George Manahan, Music Director of American Composers Orchestra, Wins 2012 Ditson Conductor’s Award

New York, NY – Columbia University will award George Manahan, Music Director of American Composers Orchestra, the 2012 Ditson Conductor’s Award for the advancement of American music.

The award will be presented Friday evening, Jan 18, at a 7:30 concert of American Composers Orchestra at Zankel Hall in Carnegie Hall. Augusta Read Thomas, a member of the Ditson Advisory Committee, will present the award.

Mr. Manahan will be awarded $5,000 and a citation on behalf of Columbia’s President Lee C. Bollinger.

“George Manahan has conducted and championed contemporary American music throughout his distinguished career, whether on the concert stage, in the opera pit, or through recordings,” said Fred Lerdahl, secretary of the Alice M. Ditson Fund and the Fritz Reiner Professor of Musical Composition at Columbia. “After a celebrated dozen years as Music Director of the New York City Opera, in 2010 he moved to the directorship of American Composers Orchestra, which in only two years he has brought to a fresh level of vitality. He is the composer’s conductor par excellence.”

The Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University established the Ditson Conductor’s Award in 1945. It is the oldest award honoring conductors for their support of American music. Previous recipients include James Levine, Christopher Keene, Mstislav Rostropovich, Leopold Stoukowski, Leonard Bernstein, Eugene Ormandy and Alan Gilbert.

In his second season as Music Director of American Composers Orchestra, the wide-ranging and versatile George Manahan has had an esteemed career embracing everything from opera to the concert stage, the traditional to the contemporary. In addition to his work with ACO this season, Mr. Manahan continues his commitment to working with young musicians as Director of Orchestral Studies at the Manhattan School of Music as well as guest conductor at the Curtis Institute of Music.

Previous to American Composers Orchestra, Manahan served as Music Director of the New York City Opera for fourteen seasons and was hailed for his leadership of the orchestra.
In May 2011 Mr. Manahan was honored by the American Society of Composers and Publishers (ASCAP) for his “career-long advocacy for American composers and the music of our time has enriched and enabled Concert Music both at home and abroad.”

Mr. Manahan’s guest appearances include the Orchestra of St. Luke’s, the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, as well as the symphonies of Atlanta, San Francisco, Hollywood Bowl, and New Jersey, where he served as acting Music Director for four seasons. He is a regular guest with the Music Academy of the West, and the Aspen Music Festival, and has also appeared with the Opera Companies of Seattle, Chicago, Santa Fe, Portland, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, Opera National du Paris, Teatro de Communale de Bologna, the Bergen Festival (Norway), the Casals Festival (Puerto Rico) and Minnesota Opera, where he was Principal Conductor.

His many appearances on television include productions of La Boheme, Lizzie Borden, and Tosca on PBS. Live from Lincoln Center’s telecast of New York City Opera’s production of Madame Butterfly under his direction won a 2007 Emmy Award.

George Manahan’s wide-ranging recording activities include the premiere recording of Steve Reich’s Tehillim for ECM; recordings of Edward Thomas’s Desire Under the Elms, which was nominated for a Grammy; Joe Jackson’s Will Power; and Tobias Picker’s Emmeline. His enthusiasm for contemporary music continues today; he has conducted numerous world premieres, including Charles Wuorinen’s Haroun and the Sea of Stories, David Lang’s Modern Painters, Hans Werner Henze’s The English Cat, and the New York premiere of Richard Danielpour’s Margaret Garner. As Music Director of the Richmond Symphony (VA) for twelve years, he was honored four times by the American Society of Composers and Publishers (ASCAP) for his commitment to new music.

He received his formal musical training at the Manhattan School of Music, studying conducting with Anton Coppola and George Schick, and was appointed to the faculty of the school upon his graduation, at which time The Juilliard School awarded him a fellowship as Assistant Conductor with the American Opera Center. Mr. Manahan was chosen as the Exxon Arts Endowment Conductor of the New Jersey Symphony and he made his opera debut with the Santa Fe Opera, conducting the American premiere of Arnold Schoenberg’s Von Heute Auf Morgen.

About Columbia University
A leading academic and research university, Columbia University continually seeks to advance the frontiers of knowledge and to foster a campus community deeply engaged in understanding and addressing the complex global issues of our time. Columbia’s extensive public service initiatives, cultural collaborations, and community partnerships help define the university’s underlying values and mission to educate students to be both leading scholars and informed, engaged citizens. Founded in 1754 as King’s College, Columbia University in the City of New York is the fifth oldest institution of higher learning in the United States.

About American Composers Orchestra
American Composers Orchestra (ACO) is the only orchestra in the world dedicated to the creation, performance, preservation, and promulgation of music by American composers. ACO identifies today’s brightest emerging composers, champions prominent established composers as well as those lesser known, and increases regional, national and international awareness of the infinite variety of American orchestral music, reflecting geographic, stylistic, and temporal diversity. ACO also serves as an incubator of ideas, research, and talent, as a catalyst for growth and change among orchestras, and as an advocate for American composers and their music. To date, ACO has performed music 750 American composers, including 200 world premieres and newly commissioned works. In pursuit of its singular mission, ACO maintains an unparalleled range of activities, including an annual concert series at Carnegie Hall, commissions, recordings, radio broadcasts, educational programs, new music reading sessions,
composer residencies and fellowships, as well as special projects designed to advance the field. More information is available at www.americancomposers.org.

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