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For immediate release:

## **American Bach Soloists Bring Handel's *Messiah* Back to Mondavi Center**

*November 27, 2007; Davis, California*—**George Frideric Handel's *Messiah***, one of the holiday season's oldest and most beloved musical traditions, will return to the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts** in another glorious performance by the renowned **American Bach Soloists**. The event will feature soprano **Christine Brandes**, alto **Jennifer Hines**, tenor **Wesley Rogers**, baritone **Jeremy Galyon**, 31 period-instrument musicians, and the 32-member **American Bach Choir** performing under the direction of esteemed conductor, singer, and **UC Davis** Professor of Music **Jeffrey Thomas**.

The performance will begin at 7:30 pm on December 22 in the Mondavi Center's Jackson Hall on the **UC Davis** campus. (Patrons are asked to please take special note of the early starting time, which is one half hour earlier than the Mondavi Center's usual start time for Saturday evening events.) Tickets are available from the Mondavi Center Ticket Office at 530.754.2787 or online at [MondaviArts.org](http://MondaviArts.org). Patrons who purchase tickets for the *Messiah* may receive a discount of 25 percent off the price of tickets for the American Bach Soloists' performance of **J.S. Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*** at the Mondavi Center on January 28, 2008. For more information on this offer, call the Mondavi Center Ticket Office at 530.754.2787.

The American Bach Soloists' performances of *Messiah*, under Thomas' direction, have been acclaimed by critics as being among the most dynamic accounts of Handel's masterpiece. "Leading a crack team of period musicians and singers, Thomas had a thoroughly conceived vision for the piece, maintaining a committed drive and intensity all the way through the stunningly intense and pious final 'Amen' fugue," *San Francisco Classical Voice* wrote of one Bay Area performance.

The ABS has been a fixture at the Mondavi Center almost since the facility's opening, having performed Bach's *St. John's Passion*, Mass in B Minor, and several other works at the facility in addition to its holiday season renderings of *Messiah*. The ensemble's December 2004 *Messiah* performances were recorded live at the Mondavi Center and released on CD by Delos International, a recording that has drawn raves for both sound quality and performance. In a review of the CD, *Stereophile* praised the acoustics of the Mondavi Center, "which audio engineer **John La Grou** reckons ranks as one of *the* great performance spaces," adding that "his recording offers some proof of that conviction" and praising the ABS performance: "The American Bach Soloists shine on 'Glory to God,' and there's a spectacular performance from the countertenor [**Daniel Taylor**] on 'He was Despised.'"

The American Bach Soloists, named “the best American specialists in early music” by *The Washington Post*, was founded in 1989 with the mission of introducing contemporary audiences to historically informed performances of the cantatas of J. S. Bach. Under the direction of Thomas, whom *The Wall Street Journal* described as “a superstar among oratorio tenors,” the ensemble has achieved its goal of assembling the finest available vocalists and period-instrument musicians. ABS has become one of the most popular and critically acclaimed of all Baroque music ensembles, recording dozens of CDs and bringing the music of Bach, Handel, and others to glorious life in places as far flung as Hong Kong and Singapore. Its annual holiday performances of *Messiah* have become a holiday tradition in the Bay Area and, more recently, in Davis.

Handel’s *Messiah* is probably the most popular oratorio ever written. A collection of arias, recitatives, duets, and choral pieces based on scriptural texts, the approximately two-hour-long piece contains some of the most memorable and best-loved vocal music of all time, including the famed “Hallelujah!” chorus.

*Messiah* was not always a Christmas tradition. Its debut, in Dublin in 1742, actually occurred during the Easter season, and the subject matter—a collection of scriptural quotations pulled together by librettist **Charles Jennens**—reflects on the whole of the life and teachings of **Jesus Christ**, not merely the nativity. Jennens’ goal was not to put together a coherent narrative of scriptural events, but to provide a more abstract framework that could accommodate both meditative and dramatic sections. More practically, his purpose was to give Handel the opportunity to compose a set of the anthem-like melodies at which he excelled.

If Jennens succeeded in providing subject matter that would prove to be both moving and thought-provoking for a wide range of audiences, Handel did his part by composing vocal music that is generally considered to be among the most sublime ever written. Arias such as “I know that my Redeemer liveth,” recitatives such as “There were shepherds,” choral pieces such as “Glory to God,” and, of course, the “Hallelujah!” chorus, are among the most well-known and most beloved in all the repertoire, and staples of the vocal performance tradition.

In fact, the popularity of *Messiah* was aided in no small part by the growth in popularity of choral singing in English-speaking countries. Beginning in the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the custom evolved of performing *Messiah* during the Christmas season with ever-enlarging orchestras and choirs. Performances involving hundreds—and even thousands—of singers and musicians came to be surprisingly commonplace. In one instance, in Boston in 1869, a “Hallelujah” chorus was performed in which no less than 10,000 singers and 500 musicians participated!

Recent decades have brought a trend toward presentations that more accurately capture the sound and style of Handel’s era. Instrumental and choral forces have been pared back down to numbers that Handel would have expected, and many ensembles—including the American Bach Soloists—have returned to using instruments and playing styles of the Baroque period. For this year’s performance, the ABS will utilize the 1749 version of the score first performed at Covent Garden.

“The American Bach Soloists’ *Messiah* has become a holiday tradition for the Mondavi Center and our audience, and we are proud to once again present Handel’s masterpiece in a performance by these outstanding musicians and vocalists,” said **Don Roth**, the Mondavi Center’s executive director.

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**What:** **Handel’s *Messiah***  
**American Bach Soloists**

**Jeffrey Thomas, director**

**When:** Saturday, December 22, 2007 · 7:30 pm

**Where:** Jackson Hall

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

**Admission:** \$44/\$39/\$34 Adults • \$22/\$19.50/\$17 Students, Children

**Tickets/Info:** 530.754.ARTS (2787)

866.754.ARTS (toll-free)

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