

Please note pronunciations: Knowles (noles); Theodore Roethke (RET-kee); Vihuela de Mano (vee-WAY-la de-MAH-no)

For immediate release

**DUO LIVEOAK RELEASES THREE CDS -- PIVA, SKETCHES, AND WOMAN OF THE WATER -- ALL ON THE GYRE LABEL**

**Nancy Knowles, Soprano, and Frank Wallace, Baritone, Sing Works Based on Texts by Ms. Knowles and Other Poets, Accompanied by Mr. Wallace on Guitar, Lute, Vihuela de Mano, in His Own, and Other Composers', Works**

Duo LiveOak, comprised of soprano Nancy Knowles and baritone Frank Wallace, has released three new CDs on the Gyre label. The duo sings works of renaissance masters as well as their own new works based on poems by Ms. Knowles and other poets, accompanied by Mr. Wallace on guitar, lute, and vihuela de mano. One of the CDs is a collection of original works by Mr. Wallace for solo classical guitar, which he performs.

The Gyre label was founded by Knowles and Wallace in 2000. The seeds of the company were planted in 1979, when, as a young trio specializing in medieval music (with medieval instruments on their backs), they followed the ancient pilgrimage routes on foot from France over the Pyrenees mountains to Montserrat, near Barcelona, famed since time immemorial as a "mountain of miracles." Along the way, they sang medieval chants and part songs in the haunting acoustic of the many 11th and 12th century Romanesque churches of Catalunya – a sound that is celestial yet earthy and human in scale. Here, they experienced sound, Knowles says, “in a totally physical way; it surrounds the listener and performer in a web of vibration, as if one were inside a great instrument. This romaneseque resonance influenced the way we perform and, in running the Gyre recording company, set the standard for the recorded sound that is our goal.”

The three CDs are:

***PIVA – RENAISSANCE SONG OF ITALY AND SPAIN*** (Gyre 10032, Duration: 63:37 minutes) features Nancy Knowles and Frank Wallace singing emotionally expressive, vibrant works from 15<sup>th</sup> and 16 century Italy and Spain, with Mr. Wallace playing the lute and vihuela de mano, the guitar-shaped 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish counterpart to the lute.

In his liner notes for this CD, Frank Wallace states, “The musical ties between Italy and Spain in the 15th and 16th centuries were many. The kingdom of Naples was the gateway into Italy for Spanish music and New World influences. This influx was spread by a period of artistic and commercial exchange between Naples and Florence beginning in 1480. In the early 16th century the Aragonese court in Naples was admired all over Italy for its cultivation of music. The lively neapolitan *villanelle* of the Italian composer da Nola and his contemporaries reverberated throughout Europe in settings by Willaert and others. During this period, many Spanish musicians, as clergy, found their way to Rome. In his years there, Juan del Encina (Juan del Encina means “John of the Live Oak”) was inspired by the simple four-part *frottole* of Bartolomeo Tromboncino and friends. Encina’s earthy, dramatic *villancicos*, many of which survive in the *Cancionero Musical de Palacio*, were the backbone of his courtly theatrical productions. With almost 500 three- and four-part songs, this songbook is the most important source for Spanish polyphony from the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. Juan Ponce is another prominent composer in this magnificent collection.”

***WOMAN OF THE WATER*** (Gyre 10082; duration: 59:51 minutes), four song cycles composed by Frank Wallace, with poetry by Nancy Knowles and others. The works are sung by both Ms. Knowles and Mr. Wallace, with Mr. Wallace playing guitar and lute.

Frank Wallace has written that inspiration for composing his songs came from John Dowland, whose lute songs, he says, “were inspired by the lyric word and the great sung polyphony of his time, and yet he brought new instrumental color to his writing. As a rare heir to the renaissance tradition of singer-instrumentalist-composer, I aim to bring back the richness of the art song to the classical guitar repertoire. Our popular culture has championed the guitar as the ultimate accompaniment to the voice, but as yet the classical world has not embraced this magical combination.”

The recording opens with *Pearly Everlasting* (5:54), for soprano, baritone and lute, which laments the death of their musical partner, John Fleagle, who founded LiveOak with them in 1976. Ms. Knowles wrote the poem during the last month of his life. This work is a melding of many styles, from medieval drones to 17th century lute writing, with dense counterpoint. One of Fleagle’s favorite tunes, *Comment Qu'a Moy*, by Machaut, weaves through the work.

*A Single Veil* (11:34), for soprano and guitar, debuted shortly after 9/11. Performances of this work, with its moving, eclectic poetry from Europe, America and the Middle East, have been healing for performers and audiences alike. Opening with a brief raga-like statement of melody, an homage to Rumi's Persian roots, the songs progress through anger and dissonance, to a final lullaby of peace.”

