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**Houston Arts Alliance's Folklife + Traditional Arts
in Partnership with Asia Society Texas Center Present
Voices of the Spirit V
A concert celebrating devotional music from
Houston's diverse faith communities**

**Saturday & Sunday, April 25 & 26, 2015
Asia Society Texas Center**

HOUSTON, TX – Each year Houston Arts Alliance's Folklife + Traditional Arts program in partnership with Asia Society Texas Center shines a light on Houston's diverse cultural landscape through the devotional music of our faith communities with its *Voices of the Spirit* concerts. From a capella gospel and the Golden Age of American Jewish religious music to Hindustani songs, this year's concerts on Saturday, April 25 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, April 26 at 3 p.m. reflect the richness of our city's religious practices as in years past, but with a special twist: a spectacular finale featuring the *chinelos* tradition of dancers in colorful larger-than-life costumes from southern Mexico.

Both performances will feature the same program and take place in the stunning Brown Foundation Performing Arts Theater at Asia Society Texas Center, 1370 Southmore Blvd.

Whether through syncopated close harmonies, devotional ragas, classic cantorial song or a vibrant brass band, each tradition voices its unique spirituality through a distinctive musical style with a long history. Now in its fifth year, *Voices of the Spirit* will begin with praise music from a cappella gospel ensemble The Cortez Family, followed by Cantor Daniel Mutlu singing repertoire from the Golden Age of American Jewish religious music. The program will continue with David and Chandrakantha Courtney performing Hindustani vocal music accompanied by *sitar*, *tabla*, *tanpura* and *esraj*. The concert will close with Danza Chinelos del Estado de Morelos and Banda Viento Morelense de los Hermanos Campos, making it the first time a *Voices of the Spirit* program presents a non-vocal sacred music tradition.

Creating and organizing *Voices of the Spirit* is just one of the ways that the Houston Arts Alliance's Folklife + Traditional Arts program has opened the doors to various communities and exposed Houston audiences to new selections of sacred music traditions each year.

Admission is free and open to the general public with reservations at asiasociety.com/texas, limit two per person. For additional requests, please call 713.496.9901. Unclaimed tickets will be released 10 minutes prior to the event.

Voices of the Spirit is made possible by the generosity of the National Endowment for the Arts and Houston Endowment.

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About the Performers

The Cortez Family

The Cortez Family consists of five siblings who have been singing together for more than two decades. Brought up in their grandfather's church, Greater Faith Missionary Baptist Church in Acres Homes, this group of brothers and sisters continue a long tradition of gospel music in their family. Zacardi, Erin, Eric, Neesha and Erica began singing when they were three, five, seven and nine, respectively, and all are still singing today — as a group, solo and in several other configurations — in churches throughout Houston. They began as an a capella group and have graduated to a variety of styles. For this performance, they return to their roots with rousing renditions from older repertoire popular in traditional African American sacred music.

Cantor Mutlu

Cantor Mutlu is a first generation American born to Turkish parents. Raised in Worcester, Massachusetts, Cantor Mutlu fell in love with music during high school and went on to attend the New England Conservatory of Music. After serving as a cantorial soloist at Temple Emanuel of Worcester, Cantor Mutlu pursued a Master's Degree in Sacred Music at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City. In 2011, Cantor Mutlu was called to Houston and joined Beth Israel's senior clergy as only the second full-time Cantor in the congregation's 160-year history.

Cantor Mutlu has performed with many premier musical ensembles. He has sung at venues ranging from Lincoln Center to Minute Maid Park. Cantor Mutlu has had the pleasure of working with such notable conductors as Jane Glover, Simon Carington, Andrew Megill and Owen Burdick, under whose baton he earned two glowing musical reviews from *The New York Times*. An avid composer, Cantor Mutlu has premiered original works in Boston, Jerusalem, New York and Houston.

