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For immediate release:

Cirque-Works Birdhouse Factory Brings 'New Circus' to Mondavi Center

September 13, 2007; Davis, California—A factory may seem an unlikely setting for slapstick humor, wild acrobatics, and spectacular circus stunts, but **Cirque-Works Birdhouse Factory** is a magical place where workers are acrobats, the machines power a high-flying trapeze routine, and birdhouses are built amidst the antics of clowns, contortionists, and much more. Featuring star performers from the famed **Cirque du Soleil**, the “new circus” production will come to the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts** for a series of performances.

The events will begin at 8 pm on October 13 and 3 pm on October 14 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 October 13 performance is presented as a Mondavi Center **Global Beat** event, while the October 14 performance is part of the Mondavi Center’s **Family Series**.

The **Mondavi Center Arts Education** program will also present **Cirque-Works Birdhouse Factory** as part of the 2007-08 **Wells Fargo School Matinee Series** on October 15 at 11 am in Jackson Hall. 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.

Inspired by painter **Diego Rivera**’s masterful industrial murals, the outrageous illustrations of cartoonist **Rube Goldberg**, and the slapstick humor of **Charlie Chaplin**’s classic film *Modern Times*, **Birdhouse Factory** was conceived as a kind of 30th anniversary tribute to the **Pickle Family Circus**, the small troupe founded in San Francisco in 1975 that helped inspire the “new circus” movement that influenced the creation of **Cirque du Soleil** in Montreal and other similar companies. The production is brought to life by director **Chris Lashua**, assistant director/choreographer **Aloysia Gavre**, and actor/performer **Steven Ragatz**, all veterans of **Cirque du Soleil**.

The story begins as a group of seemingly numb and disenchanted workers enter the factory and take their places along the dreary assembly line. But when a bird unexpectedly flies into one of the machines, a transformation begins. Suddenly, the factory becomes a magical place where the workers are acrobats and the machines are circus props. A contortionist performs atop a turntable powered by unicyclists, trampoline artists seem to defy the laws of physics as they walk on air, and acrobats improvise a tango atop a steam pipe. All the while, clowns and dancers keep the action moving amid the stunts, comedy, and making of birdhouses.

“Part of the genius of director Chris Lashua’s factory concept is in the way he transforms circus rigging into integral parts of the acts; part is in the inventive humor with which the performers become Rube Goldberg-like machines,” noted the *San Francisco Chronicle*. “The beauty of ‘Birdhouse,’ though, lies in the generosity with which acts are layered upon each other and the superb integration of circus skills with music, light, and choreography.”

Chris Lashua spent nearly a decade performing in bicycle freestyle competitions before winning a bronze medal at China's famed Wu Ciao festival in 1992 that also won him a place with Cirque du Soleil. His exciting performances inside the circus prop known as the German Wheel were the opening act of Cirque du Soleil's *Quidam* from 1996-2002. During that time, he began building various machines that he added to his act, which led to an interest in building a variety of contraptions that would interact with other circus performers and ultimately led to the idea for Birdhouse Factory. In order to make his vision a reality, Lashua teamed up with graduates of the **Circus School of San Francisco**, former Pickle Family Circus members, other former members of Cirque du Soleil, and artists from the **Nanjing Acrobatic Troupe**. Birdhouse Factory is the result of their combined efforts.

Co-director **Aloysia Gavre** was an early member of the Pickle Family Circus and has studied with **Pilobolus**, the **Tandy Beal Dance Company**, and **Zacho Dance Theater**, and polished her circus skills with **Lu-Yi** of the **San Francisco School of Circus Arts** and at **L'Ecole Nationale Du Cirque** in Montreal. She was featured in Cirque du Soleil's *O* in Las Vegas and in *Quidam*, in which she performed an aerial hoop act that earned a special prize at the Monte Carlo International Circus Festival in 2002.

An original Birdhouse Factory cast member and collaborator, **Steven Ragatz** has been entertaining audiences with his juggling, physical comedy, stilt walking and general antics for more than two decades. As a six-year veteran of Cirque du Soleil, Ragatz has performed throughout North America and on television programs including *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, *The Rosie O'Donnell Show*, and *The Today Show*.

"The performers of Cirque-Works Birdhouse Factory capture all the joy and imagination that have made the 'new circus' genre such a success with audiences and critics alike, and we look forward to what should be a delightful series of performances," said **Don Roth**, the Mondavi Center's executive director.

What: **Cirque-Works Birdhouse Factory**
When: Saturday, October 13 • 8 pm
Where: Jackson Hall
Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts
University of California, Davis
Admission: \$39/\$34/\$24 Adults • \$19.50/\$17/\$12 Students & Children

When: Sunday, October 14 • 3 pm
Where: Jackson Hall
Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts
University of California, Davis
Admission: \$39/\$34/\$29 Adults • \$19.50/\$17/\$14.50 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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