

Northern Harmony / Larry Gordon & Patty Cuyler, Directors

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PRESS RELEASE

Note to Editors: Northern Harmony publicity photos are posted on our website for free download at: <http://www.villageharmony.org/PR/> Text files of a generic press release are also posted there.

Northern Harmony World Music Choir Performs (fill in date and place)

Northern Harmony, acclaimed world music singing ensemble from Vermont, USA led by Larry Gordon and Patty Cuyler, will present a concert in (fill in town, venue, date and time _____). Admission is _____. For information or ticket bookings call: _____.

Hailed for their “sheer agility, vitality and power” by the Washington Post, Northern Harmony’s brilliant young singers stretch the normal boundaries of choral music with their command of varied world ethnic singing styles: American shape-note singing and Appalachian harmonies; village songs from Caucasus Georgia and the Balkans; sacred and secular harmonies from Corsican and Occitan oral traditions; South African folksongs and dances; and contemporary works.

Northern sixteen singers include many graduates of Gordon’s well known youth ensemble Village Harmony. Many of them began singing with Village Harmony when they were 12, most are veterans of previous tours and study trips to Caucasus Georgia, Bulgaria, South Africa, UK, Germany, Italy, and across America, and many are now singing leaders in their own right.

Northern Harmony’s vocal styles range from the hearty and ultra bright Bulgarian “hard voice,” to the equally powerful, but darker and more sonorous Georgian timbre, to the rich, syncopated South African style, to the wild and unrestrained American shape-note sound. Northern Harmony’s UK appearance in 2001 at the London Lufthansa Festival of Music was hailed by festival Artistic Director Kate Bolton as “*certainly the most moving concert of the entire festival.*”

The 2008 Northern Harmony tour begins with three weeks of study and performances in Caucasus Georgia. Georgia has one of the world's most ancient polyphonic singing traditions. The music is almost always in three vocal parts and features a dark, sonorous vocal quality. The harmonies are unlike anything in European music, with

untempered intervals and striking harmonic convergences. Shergil Pirskhelani, one of the leaders of the well-known Georgian Ensemble Zedashe, joins Northern Harmony for this tour, and is featured in the Georgian repertoire.

Shape-note singing, one of Northern Harmony's trademarks, had its origins in the community singing schools of 18th century New England. It is simultaneously a sacred and a social singing tradition, featuring stark, open harmonies, rhythmic, contrapuntal "fuging" sections, and the marvelous sacred poetry of the 18th century English hymn writer Isaac Watts and his followers. The concert will also feature traditional and contemporary arrangements of 1930's gospel quartet numbers..

Traditional Corsican singing has been described as "wrenched from the bowels of the earth." Passed down almost entirely through oral tradition, the three part harmonies feature two highly ornamented upper voices over a more sustained harmonic bass. The excitement for the listeners and singers both comes from the impassioned delivery, the surprising harmonic shifts which ripple from voice to voice, and the buzzing vocal timbre which creates an extremely powerful sound rich in overtones.

South Africa has a particularly powerful and appealing folk harmony singing tradition, with a rich, resonant vocal sound, and wonderfully syncopated rhythm. The singing is always accompanied by dancing, with the rhythm of the dance movements often in counterpoint to the song. Northern Harmony directors Cuyler and Gordon have led regular study tours to South Africa, working intensively with South African conductor Matlakala Bopape and her Polokwane Choir. Cuyler and Bopape have jointly published two volumes of *The Folk Rhythm* including 36 songs from the South African singing traditions with accompanying audio and video materials.

Northern Harmony also performs a wide variety of village music from the Balkan countries. This music features the characteristic bright, "hard-voiced" Balkan vocal timbre, with dissonant harmonies frequently based on drones, and irregular dance meters in 7. 9 and 11. Many of these numbers also feature accompaniment on accordion, tambura and drum.

For further information visit the Northern Harmony website:
www.villageharmony.org