



Contact: Joe Martin
530.754.5428

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For immediate release:

Bluegrass Legend Doc Watson Brings *Hills of Home* to the Mondavi Center Stage

September 4, 2007; Davis, California—**Doc Watson**, a legendary figure in American music and one of the best and most influential traditional guitarists of all time, will perform at the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts** at **UC Davis**. Appearing with storyteller and musician **David Holt** and guitarist **Richard Watson**, his grandson, Doc Watson will bring his trademark lightning-fast guitar licks, soulful vocals, and rich storytelling skills to the Mondavi Center for an evening of bluegrass, old-time ballads, country and western, and more in a production entitled *Hills of Home*.

The event will begin at 8 pm on October 6 in 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 event is presented as part of Mondavi Center's **American Heritage Series**. There will be a Pre-performance Lecture featuring award-winning bluegrass writer and historian **Jon Fox** beginning at 7 pm in the AGR Room of **Buehler Alumni and Visitors Center** adjacent to the Mondavi Center.

Doc Watson is one of the few figures in any genre of music truly deserving of the title "living legend." A product of the rich musical environment of western North Carolina, the blind, self-taught virtuoso created a unique flatpicking style of guitar playing that brought a speed, clarity, and melodic sense that were almost unprecedented in bluegrass and country music. Also an outstanding singer and banjo player, Watson has won numerous honors including seven Grammy Awards, a National Medal of Arts, a National Heritage Fellowship, and membership in the Bluegrass Hall of Honor.

Born Arthel Lane Watson in Stoney Fork, North Carolina on March 3, 1923, Watson had a birth defect that caused him to lose his vision shortly before his first birthday. As a child, Watson absorbed the rich musical legacy of southern Appalachia, one of the nation's most fertile environments for traditional folk singing, banjo playing, and fiddling. He began playing harmonica at age six, and at 11, learned to play the fretless banjo his father made for him.

Watson's earliest musical influences were the songs he heard his family and neighbors play at home and in church, as well as artists such as the **Carter Family**, **Jimmy Rodgers**, and the **Carolina Tar Heels**, whose records he heard on his family's wind-up Victrola. His musical horizons were expanded when he was sent to the **Governor Moorehead School for the Blind** in Raleigh, where he was exposed to classical music and jazz—notably the music of gypsy guitar genius **Django Reinhardt**, which impressed him greatly. At age 13, he began to learn guitar, and realized he'd found his instrument.

While still a teenager, Watson began to play for tips in the streets of Boone, North Carolina—in part to make payments on the Martin D-28 guitar he had bought from a shop in town. The street performances led to invitations to play at local contests and gatherings, and at one local radio performance, Watson received his nickname—an impromptu audience suggestion after the host commented that “Arthel” was too long a name for use on the air.

Despite this early success, Watson worked primarily as a piano tuner until 1953, when he got a job playing electric guitar in the country swing band **Jack Williams and the Country Gentlemen**. Williams’ band often did not have a fiddle player, which prompted Watson to learn to play traditional fiddle tunes such as “Old Joe Clark” and “Black Mountain Rag” on guitar. The techniques he developed to achieve the speed and clarity needed for this type of playing became the foundation of his signature style of flatpicking, which has influenced every subsequent generation of guitarists.

In 1960, as part of a wave of renewed interest in traditional folk music, musicologist **Ralph Rinzler** traveled to North Carolina to record **Clarence “Tom” Ashley**, one of the original members of the Carolina Tar Heels and a friend with whom Watson frequently played traditional music. Rinzler was impressed by Watson, and recorded him a few days later. The musicologist also encouraged Watson to perform as a solo act in New York City coffeehouses, which led to appearances at the Newport Folk Festival in 1963 and 1964. Watson’s career was given a boost when his son **Merle Watson** developed into a fine guitarist as a teenager, and he performed with his father at the Berkeley Folk Festival in 1964. They began recording as Doc Watson & Son, and after Merle graduated from high school, they began touring together, with Merle handling many of the tasks associated with traveling that his blind father had found difficult.

Another breakthrough came in 1972 with the release of the **Nitty Gritty Dirt Band**’s influential recording *Will the Circle be Unbroken?*, a collection of traditional songs featuring bluegrass and country music legends including **Mother Maybelle Carter**, **Earl Scruggs**, **Roy Acuff**, Watson, and several others. The album brought bluegrass to new audiences, and led to international tours for Watson and his son. Merle Watson would continue as his father’s musical partner until his tragic death in 1985, when he was killed in a tractor accident.

Now 84 years old, Doc Watson can look back on a legacy that includes seven Grammy Awards, including a Best Traditional Folk Recording Grammy for the 2002 CD *Legacy*, a three-disc set that combines interviews, music, and stories of Watson’s early years growing up in North Carolina. The recording also features **David Holt**, an accomplished musician, musicologist, and storyteller. The *Hills of Home* concert largely recreates the album’s winning combination of bluegrass, ballads, blues, and folk tales. Holt plays banjo and slide guitar, while Richard Watson plays guitar, and Doc Watson contributes guitar, vocals, and the down-to-earth wisdom accumulated from a lifetime in American music.

“Doc Watson has spent five decades bringing one of the great traditions of American music to audiences all over the world, and we are proud to bring him to the Mondavi Center for the first event of this year’s American Heritage Series,” said **Don Roth**, the Mondavi Center’s executive director.

What: *Hills of Home*
Featuring Doc Watson with David Holt and Richard Watson

When: Saturday, October 6, 2007 • 8 pm

Where: Jackson Hall
Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts

University of California, Davis

Admission: \$42/\$37/\$32 Adults • \$21/\$18.50/\$16 Students, Children

Tickets/Info: 530.754.ARTS (2787)

866.754.ARTS (toll-free)

<http://www.MondaviArts.org>

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