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**VANESSA WILLIAMS TO RECEIVE FIRST ALUMNI AWARD
FROM NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR ADVANCEMENT IN THE ARTS**

**CONDUCTOR MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS TO BE HONORED WITH ARISON
AWARD**

**FORMER ARISON AWARD WINNERS MIKHAIL BARYSHNIKOV, QUINCY
JONES, PLACIDO DOMINGO, JACQUES D'AMBOISE, AND ROBERTA
GUASPARI JOIN TILSON THOMAS TO CELEBRATE
NFAA'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY IN SPECTACULAR GALA & PERFORMANCE**

MIAMI, FL (January 3, 2006) – The National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts (NFAA), the nation's foremost arts recognition organization for young emerging artists, culminates its 25th anniversary celebration Jan. 14th in Miami's Bayfront Park with the presentation of its first Alumni Award to multi-talented singer and actress **Vanessa Williams**, whose new television series, "South Beach," debuts Jan. 11 on UPN-TV. Conductor **Michael Tilson Thomas** will receive the sixth annual Arison Award in recognition of his outstanding career with several orchestras, including the New World Symphony, which will perform under his direction.

Former Arison Award recipients **Mikhail Baryshnikov, Quincy Jones, Placido Domingo, Jacque d'Amboise** and **Roberta Guaspari**, whose work as a public school violin teacher in East Harlem inspired the movie "Music from the Heart," starring Meryl Streep, will also participate in the gala festivities.

The NFAA Alumni Award will be presented to Williams by NFAA President Dr. William Banchs, NFAA Board of Trustees Chairman Jerry Parks, sculptor John Henry, who created the award, and Henry Juskiewicz, of Gibson Guitar and Baldwin Piano, the award sponsor. Williams, who was singled out by NFAA as a high school senior in New York in 1981, will perform with the New World Symphony.

Placido Domingo will introduce Tilson Thomas, who will perform with the New World Symphony, founded by the late Ted Arison and his wife, Lin. The Arisons also created the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts to identify emerging artists and assist them at critical junctures with their educational and professional development. Both organizations will celebrate their achievements together, with a nod to the Arisons' vision for a city that 25 years ago was not the dominant force that it is today.

Also slated to perform during the gala are the 1992 NFAA ARTS Winner in Modern Dance, **Matthew Rushing**, and the 1994 NFAA ARTS Winner in Modern Dance, **Linda Sims**, both principal dancers with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, who will be introduced by Mikhail Baryshnikov; **Roy Hargrove**, the 1988 NFAA ARTS Winner in Jazz, who will be presented by Quincy Jones; 1994 NFAA ARTS Winner in Violin, **Jennifer Koh**, who will be introduced by Roberta Guaspari; and New York City Ballet members **Pauline Golbin**, the 1992 NFAA ARTS Winner in Dance and **Craig Hall**, the 1997 NFAA ARTS Winner in Dance, who will be presented by Jacques d'Amboise.

“This special evening pays homage to the many thousands of young people who have been recognized by NFAA and who have gone on to share their artistic talents in music, dance, theater, visual arts, and the written word,” said NFAA President Dr. William H. Banchs. “Our alumni are everywhere the arts flourish, and their gifts are truly a national treasure.”

This year, students competed for cash awards totaling more than \$500,000. They were selected in a blind judging process from a pool of 6,524 applicants representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia, as well as all U.S. territories. The top 160 finalists have been selected to participate in NFAA ARTS Week, where they will be evaluated in a dramatic series of final auditions and showcase performances, January 9 – 15, 2006 in Miami. NFAA, a not-for-profit organization, pays all expenses, including airfare, hotel, meals and ground transportation. Through an exclusive partnership with the White House Commission on Presidential Scholars, the U.S. Department of Education and the Presidential Scholars Program, all NFAA ARTS Week finalists are the only students who are considered for the additional honor of being named a U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts.

NFAA celebrates and rewards exceptional student artists from across the U.S. in each of nine artistic fields: dance, film and video, classical, pop and jazz music, photography, theater, visual arts, voice and writing. NFAA ARTS Week is a once-in-a-lifetime experience allowing students to participate in master classes, workshops, readings, exhibits and enrichment activities while also given the chance to perform in front of renowned artists and arts educators.

The 160 NFAA ARTS Week finalists will each receive one of the following awards:

- The coveted \$10,000 Gold Awards, given to up to 15 deserving finalists;
- The first-ever \$5,000 Silver Awards, which allows judges to choose up to four deserving finalists in each of the nine NFAA ARTS disciplines; and
- Level III, II and I Awards for NFAA ARTS Finalists, ranging from \$1,000 to \$3,000.

For a complete list of ARTS finalists or more information about NFAA, call 1-800-970-ARTS(2787) or please visit www.NFAA.ARTSawards.org.

ABOUT NFAA:

Dedicated to empowering the arts for America's future, the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts (NFAA) is a non-profit organization founded in 1981 by businessman and visionary Ted Arison. NFAA's mission is to identify emerging artists and assist them at critical junctures with their educational and professional development; and to raise the appreciation for, and support of, the arts in American society. Arts Recognition and Talent Search® (ARTS) is a program of the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts (NFAA). The NFAA ARTS program is sponsored, in part, by: Carnival Cruise Lines; The Coca-Cola Company; Gibson Guitar, Baldwin Piano and The Gibson Foundation; International Association for Jazz Education; The Jacques and Natasha Gelman Trust; The John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts; PricewaterhouseCoopers; Smithsonian Magazine; and SunTrust. ARTS Week 2006 will be made possible, in part, by support from American Airlines; The State of Florida Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Arts Council; the National Endowment for the Arts and the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs; the Cultural Affairs Council; the Tourist Development Council; and the Mayor and the Miami-Dade County Board of Commissioners. For more information about NFAA, visit the website [NFAA.ARTSawards.org](http://www.NFAA.ARTSawards.org).