

For Immediate Release

September 27, 2011

## **Special Concert Event to be Filmed Live at Kauffman Center for National Television Broadcast**

### **Kauffman Center and KCPT Announce Program to Celebrate Music by Composer and Kansas City Native Virgil Thomson**

KANSAS CITY, MO— Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts in collaboration with Kansas City Public Television (KCPT) will celebrate the music of Virgil Thomson, Kansas City’s most illustrious classical composer, in a commemorative concert in Helzberg Hall on Thursday, October 20, at 8pm.

Titled “Homecoming: An Evening with Virgil T,” the 90-minute program will be dedicated to an array of Virgil Thomson’s instrumental and vocal works, all related in some significant way to the theme of Thomson as, in Aaron Copland’s words, the “father of American classical music.”

The musical tribute will be filmed in HDTV with excerpts from the concert incorporated into a biography of Thomson to be broadcast nationally on PBS. The biography is a work-in-progress by producer/writer James Arntz and director John Paulson, both, 2007 Emmy nominees and the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers award-winners for PBS/*American Masters*. Aimee Larrabee, of Kansas City’s Inland Sea Productions, serves as co-producer/writer on the project. “KCPT is proud to be the presenting station for the PBS broadcast,” says Kliff Kuehl, KCPT President and CEO. “We’re pleased to spotlight this artist and the new Kauffman Center to a national audience.”

Tickets for the program will be available initially for purchase by invited Kauffman Center and KCPT audiences. A limited number of general admission tickets will also be available, and there will be opportunities for student attendance. Audience members should come prepared to appear on-camera throughout the concert.

A diverse and talented young company of Kansas City performers and chamber groups will be featured, including tenors Nathan Granner and Ben Gulley, violinist Elizabeth Suh Lane, jazz vocalist Shay Estes, accordionist Kyle Dahlquist, soprano Victoria Botero, singer-guitarist Barclay Martin, pianists Karen Engebretson, Karen Kushner and Mark Lowery, mezzo-soprano Elaine Fox, guitarist Beau Bledsoe, baritones Richard Gibson and Gary Mock, the Park University Conservatory String Quartet, the UMKC Conservatory Brass Quintet, and the Peoples Liberation Big Band. Crosby Kemper III, Director of the Kansas City Public Library, will serve as the concert host and narrator.

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**1** *KCPT is a nonprofit, community-owned television station serving the greater Kansas City area that provides programming and services—on air and off—that entertain, educate and enrich the community. For more information about KCPT’s programs and services, or to become a member and support public television in Kansas City, please go to [www.KCPT.org](http://www.KCPT.org).*

“We are honored to celebrate a Kansas City legend with this concert,” said Jane Chu, President and CEO of the Kauffman Center. “Virgil Thomson was always extremely proud of his connections to Kansas City. It’s fitting that the next generation of the area’s gifted musical artists recognize Thomson’s contributions in such a meaningful way.”

The evening will also include a selection of rare film clips in which Thomson speaks about his compositions and his musical roots in Kansas City. Born in 1896 at the family home on Wabash Avenue, Virgil Thomson’s early connections to music were established through his piano lessons, the Calvert Baptist Church organ, and adolescent stints accompanying vaudeville and the silent movies.

A truly original American composer and brilliant chief music critic for the *New York Herald Tribune* throughout the 1940’s, Thomson created work over a broad spectrum of musical genres, always in a style marked by a crafty wit and playfulness - - rooted in American, mid-western and Kansas City rhythms and hymnbook harmony - - clear, straight ahead, ironic and humorous.

His best-known works are “Symphony on a Hymn Tune,” and two operas “Four Saints in Three Acts” (directed on Broadway by John Houseman) and “The Mother of Us All,” with librettos by Gertrude Stein with whom Thomson formed a legendary artistic collaboration.

He is also widely recognized for his film score, “The Plow That Broke the Plain” and the Pulitzer Prize he received for his score to the Robert Flaherty film “Louisiana Story.” He is the author of eight books and the recipient of numerous awards, including a Brandeis Award, the gold medal for music from the American Academy, the National Book Circle Award and the Kennedy Center Honors.

When Thomson died in 1989, Leonard Bernstein wrote that “he will always remain brightly alive in the history of music, if only for the extraordinary influence his witty and simplistic music had on his colleagues, especially on Aaron Copland, and through them on most of American music in our century. I know I am one twig on that tree, and I will always cherish and revere Virgil, the source.”

The live concert is supported in part by a grant to the Kauffman Center from the Virgil Thomson Foundation and other contributions designated for Kauffman Center programming activities.

#### **About the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts**

The Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, a major new center for music, opera, theater, and dance designed by Moshe Safdie opened in September 2011. The Kauffman Center presents vibrant performances and educational programming, and advances the role of the performing arts as a catalyst for Kansas City’s educational, civic, and economic vitality. The two performance venues, the 1,800-seat Muriel Kauffman Theatre and the 1,600-seat Helzberg Hall, offer audiences engaging and intimate experiences, while at the same time providing resident



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ballet, opera and symphony companies with dramatically enhanced performance capabilities. Serving as a cultural cornerstone for Kansas City's dynamic downtown, the Kauffman Center brings a new spotlight to the region's performing arts community while simultaneously attracting some of the world's most talented performers and entertainers, further establishing Kansas City as a major cultural destination. More information on the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts is available at [www.kauffmancenter.org](http://www.kauffmancenter.org).

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