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**VOCALIST GRETCHEN PARLATO WINS 17TH ANNUAL
THELONIOUS MONK INTERNATIONAL JAZZ COMPETITION**

Sponsored by General Motors

The 17th annual Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition, this year devoted to jazz vocals, came to a close this evening with four winners among a strong field of 13 competitors. Taking top honors and the \$20,000 first place scholarship was Gretchen Parlato, 28. A native of Los Angeles and current resident of New York, Gretchen began singing at the age of four. Gretchen has studied and performed with jazz greats Herbie Hancock, Quincy Jones, and Gerald Wilson and appeared at the 2001 Ojai Music Festival with Oscar Castro-Neves. She has performed as a vocalist on TV shows including 'Jag' and 'Lucky' and sings on Walt Disney Records' "A World of Happiness," also featuring Debbie Harry, Isaac Hayes, and Gary Oldman. Her program included Vincent Youman's "More Than You Know" and Frank Loesser's "I've Never Been in Love Before."

Second place honors and a \$10,000 scholarship went to Kellylee Evans, 29, from Ashton, Ontario, Canada. The \$5,000 third place scholarship went to Robin McKelle, 28, a resident of West Newton, Massachusetts. A fourth place scholarship of \$2,500 was awarded to Charenee Wade, 22, from Brooklyn, New York.

This year's Competition, sponsored by General Motors, with Semifinals held at the Smithsonian Institution's Baird Auditorium on Sunday September 12 and Finals held at the Kennedy Center's Eisenhower Theater on Monday September 13 in Washington, DC, was co-hosted by Herbie Hancock, Thelonious Monk Jr., and Billy Dee Williams. The Competition's world-class panel of judges and performers included Dee Dee Bridgewater, Kurt Elling, Al Jarreau, Quincy Jones, Flora Purim, and Jimmy Scott. The Competition band was comprised of drummer Carl Allen, bassist Lonnie Plaxico, and pianist George Duke, who also served as the Competition's Artistic Director. Also featured on stage were jazz All-Stars Terence Blanchard, Jon Faddis, Herbie Hancock, Jimmy Heath, Wayne Shorter, and Clark Terry.

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The Institute's 2004 Maria Fisher Founder's Award was presented to Senator Orrin Hatch, who has made outstanding contributions to the Institute and the world of jazz. Presenting the award was Institute Honorary Chairman Billy Dee Williams.

At the jazz vocals Competition Finals, Misha Piatigorsky, winner of the 2004 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Composers Competition sponsored by BMI, performed his winning piece "Low Talk" and received the \$10,000 grand prize award from Philip Graham, BMI's Senior Vice President of Writer/Publisher Relations. Piatigorsky, who is now residing in Israel, was born in Moscow at the height of the Cold War. His grandfather was the famed cellist Gregor Piatigorsky and his father was a composer of classical music. Over the past decade, Piatigorsky has produced, written, and arranged for singers including Mariani Ebert, Barbara Mendes, Judy Bady, and Ayelet Piatigorsky. He has also produced his own projects including the Piatigorsky ensemble, AYA, and his own trio recordings. Piatigorsky scored the music for three films, wrote the hip-hop musical *Mister*, and was the musical director of a gospel Baptist church in the Bronx. Currently, he is completing the debut CD of "Trio del Sol" for Twinz records.

Preceding the Finals on September 13, all participants were invited to the State Department, where Secretary of State Colin Powell hosted a VIP reception honoring the Thelonious Monk Institute and its successes in fostering the music's development through educational outreach. Jazz masters Herbie Hancock and Dee Dee Bridgewater performed for the audience. Tom Carter, President of the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, acknowledged the evening's co-chairs Quincy Jones, Joseph E. Robert, Jr., and Senator and Mrs. Ted Stevens.

The Competition, which showcases a different instrument every year, is the world's most prestigious jazz competition. It has launched the careers of pianists Marcus Roberts and Jacky Terrasson, saxophonist Joshua Redman, vocalist Jane Monheit, and trumpeter Ryan Kisor, among others. This year's Competition was taped for a two-hour documentary that will air on Black Entertainment Television and BET Jazz, and was recorded and aired live on XM Satellite Radio.

The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz (www.monkinstitute.org) was established in 1986 in memory of the renowned jazz pianist and composer. Its mission is to preserve America's legacy of jazz through performance and education. The Institute offers the world's most promising young musicians college level training by America's jazz masters and presents public school-based jazz education programs for young people around the world. Additionally, the Institute provides scholarships, performance opportunities, and worldwide recognition to gifted young musicians through its many education programs.