*Dake's Song* (3:22), for solo guitar, was written for the guitar builder Dake Traphagen as a piece to show off the beauty of his instruments. *Débil del Alba* (Tenderness of the Dawn)

(6:37), for solo guitar, was conceived as a duet for guitar and dancer. The title comes from Pablo Neruda.

*Bestiary* (12:29), six songs for mezzo-soprano, baritone and guitar, is a “circus piece” which often ends the duo’s concerts. The “beasts” are from the late American Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Theodore Roethke, with one creature, *Star-nosed Mole*, written to poetry by Nancy Knowles. The music and poetry complement each other in bringing this menagerie to life.

The title piece on this CD, *Woman of the Water* (20:31), nine songs for mezzo-soprano and 10-course lute, features poetry from *The Far Field*, Theodore Roethke's last book of poems, published in 1964, one year after his death. Frank Wallace has written that here, “the poems trace the passions of a woman who lives by the sea, from her awakening young body and the beginnings of love, through longing and frustration to union and joy in her later years. The lute was chosen as a graceful, more feminine accompaniment to this delicate tale.”

*SKETCHES* (Gyre 10052; duration: 71:08 minutes) is an album of solo works composed by Frank Wallace and performed by him on classical guitar. It is, in Mr. Wallace’s words, “a collection of miniatures written spontaneously over the past eight years. They are tone poems, short and direct – ethnic and simple, influenced by ouds and gypsy fiddles, medieval chants and renaissance fools, sacred motets and ancient guitarists. They are whimsy, a meditation.”

The works in *Sketches* include:

*Garcia Lorca's Riddle* 3:02

*Friend of the Sand Winds* 4:35

*Oriente* 5:57

*Nuevas Cantigas* 10:27

*Five Polyphonic Fantasies* 8:05

*Harlequin in Love* 13:10

*Six Prayers on Six Strings* 10:22

*Inversions* 3:43

*Good Winds for Dionisio*

(theme and eleven variations) 11:44

### About Duo LiveOak

In the Catalan language, the word for the evergreen live oak – a tree known for its strength and long life -- is made into a verb, *alzinarse*--to revitalize. Duo LiveOak is bringing new life to the long-neglected form of the art song with guitar and lute, performing the great song repertoire of all ages, from the Middle Ages to contemporary, accompanied by the guitar and its ancestors. Duo LiveOak harks back to an earlier, more humanistic, age when singers played instruments, instrumentalists sang, performers composed, and composers mingled with performers and the public.

Wallace and Knowles have toured widely throughout the U.S. and Europe since 1976, performing in concert series, on radio and TV, and for such festivals as the Holland Festival/Utrecht, the Barcelona Festival, the Regensburg Festival, Música en Compostela, the Boston Early Music Festival, and the Guitar Foundation of America. LiveOak has recorded for Titanic, Musical Heritage, Centaur, and, most recently, Gyre.

### About Frank Wallace

Guitarist/baritone/composer Frank Wallace has distinguished himself not only as a dynamic soloist and accompanist on classical and romantic guitars, but is also recognized as a leading player of the vihuela de mano and the lute. He is an accomplished performer of self-accompanied song -- singing and playing the art songs of renaissance Italy and Spain, Elizabethan England, and Schubert with equal attention to the subtleties of melody, words, and accompaniments. As a composer, he draws on influences ranging from avant garde to medieval to the blues.

### About Nancy Knowles

Nancy Knowles, soprano and poet, conceives programs for the Duo that are both thought-provoking and whimsical. She lends her poet's sensibility and dramatic sense to the choosing of the texts. Her most recent theater piece is *The House of Fools*, a dramatic memoir in two acts that combines Knowles' own poetry with masks, unaccompanied song, flutes and drums, premiered in 2002. A singer/actress since her youth, Knowles is also a talented visual artist. It is her eye that has carved the image of LiveOak and Gyre over the years, from photography to graphic design to sets and masks for staged productions.

Long known for her performances of medieval Spanish music, Knowles is currently performing a program, with flute and frame drum, of the evocative solo repertoire of medieval Spain called *Voice of the Rose: The Sacred Feminine*, which harks back to an age when feminine virtues were a source of inspiration, praised in song and verse.

### About Gyre Music

The word gyre, in a 1777 dictionary, means "circle, ring, trance." Owned and operated by artists, the quality and integrity of Gyre products are guaranteed. All steps in the production process, including the website, is carried out by the artists and, occasionally, their artist colleagues, from the conception to the recording, editing, photography and design. Gyre CDs are issued in elegant eco-packaging by Oasis. The three new CDs will be distributed by ClassiQuest/Forte distribution.

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#### NOT FOR PUBLICATION:

For additional information, copies of CDs for review, interview access, or photographs (including high-resolution photos of the CD cover), please contact Nancy Shear Arts Services, Press Representatives, at 212/496-9418.