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February 2, 2009

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Moham, Cook to Perform Rare Repertoire by African American Composers

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Associate Professor of Voice Carren Moham, soprano, accompanied by Associate Professor of Piano R. Kent Cook, will give a recital of songs by African American composers on Sunday, Feb. 8 at 3 p.m.

Free and open to the public, the performance will take place at St. John's Lutheran Church (1617 East Emerson St., Bloomington).

The recital, given in celebration of Black History Month, features both art songs and spirituals composed by African Americans, many of which have rarely been performed since the 1940s.

"In the first half of the 20th century, it was almost impossible for black composers to get their music published, and it was even harder for women," said Moham, who has done extensive research in the past 14 years on the virtually unknown and unpublished art songs of African-American composers. "Many black composers passed their music around to friends."

One such composer, Julliard-educated Margaret Bonds, gave an original, handwritten composition to her friend, contralto Carol Brice, under whose guidance Moham later studied at the University of Oklahoma. "I rarely do a program featuring African American or female composers that does not include something Brice gave me because those pieces are what really sparked my interest," said Moham.

Moham found many of the other pieces on her program during her doctoral research, which involved a currently impossible trip into the vaults at the Library of Congress. "There, I found a book of songs by black composers called *Negro Art Songs* which was published in 1940 and immediately taken out of publication and really had not been heard from since," said Moham. "I stumbled across it by accident because it was not in the computer database, but I noticed it as I looked through the old card catalogue."

Moham was allowed to copy the entire book because it is out of publication and chose six songs from it to perform at the recital. "There are all these amazing songs and no one is singing them. I thought this would be the perfect opportunity," said Moham.

Moham has performed three years with the Metropolitan Opera and has sung three times at the White House. Her research has led her to devise two concert series titled "Songs by African-American Women" and "Songs by African-American Composers." In 2002, she released a compact disc titled "Sonnets on Love, Rosebuds and Death: Songs by African-American Women." Moham is often engaged to give lecture recitals on this topic and has performed the series in many major cities in the United States, Europe and South America.

R. Kent Cook keeps an active performing schedule as soloist and chamber musician and has appeared in many venues around the United States and abroad with performances in Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, England, and Italy. In January of 2002, Cook released his first compact disc, "Nachtstücke," and is a recording of 12 Nocturnes by seven different composers including Chopin, Liszt, and Schumann. In addition to accompanying Moham, Cook will perform a piano solo on Louis Gottschalk's *Souvenir de Porto Rico* (Op. 31).

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