Chandrakantha and David Courtney

Chandrakantha and David Courtney are a husband-and-wife team who have been involved in Indian music for decades. Based in Houston, they have taught and performed worldwide. They have produced recordings of and authored books on Hindustani and other Indian musical traditions.

Chandrakantha Courtney began to sing professionally as a child. She was a regular contributor to radio and television programs during and after her studies with many noted gurus. In 1977 she was an artist in the Om International troupe, which toured South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore and Mauritius. In 1978 she married David Courtney and moved with him to the United States. She has been teaching Indian classical vocal in the Houston area since then. She has also been very active in arts education programs throughout the region.

David Courtney has been performing on the *tabla* since 1972. He first studied *pakhawaj* (an ancient barrel shaped drum) under the famous Zakir Hussain at the Ali Akbar College of Music. He then moved to India and spent a number of years learning *tabla* under the late Ustad Shaik Dawood Khan of Hyderabad. He is also well versed in *dilruba*, and *esraj*. They are both prolific performers, producers, composers and authors. They are joined for this performance by Neha Gupta on vocal and *tanpura* and Masood Raoofi on *tabla*.

Danza Chinelos del Estado de Morelos and Banda Viento Morelense de los Hermanos Campos

Danza Chinelos del Estado de Morelos and Banda Viento Morelense de los Hermanos Campos perform together on various occasions throughout the year, but especially so during the early December days that surround the feast day for the Virgin of Guadalupe. Both groups are family ensembles that draw on the traditions of southern Mexico from which each family originates. In general, *chinelos* are a troupe of colorfully costumed dancers that reveal a blending of indigenous and Catholic traditions. Their outfits spoof the fancy Europeanized manners of the Mexican elite, while simultaneously bearing beloved images of venerated holy personages from the Catholic world. They "dance" their devotion to these images. Danza Chinelos del Estado de Morelos has roots in the state where the contemporary

Banda Viento Morelense de los Hermanos Campos plays a style of music popular throughout Mexico and based initially on the village brass bands that can be found throughout Southern and Central Mexico. They brought the music to Houston from their native Morelos and now perform regularly around the region, with and without the *chinelos*. The two groups have been performing together for over fifteen years. Their special bond involves a shared repertoire of dance steps accompanied by a distinctive set of instrumental pieces that are traditionally associated with each other. The Hermanos Campos are the only *banda* in the Houston area that know these tunes. They all consider it a lucky coincidence and a heavenly blessing.

About Houston Arts Alliance

Houston Arts Alliance (HAA) is a nonprofit agency established by the City of Houston to enhance the quality of life and tourism in the Houston region by advancing the arts on its behalf. HAA distributes grants to more than 220 nonprofit arts organizations and individual artists each year. In addition, HAA invests in and nurtures Houston's thriving creative community by commissioning the work of artists for public spaces, managing the city's civic art collection, showcasing Houston's rich folklife traditions, cultivating business volunteers, and empowering arts organizations to become sustainable and reach new audiences. For information on all events, visit HAA's online resource at artshound.com. For information on HAA, visit houstonartsalliance.com.

About HAA's Folklife + Traditional Arts Program

Houston Arts Alliance Folklife + Traditional Arts Program focuses on promoting and presenting the lively cultural traditions of the nation's fourth largest city. The program works in diverse neighborhoods and communities to explore and highlight the contemporary traditions that make Houston one of the most vibrant urban landscapes in the United States. Program goals include research, documentation and public projects that explore the wide variety of established and emerging cultural communities that come together in the greater Houston area.

Asia Society Texas Center

Asia Society Texas Center is part of a leading global educational organization dedicated to promoting mutual understanding and strengthening partnerships among peoples, leaders and institutions of Asia and the United States in a global context. Across the fields of arts, business, culture, education and policy, Asia Society Texas Center provides insight, generates ideas, and promotes collaboration to connect Americans and Asians for a shared future. Website: www.asiasociety.org/texas