FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 10, 2005

WHAT: Soweto Gospel Choir

WHEN: Monday, February 7, 2005 at 7:30pm

WHERE: Fine Arts Center Concert Hall
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Call 1-800-999-UMAS or 545-2511 for tickets or
go online to www.fineartscenter.com/tickets
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South Africa’s Newest Sensation Soweto Gospel Choir Celebrates the Release of their US Debut CD Voices From Heaven & 35-City North American Tour

Soweto Gospel Choir, the most exciting vocal group to emerge from South Africa since Ladysmith Black Mambazo, will bring their magnetic energy, joyful spirits and beautiful harmonies to area audiences on Monday, February 7 at 7:30pm at the UMass Fine Arts Center Concert Hall. This is in tandem with the release of their American debut, Voices From Heaven, on Shanachie Entertainment. Soweto Gospel Choir is the recipient of the American Gospel Music Award’s “Best Gospel Choir 2003.” In November 2003, the Choir wowed fellow performers Peter Gabriel, Bono, The Eurythmics, Jimmy Cliff and Queen at the 46664 Concert in Capetown, organized by Nelson Mandela (taking its name from his prison number) to heighten awareness of the AIDS epidemic. In fact many of the international superstars kept the Choir onstage to back their own sets.

Soweto Gospel Choir’s performances deliver a non-stop pageant of all types of inspirational material, punctuated by traditional dancing (an integral part of church worship in Africa) and energized numbers backed by a live band. An Edinburgh critic raves, “Nothing can really prepare you for the riot of exuberance and depth of emotion.

Soweto Gospel Choir is much more than simply a musical phenomenon. The post-apartheid economy of South Africa is marked by high unemployment and black townships such as Soweto have

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many residents living at a bare subsistent level. The choir recently created its own charity foundation in association with Nkosi’s Haven (a Soweto-based AIDS-care project established by Gail Johnson, whose late son Nkosi, at age 11, gave a moving address to a United Nations international AIDS conference that was televised world-wide). The charity called Nkosi’s Haven/Vukani (meaning to arise, do something!!), raises funds for AIDS orphans establishments that receive no government or private funding. The choir has been able to raise a significant amount of money that has been used to donate food parcels and other essential goods to numerous needy organizations.

Soweto Gospel Choir’s Shanachie debut, *Voices From Heaven*, is a stunning recording that delivers the full range of the choir’s talent. The sheer aural beauty of the voices, both in powerful solo segments and lush choral harmonies, makes a memorable impact. But there also is an unquantifiable quotient of spirit—the heartfelt, sincere joyousness that cannot be taught or simulated—that infuses the Choir’s performances. It is this quality that enables them to make even very familiar material such as “Amazing Grace” or Jimmy Cliff’s “Many Rivers To Cross” sound fresh. The Choir moves easily from the traditional a capella Mbube, popularized internationally by Ladysmith Black Mambazo to straightforward church hymns to rollicking “township jive”-inflected numbers with band backing. The most universal, direct and powerful instrument is the human voice and on *Voices From Heaven* Soweto Gospel Choir revels in this “first instrument” as the essence of human musical expression.

The Soweto Gospel Choir will perform at Fine Arts Center Concert Hall, Wednesday, February 7 at 7:30pm. Tickets are $30, $25, and $15; 17 and under are $10 and Five College student tickets are $15, $10 and $7. For tickets and information, call the Fine Arts Center Box office at 413-545-2511 or 1-800-999-UMAS, or go online to www.fineartscenter.com/centerseries. This performance is sponsored by The Valley Advocate and WEIB 106.3 SmoothFM.

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