ANN ARBOR (February 9, 2006) — The Naxos recording of William Bolcom’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, a collaboration between the University Musical Society and the University of Michigan School of Music, was awarded four Grammy Awards at the ceremonies in Los Angeles yesterday. The awards — which included the prize given in the most prestigious classical music categories — included Best Classical Album, Best Choral Recording, and Best Classical Contemporary Composition. In addition, the producer of the recording, Tim Handley, won the Producer of the Year honors for this work, as well as several other recordings he produced, including one featuring music by U-M composer Michael Daugherty. Other U-M connections include: U-M School of Music graduate Jessye Norman (MM ’68) also received a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award at the ceremony; and Professor Robert Hurst (jazz double bass) played on Dianne Reeves Good Night and Good Luck, which won Best Jazz Vocal Album.

The recording of Pulitzer Prize-winning composer William Bolcom’s massive song cycle based on the poetry of William Blake was a live recording of the concert presented in Ann Arbor at Hill Auditorium on April 8, 2004 and was the first commercial recording of the work, which had its world premiere in 1984. With approximately 450 musicians, including the University Symphony Orchestra, the Contemporary Directions Ensemble, U-M School of Music Choirs (University Choir, Chamber Choir, and Orpheus Singers), the UMS Choral Union, the MSU Children’s Choir, and more than a dozen soloists from the classical, pop, folk, and operatic realms, the performance was conducted by Leonard Slatkin, nearly 20 years to the date after the work received its US premiere in the same venue.
Slatkin, who serves as music director of the National Symphony, had conducted the work several times before and worked closely with students leading up to the performance and recording. U-M Director of University Orchestras & Professor of Conducting Kenneth Kiesler guided the University Symphony Orchestra in preparing them for this monumental undertaking.

Perhaps most remarkable about this recording winning the prestigious awards is that it was a production comprised largely of University of Michigan students, who were competing against outstanding professionals in the international classical music field. The five different choirs — including over 340 singers — who came together for this project were awarded the Best Choral Performance Grammy. The logistics of preparing five ensembles from Ann Arbor and Lansing fell to conductor Jerry Blackstone, who serves as Chair of the Conducting Department at the School of Music as well as music director of the UMS Choral Union.

The thirteen soloists on the recording also included University of Michigan and Ann Arbor-based musicians: mezzo-soprano Joan Morris, soprano Carmen Pelton, violinist Jeremy Kittel, and Peter “Madcat” Ruth on harmonica and vocals.

U-M School of Music Dean Christopher Kendall added, “This is cause for great celebration! It’s wonderful to see the extraordinary quality of the work of our students and faculty being recognized in this way…truly a triumph for the many people whose artistry and organizational skills contributed to this project. My predecessor, Karen Wolff, was a great champion of the mounting of this ambitious project, both as a performance and a recording, and this award is also a tribute to her commitment.”

UMS President Kenneth C. Fischer commented, “This project would not have happened without an incredible partnership between two of Ann Arbor’s oldest musical institutions: the University Musical Society and the University of Michigan School of Music. We’re so proud of the UMS Choral Union and the many, many faculty and student musicians from the School of Music who pulled together to make this ambitious project a reality — and who demonstrate the uncommon
experiences that our two world-class institutions provide. And, or course, none of this would have happened without Bill Bolcom’s creative genius.”

Composer William Bolcom was introduced to the poetry of William Blake and decided to set the poet’s cycle to music in 1956, when he was still a teenager. Bolcom wrote the first songs when he was only 17, but put the remainder of the project on hold for many years to pursue his own education and to further develop the compositional vocabulary that he felt he needed to do the project justice. Most of the work was completed between 1973 and 1982; Bolcom moved to Ann Arbor in 1973 to teach at the University of Michigan and was finally able to devote the attention needed for the work.

Bolcom’s Songs of Innocence and of Experience received its world premiere in Stuttgart, Germany, in January 1984, followed three months later by the U.S. premiere in Ann Arbor on April 11. The work’s mammoth scale has resulted in relatively few performances over the past 20 years, notwithstanding extraordinary reviews. The New York Times exclaimed, “What an astonishing, exhilarating, exhausting, and exasperating composition it is!” also calling it “a masterpiece of our time and place…gigantically ambitious.” The Boston Globe called it “the greatest achievement of synthesis in American music since Porgy and Bess” and the Chicago Tribune considered it “one of the finest and most important new American works of the decade.” The New York Times added, “It is exuberant, tricky, a theater piece that is meant to construct its own all-inclusive universe like the great symphonies of the last century.”

William Bolcom was born in Seattle in 1938. When he exhibited musical talent while still very young, he began private composition studies (at age 11) with John Verrall and piano with Berthe Poncy Jacobson at the University of Washington while performing extensively throughout the Seattle area. He earned his Bachelor’s Degree from the University of Washington in 1958 and studied with Darius Milhaud at Mills College in California and at the Paris Conservatoire de Musique. He earned a doctorate in composition from Stanford University in 1964, working with Leland Smith. His many awards include the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for 12 New Etudes for Piano;
two Guggenheim Fellowships, several Rockefeller Awards and NEA grants; the 1977 Henry Russel Award (the highest academic prize given by the University of Michigan) and 20 years later the prestigious Henry Russel Lectureship; investiture in the Academy of Arts and Letters in 1992; and numerous other honorary degrees, grants, and awards.

He has been commissioned to compose new works by Lyric Opera of Chicago (most recently, *The Wedding*, plus *A View from the Bridge* and *McTeague*), as well as the orchestras of Philadelphia, St. Louis, Seattle, St. Paul, Vienna (Philharmonic), Baltimore, Washington DC (National Symphony), New York (MET Orchestra), and many others. He composed a monodrama for soprano and string orchestra, *Medusa*, which was performed in Ann Arbor by Catherine Malfitano and the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra last season. His cabaret songs were also on display at the Hill Auditorium Gala Re-Opening Concert when mezzo-soprano Measha Brueggergosman stepped in for an indisposed Audra McDonald, with the composer at the piano. Further information about his compositions and recordings is available at www.bolcomandmorris.com.

Encompassing programs in dance, music, musical theatre, and theatre, the University of Michigan School of Music, now celebrating its 125th year, is defined by a long and rich heritage of excellence. With an internationally recognized faculty, world-renowned performance facilities, and a diverse student population, the University of Michigan is one of the finest performing arts schools in the United States. Many departments are consistently ranked among the top five in the country, with Composition and Conducting currently ranked as number one.

The University Musical Society was founded in 1879 and presents its 127th season in 05/06. One of the oldest performing arts presenters in the country, UMS serves diverse audiences through multi-disciplinary performing arts programs in presentation, creation, and education. With a program steeped in music, dance, and theater, UMS hosts approximately 75 performances and 150 free educational activities each season. UMS also commissions new work, sponsors artist residencies, and organizes collaborative projects with local, national, and international partners. While proudly affiliated with the University of Michigan and housed on the U-M campus, UMS is a
separate not-for-profit organization that supports itself from ticket sales, grants, contributions, and endowment income.

This UMS/U-M School of Music collaboration was funded in part by the University of Michigan and supported by the Maxine and Stuart Frankel Foundation and Linda and Maurice Binkow.

**Media Inquiries/Further Information:**
Sara Billmann, University Musical Society
734-763-0611
sarabill@umich.edu

Carrie Throm, U-M School of Music
734-764-4453
cthrom@umich.edu

--30--