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**James Toland Vocal Arts Announces New Vocal Competition
Designed for Singers in Early Career Stages**

OAKLAND, CA – (August 2013) – A new annual vocal competition focused on supporting singers early in their careers has been announced by James Toland Vocal Arts Inc., a non-profit organization based in Oakland, California. In addition to monetary prizes ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000, the competition will offer the grand prize winner an opportunity to perform as a guest artist with the Oakland East Bay Symphony under the baton of Maestro Michael Morgan. The inaugural James Toland Vocal Arts Competition will take place on Saturday, June 21, 2014 at Holy Names University in Oakland.

The James Toland Vocal Arts (JTVA) competition is unusual in that there are no specific age, education or residency requirements for participation. Applicants qualify based on their level of ability and vocal experience. Two levels are offered with prizes in each, Tier One for skilled singers ready to embark on a professional career and Tier Two for those studying singing at or near the college level. In addition, the competition is designed to recognize exceptional singing across a range of genres from opera, oratorio, and art songs, to musical theater, jazz and cabaret standards.

“Regardless of the level of natural talent and dedication, establishing a vocal career in the performing arts is extremely challenging,” says founder James Toland, who has been a private voice teacher for more than thirty years. “Good training is essential, as are opportunities to perform, and both can be costly in terms of lessons, travel and living expenses. Many talented singers simply do not have access to the support or resources they need and are unable to pursue a potentially successful career,” he added. JTVA hopes to assist such singers reach their goals through the competition and related activities. In addition to monetary prizes and performance opportunities, world-renowned mezzo soprano Susanne Mentzer will offer Tier One finalists a master class the day before the competition on Friday, June 20, 2014.

Toland has extensive experience in the performing arts world. He has served as a Master Teacher for the prestigious San Francisco Girls Chorus and has worked with numerous choral groups around the Bay Area. His voice students have performed in major opera houses and concert halls around the world. Toland has been a frequent adjudicator for voice competitions including the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. He is a past member of the board of directors for Festival Opera (Walnut Creek) and Livermore Opera and, prior to moving to the Bay Area, served for more than a decade as artistic director for the Eugene Opera.

Toland's dream to launch a vocal competition designed for pre-professional singers met with strong support from members of the local arts community. Among them was Michael Morgan who saw particular value in the opportunity to seek and reward fine singing talent regardless of the type of music being sung, something he believes is missing in local music education efforts. Enthusiastic about the competition and the role the Oakland East Bay Symphony can play in fostering such talent, he said, "I hope this serves to encourage singing of all kinds and at all ages.... It is the most accessible form of musical expression there is."

In 2011, Toland set an initial goal to raise pledges to fund the competition prizes. Within 12 months, pledges had more than exceeded the goal. In 2012, James Toland Vocal Arts Inc. was incorporated in the state of California with a six member board of directors. Federal tax-exempt nonprofit status was granted in June 2013. To help guide the organization, an Artistic Advisory Council was also formed and, in addition to Michael Morgan and Susanne Mentzer, includes a number of arts luminaries such as Sheri Greenawald director of the San Francisco Opera Center, Dr. Lynelle Wiens, program director and professor of voice at University of the Pacific, Tony Award-winning actress and singer Faith Prince, and operatic tenor Brandon Jovanovich, winner of the 2007 Richard Tucker Award.

Applications for the James Toland Vocal Arts Competition will be accepted on the YAP Tracker website (www.yaptracker.com) beginning August 21, 2013. Singers must submit a completed online application form, an uploaded video, and an application fee of \$35. Deadline for applications is December 21, 2013. Finalists will be notified by May 12, 2014 and must be available to perform at the competition before a panel of judges at the Regent's Theater on the Holy Names University campus in Oakland on June 21, 2014. Competition winners will be

announced at the close of the event. The master class with Susanne Mentzer will take place the day before and tickets for both events will be available to the public. For more information and details regarding the competition, requirements, deadlines and judging, or to sign up for periodic event reminders, visit www.JamesTolandVocalArts.com

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Based in Oakland, California, **James Toland Vocal Arts, Inc.** is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation dedicated to encouraging and cultivating, through competition and education, the emerging talents of singers who aspire to a professional career in vocal performance. The primary emphasis of JTVA is an annual voice competition with expert judging, live audience and monetary prizes to be held in June. The organization also participates in events of a related nature including master classes, workshops and other training or networking opportunities.

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