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Celtic 'Heaven & Earth' debuts April 2 in Des Moines with Irish musicians, singers, dancers

DES MOINES, Iowa (March 1) - Des Moines composer-conductor Ben Allaway's new major work, *Heaven & Earth: Mass on the Celtic Journey*, will have its world premiere in Des Moines April 2 featuring the 200-voice Celtic Mass Choir, conducted by the composer, with noted Irish singer Tommy Sands and his Irish Band, additional Celtic instrumentalists, pipe organ, dancers and Sands' narration. Iowa Public Television will film the live event for broadcast this summer.

Co-sponsored by the Celtic Music Association, The Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, and First Christian Church, Des Moines, the concert will be at First Christian Church (at 25th Street and University Avenue) on April 2, 2011 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$15 in advance, \$17 at the door, \$10 for students for the event and are available from MidwesTix.com or DMVAE.org, or First Christian Church, 515-255-2181.

Allaway has spent over 10 years studying and arranging traditional Celtic music and traveling to the Celtic nations in preparation for this work, which is almost entirely original music, written in Celtic style. *Heaven & Earth: Mass on the Celtic Journey* uses the form of the Roman Catholic Mass to explore the Celtic sensitivity to both heaven and earth, of "all things visible and invisible." The nine movements tell nine different stories of Celtic peoples, both immigrants and those who never left their homelands.

Tommy Sands is considered Ireland's most influential musician-activist, having encouraged the official Peace Process in Northern Ireland, which just celebrated a 12-year milestone with a concert at Stormont Castle hosted by members of the Assembly (governing body), with Tommy Sands presiding. Sands gathered musicians, poets, and performers from every political affiliation to join him on stage for a first-ever All-Party unified performance.

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Heaven & Earth (add 2)

Sands was influential in the signing of the Good Friday Accord in 1997, bringing a children's choir of Protestants and Catholics to sing at the faltering talks at Stormont, coaxing the negotiators to sing with the kids — an act which was credited with the signing of the Accord the following day.

After the Des Moines premiere, Allaway and Sands will be joined by Kevin Conneff of famed Irish band The Chieftains this summer when they tour with 50 musicians to Belfast, Northern Ireland and Bangor, Wales for the premieres in these Celtic nations in June. The world premiere in Des Moines, Iowa on April 2, 2011 will be filmed by Iowa Public Television and footage from the U.K. tour will be incorporated to create two one-hour specials, which will be made available nationally to Public Broadcasting System stations.

The Celtic Festival Choir will be composed of members of the Omaha Symphonic Chorus, the Des Moines Vocal Arts Ensemble, the Choirs of St. Paul's Cathedral and of First Christian Church (both of Des Moines), and Opus24 Chamber Choir (Decatur, Illinois); all had a part in co-commissioning the work, along with eight other choirs around the country.

Other guest artists include Uilleann piper Tim Britton of Fairfield, Iowa; organist Lonnie Liggitt of Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Des-Moines-based musicians Kristin Maahs on Celtic harp, guitarist Seth Hedquist, Celtic drummer Dean Wiperman, accordionist Jerry Mogenson, and violinist Betty Miller. Tommy Sands will also serve as narrator for the concert.

On Friday, June 17, the Celtic Mass Choir and associated musicians will perform a preview concert at St. Patrick's Cathedral in Armagh, Northern Ireland; on Saturday, June 18 the United Kingdom premiere at St. Anne's Cathedral in Belfast, Northern Ireland; and on Tuesday, June 21, the Welsh premiere at Bangor Cathedral in Caernarfon, Wales.

Ben Allaway has dedicated a significant portion of his professional career to engaging with a variety of ethnic musics, creating his own works influenced by the music and cultures of Africa, African America, Asia, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Israel, Native American nations, other Native peoples, Norway, Poland, Spanish-language countries, and world-beat music.

Allaway's music has been featured on programs with diverse luminaries as His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Garrison Keillor, Maya Angelou, Hal Holbrook, Odetta, Jamie Bernstein, Buffy Sainte-Marie, as well as Richie Havens, Susan Werner, Jean-Michel Cousteau, Thomas Friedman, Hillary Clinton, and Nobel-Peace-Prize-laureate Dr. Norman Borlaug.

Heaven & Earth: Mass on the Celtic Journey was co-commissioned by 12 American choirs spanning the United States from Oregon to New Jersey.

Allaway's UNESCO (United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization)-based Thresholds Choral Festivals, his eclectic body of work reflects a passion for cross-cultural experiences as well as for the great Western musical traditions, and his influences including degrees from St. Olaf College and Westminster Choir College, and teaching at Iowa's Waldorf College, performing (and sometimes recording) with Bernstein, Muti, Masur, Abbado, Marriner, Shaw, and Menotti, and touring with Kenya's Muungano National Choir, and extensive travels including East Africa, the United Kingdom and Ireland, Europe, Central America, and throughout the United States.

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