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The Academy of Vocal Arts Honors Fifty Years of Leadership by Directors Christofer Macatsoris and K. James McDowell

Philadelphia: The end of the 2007/2008 season at The Academy of Vocal Arts marked the thirty-year anniversary of Maestro **Christofer Macatsoris** as Music Director and the twenty-year anniversary of **K. James McDowell** as Executive Director of the renowned opera training program. **AVA's Board of Directors hosted a surprise celebration in honor of Directors McDowell and Macatsoris on Sunday, September 14, 2008 at the Rittenhouse Hotel. AVA alumni Richard Troxell and Judith Lovat served as Masters of Ceremonies. Guests included board members, faculty, staff, resident artists, alumni, patrons, and friends of The Academy of Vocal Arts.**

Both men have profoundly influenced the academy during their tenure by increasing performances from one or two major productions per year, to a current three fully staged operas with orchestra, two concerts with orchestra, a Russian repertoire recital and a popular voice competition. Under their leadership, AVA performances, which were formerly presented only in their tiny 150 seat theatre in Center City and once a year in Bucks County, can now also be seen on the Main Line and South Jersey. They have augmented the faculty, attracting highly respected voice teachers, vocal coaches, and stage directors. By increasing performance opportunities and expanding repertoire to include both traditional and less frequently performed operas and concerts, AVA now attracts top vocal talent from all over the world. **Since 1980, more than thirty AVA alumni have joined the Metropolitan Opera's roster, and many more are enjoying international opera careers with major opera companies.** This is an astonishing success rate for a school that only accepts between six and twelve artists a year, with a total enrollment of between twenty-five and thirty in its four year, full-scholarship program.

K. James McDowell, Executive Director and Producer

Texas native K. James McDowell attended **Furman University** as a chemistry major before beginning his musical career as an apprentice with Santa Fe Opera. He then began his formal musical education at The Curtis Institute of Music, and later attended The Academy of Vocal Arts, where he performed numerous baritone roles, including Papageno in *The Magic Flute*, Junius in *The Rape of Lucretia*, and Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly*. In addition, he sang Harlequin in *Ariadne auf Naxos* and Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte* when the AVA Opera Theatre performed at The International Corfu Festival in Greece. Other roles include Germont in *La traviata* and Escamillo in *Carmen*.

In 1985, Mr. McDowell began work on a master of business administration in management and finance at **Temple University** and joined AVA as the director of public relations. In 1987, AVA's board of directors appointed him to the position of executive director. Under his exceptional guidance and direction, AVA has further developed its fine reputation as a training and performing arts institution noted for both its artistic excellence and financial stability.

While at the helm of AVA, Mr. McDowell maintains a busy schedule of opera, recital, and oratorio appearances throughout the Delaware Valley. He made his Philadelphia Orchestra debut in De Falla's *La Vida Breve*, and performed Mahler's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* in Philadelphia's Art Song Series. He has been featured with the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia as well as 1807 & Friends, and continues to schedule duet recitals with his wife, mezzo-soprano Suzanne DuPlantis.

Christofer Macatsoris, Music Director

Maestro Macatsoris began his conducting career in Italy at the Conservatory in Milan. He went on to study conducting privately with such famed maestri as Fausto Cleva, Max Rudolf, and Tullio Serafin, and studied composition with Vincent Persichetti. Among his many performance credits are appearances with Philadelphia Lyric Opera Company, Pennsylvania Opera Company, San Francisco Opera Center, and numerous regional opera companies. In 1970, Max Rudolf invited him to The Curtis Institute of Music, where he taught and conducted for seven years.

Mr. Macatsoris was the music director of the weekly NBC-TV program, *Opera Theatre*, and was music director and conductor for two seasons with the Opera at Ambler Festival. As a pianist, he toured with Metropolitan Opera singers in recital programs.

As music director of The Academy of Vocal Arts since 1977, he has led critically acclaimed performances of Puccini's *Il trittico* and *Madama Butterfly*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, and Britten's *Albert Herring*, which was broadcast on PBS. In addition, many operas received their Delaware Valley premieres at AVA under his baton, including Mozart's

Idomeneo and *La finta giardiniera*, Handel's *Deidamia*, Strauss's *Capriccio*, Verdi's *Un giorno di regno*, Puccini's *Edgar* and Richard Wargo's *A Chekhov Trilogy*. Mr. Macatsoris has appeared at The International Corfu Festival, Greece, in 1981 and 1982, leading performances of *The Rape of Lucretia*, *La sonnambula*, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and *Così fan tutte*.

He has conducted in many regional American houses and has been on the conducting staff of San Francisco Opera Company. He is in great demand as a lecturer and for master classes, and has conducted them at major universities, including Johns Hopkins, Tulane, Loyola of New Orleans, and SUNY-Buffalo. He frequently serves as a panel judge for the National Council Auditions of the Metropolitan Opera. Mr. Macatsoris consistently earns high praise for his interpretive abilities and total commitment to excellent opera theater.

THE ACADEMY OF VOCAL ARTS

The mission of The Academy of Vocal Arts, founded in 1934 by Helen Corning Warden, is to provide tuition-free vocal and opera training of the highest quality, and financial support during training, to exceptionally talented and committed young singers who have the potential for international stature, and to present them in professional performances that are accessible to a wide community.

Gifted singers come from throughout the world to seek the exceptional guidance and training that The Academy of Vocal Arts offers. AVA's four-year program is unique, not only because it is a fully tuition-free institution that focuses solely on operatic training, but also because it has established a niche as an organization that produces opera. Admission is determined by competitive annual auditions, with an average of 8 to 10 singers admitted each year. The total roster of resident artists is purposely kept low and averages 25-30 in total. Those who are accepted receive training equivalent to more than \$70,000 per year. A faculty of individuals who are among the finest in their fields provides intensive training in voice, acting, stage combat, repertoire, languages, and other related subjects necessary for an operatic career.

Over the past seven decades, outstanding singers of international stature have attended AVA, including David Adams, Lando Bartolini, Gwendolyn Bradley, Thomas Carson, Elizabeth Carter, Richard Clark, Dominic Cossa, John Darrenkamp, Joyce DiDonato, Harry Dworchak, Ryan Edwards, Wilhelmina Fernandez, Allan Glassman, Vernon Hartman, Nancy Herrera, Luis Ledesma, James Morris, Stuart Neill, John Packard, James Pease, David Poleri, Julien Robbins, Valerian Ruminski, Jane Shaulis, Hugh Smith, Ruth Ann Swenson, Indra Thomas, Richard Troxell, Victoria Vergara, Stephen West, Beverly Wolff, and currently making their mark in the opera world, recent graduates Burak Bilgili, Stephen Costello, Ellie Dehn, Othalia Graham, Eglise Gutierrez, Tracie Luck, Ailyn Perez, Dongwon Shin, and James Valenti.

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