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California Symphony to present *Adagio for Strings* accompanied by former Cirque du Soleil acrobats

New season opener to also feature 1997 Van Cliburn International Piano Gold Medalist Jon Nakamatsu

At a time when orchestras are struggling to find an audience, the 21-year-old California Symphony

enjoyed its most successful season ever in 2007-08, the result of innovative programming that fused classical music with pop culture entertainment. On October 12 & 14, founder and music director Barry Jekowsky will go even further – with an unprecedented presentation of Samuel Barber’s profoundly-moving *Adagio for Strings* interpreted through movement by two former Cirque du Soleil hand-balancing artists.

“Though breathtaking by itself, when *Adagio for Strings* is performed with Iouri and Nikolai, it becomes a spectacular collaboration of music and body sculpture,” says Jekowsky, who gave the Russian-born acrobats their symphony debut at the Reno Philharmonic last December. “What they do visually with music is extraordinary.”

Currently starring in the Las Vegas hit, “V the Ultimate Variety Show,” Iouri Safronov and Nikolai Meinkov are two of only a handful of world-class hand-balancing artists working today. Classically-trained in circus acrobatics in their native Russia, their mastery of gravity-defeating feats evolved from

years on the high wire as flying trapeze artists, beginning with the Moscow Circus. Prior to forming their own act in 2000, both enjoyed long runs in major Vegas productions – Meinkov in Cirque Du Soleil's critically-acclaimed "Mystere," and Safronov as the featured trapeze act in MGM Casino's "EFX," starring Michael Crawford.

Notably, Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings* became a symbol of the nation's grief when it was performed four days after the tragedy of 9/11 by the BBC Orchestra under conductor Leonard Slatkin in honor of those lost. While few Americans know it by name, Barber's most popular piece, premiered by Arturo Toscanini with the NBC Symphony Orchestra in a live radio broadcast in 1938, was played at the funerals of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Prince Rainier of Monaco, and can be heard in such films as Oliver Stone's Oscar-winning *Platoon* and David Lynch's Oscar-nominated *The Elephant Man*.

Also on the October program: Antonin Dvorak's Symphony No. 9 (From the New World) and Jon Nakamatsu, performing the piece that brought him the gold medal at the 1997 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition: Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30. Since achieving worldwide fame, Nakamatsu, who lives in San Jose, has soloed with such major orchestras as the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Boston Pops, and appeared in recital at Carnegie Hall and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. NPR named him "Artist of the Year" in 1998, and his latest CD, *Gershwin: Piano Concerto in F / Rhapsody in Blue / Cuban Overture*, has appeared in the top ten of the Classical Billboard charts.

This event is the first in a series of innovative programs created by California Symphony founder and music director Barry Jekowsky that will include the West Coast premiere of a new orchestral tribute to the Grateful Dead on January 25 & 27, the world premiere of a second cutting-edge score from electronica d.j. and classical composer Mason Bates on March 8 & 10, and the world's first live symphony in 3-D on May 3 & 5.

It's all part of a bold move, initiated last year by Jekowsky to make classical music accessible to a wider audience. "Last season was an amazing success," he says. "Based on our sell-out concerts and the feedback we received, there's no question that people want more from their concert experience." As Janos Gereben of the *San Francisco Classical Voice* recently wrote: "Operating on a fraction of the budget that most big orchestras have, the Walnut Creek pioneers keep coming up with intriguing and attractive programs you only wish for from the heavyweight division."

All performances of the California Symphony are held at the Hofmann Theater in the Leshner Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek, CA 94596. Sunday matinee concerts begin at 4 p.m.; Tuesday night concerts begin at 7:30 p.m. For subscription series tickets (four concerts; \$144 - \$244), visit

www.CaliforniaSymphony.org or call (925) 280-2490. Tickets to the October 12 & 14 concerts only (\$39 - \$59; students \$20) can be purchased by calling (925) 943-SHOW or ordering online at www.LesherArtsCenter.org. For more information, call the California Symphony office at (925) 280-2490.

The 2008-2009 season is made possible by the generous support of the following sponsors: Bank of America (season), Chevron (guest artists), East Bay Community Foundation (March concert), Michael Stead Porsche, John Muir Health, KPMG and the Diablo Regional Arts Association.

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MEDIA CONTACTS:

Lyla Foggia
Foggia Public Relations
(503) 622-0232
lyla@foggiapr.com

Stacey Street
Executive Director
California Symphony
(925) 280-2490
sstreet@californiasymphony.org