



AMERICAN TRADITIONS COMPETITION ANNOUNCES NEW COLLABORATION AND EXCITING PLANS FOR 24TH YEAR

SAVANNAH, GA – May 25, 2016 The American Traditions Vocal Competition announced an exciting new collaboration with the Savannah VOICE Festival at last night's Season Kickoff Fundraiser at Bryson Hall in downtown Savannah. Guests enjoyed cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, a 50/50 raffle and musical entertainment provided by Gold Medal award winners - Michael Maliakel, the 2016 winner, and Mikki Sodergren, the 2014 winner, accompanied by Justin Addington.

The American Traditions Competition (ATC) President, Daniel Cohen delighted audiences when he announced a new collaboration with the Savannah VOICE Festival (SVF) for 2017. The *Sherrill Milnes American Opera Award* will be awarded to the contestant that sings the best American Opera aria during the ATC, securing for the winner the opportunity to sing in the 2017 Season of The Savannah VOICE Festival along with a prize of \$500. Savannah VOICE Festival co-founder Maria Zouves commented "As we enter our fourth year, it seemed fitting to dedicate an award to honor my husband, legendary baritone Sherrill Milnes. As Artistic Director and co-founder of the Festival, he brings over four decades of experience to Savannah. The Savannah VOICE Festival returns for a fourth season in 2016 from August 7-21 and introduced Gold Medal Winner Mikki Sodergren to the ATC in 2014. We love to collaborate with other Savannah musical institutions and are delighted to build on our relationship with the ATC through the sponsorship of this new American opera award."

This latest award adds another level of excitement to the American Traditions Competition which already boasts a Ben Tucker Jazz Award, Johnny Mercer Award and prize money to vocalists of over \$44,000 including the Gold medal award with a prize of \$12,000. The ATC is also delighted to once again have the support of the Savannah Friends of Music who are sponsoring the fifth place award in 2017.

Attendees at the reception were the first to get the scoop on details for the American Tradition's 24th season which will run from February 20-24 at Skidaway Island United Methodist Church (SIUMC) with the masterclass and finals taking place at the Historic Savannah Theatre on Bull Street in downtown Savannah. Cohen was thrilled to announce the return of celebrity emcee from GPB – Celeste Headlee for the 2017 finals and commented “It was a real honor to welcome Celeste Headlee to preside over the finals of last year’s American Traditions Competition and the fact that she wishes to return next February is very exciting”.

Other announcements included a judges’ concert for Monday, February 20, 2017 and the return of Savannah based lyric baritone Kurt Ollman who first served as a judge in the 23rd ATC earlier this year. The talented Annastasia Victory and Wilson Southerland will return as pianists for 2017 and new for 2017 the ATC welcomes pianist Dan Gettinger who is well known and loved by Savannah audiences as a Savannah VOICE Festival artist.

New board members were welcomed including former ATC judge and singer/songwriter/composer Jim Wann; Host South President – Eric Kennedy; Michael Zaller- original cast member and part owner of the Historic Savannah Theatre and longtime Savannah music lover Ann Lytle.

Building on the success of last year’s fall and winter fundraisers, Board member Maddie Harwood unveiled a new season with a return of the Johnny Mercer Birthday Celebration in November.

The nonprofit **American Traditions Competition**, established as a world-renowned arts institution based in Savannah, celebrates standard, classic American music. The

vocal contest evolved from Savannah Onstage, which was established in 1992 and was the predecessor of the Savannah Music Festival. It runs for one week during the last week of February at various locations, including Skidaway Island and the Savannah Theatre. For more information, please visit www.americantraditionscompetition.com

Savannah VOICE Festival is a 501(c) 3 tax exempt nonprofit arts organization in the state of Georgia. The Festival brings classical vocal excellence to the Savannah area through a two-week celebration of concerts, events and educational presentations during the month of August and throughout the year. Focusing on arts awareness and audience development in the performing arts, it offers music from opera, musical theatre and popular song. Donations are tax-deductible. For more information please visit www.savannahvoicefestival.org

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