled audiences throughout the United States, Europe and South America, and has toured Spain seven times. The Spiritual Ensemble has also recorded four CDs and is featured in the 2007 PBS documentary ‘The Spirituals.’

“The prodigious voices of the North American group the American Spiritual Ensemble made the audience tremble with emotions,” wrote a reviewer for La Rioja newspaper in Longrono, Spain. “Of the performances which we have had in the Festival de Najera, this was the best.”

Generally 20 to 25 singers perform with the American Spiritual Ensemble, which tours at different times throughout the year. Members are soloists in their own right and have sung in theaters and opera houses, including the Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera and abroad in Italy, Germany, Britain, Scotland, Spain and Japan.

Two singers with strong Memphis connections will be performing with the group Wednesday. Bass-baritone Laurence Albert, a Memphis native and voice professor at Rhodes College, launched his classical career as the first African-American to represent the Mid-South Region at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. He has sung a repertoire of 50 operatic roles and 300 songs in seven languages internationally since his debut with the Detroit Opera in 1977.

Baritone Kenneth Overton is familiar to Memphis opera audiences and will sing Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* next month with Opera Memphis.

The ACDA, founded in 1959, is a nonprofit music-education organization to promote excellence in choral music through performance, composition, publication, research, and teaching. Members are choral directors who represent more than one million singers across the country. ACDA members teach in public and private schools from kindergarten through college and university levels.

“This conference will be the largest meeting of choral directors in the Southeast United States. Over 3,500 musicians will gather to celebrate the choral art with concerts, interest sessions, world premieres and performances by singers from 3rd grade through senior citizen,” Almquist said.

McCorvey, a native of Montgomery, Alabama, is a tenor who has performed widely, including at the Kennedy Center, the Metropolitan Opera, Aspen Music Festival, Radio City Music Hall and in England, Germany, Italy, Spain, Japan, Poland and the Czech and Slovak Republics.

For additional information go to:

<http://www.americanspiritualensemble.com>

<http://www.acda.org/conferences/2010/so>

<http://www.globalcreativeconnections.com>