Boston, MA--More than 850 graduates received degrees Friday at Berklee College of Music's 2009 Commencement, held at the Agganis Arena at Boston University. Berklee President Roger H. Brown presented honorary doctor of music degrees to legendary Motown singer/songwriter Smokey Robinson; versatile, enduring and multimillion-selling singer Linda Ronstadt; Dominican singer/ songwriter superstar Juan Luis Guerra; and award-winning producer and sound engineer George Massenburg. Robinson delivered the commencement address to the graduating class and more than 4,000 guests.

The annual Commencement Concert took place on graduation eve, May 8, also at Agganis Arena. Some of the college's most accomplished students presented a tribute to the honorees with performances of music associated with their careers. In an unexpected moment Guerra took to the stage to perform his song “Bilirrubina,” alongside the students. Other songs performed included Robinson’s “Tracks of My Tears,” and Ronstadt’s “You’re No Good” and “Don’t’ Know Much,” which was engineered by George Massenburg

In his commencement address, Robinson said that among his honors the one from Berklee is special because it’s from his peers. He stressed the importance of staying humble while pursuing a career in music. “Showbusiness is a very fickle life,” he told the students. “You’re up today, you’re down tomorrow. You’re in today, you’re out tomorrow. It’s a life of peaks and valleys. Let your valleys inspire you to get to the next peak. And if you have a lot of peaks in a row don’t take yourself so seriously that you think that you’re IT. You’re blessed, you’re getting a chance to do something that you love and earn a living at it. I say God’s speed to all of you. Go out and do it ‘cause I got a taste last night of what you can do and who you are and I’m so proud of you. I’m so proud to be getting this doctorate from your school. It is a school of music; it is a school of my life.”

In accepting her honorary doctorate, Ronstadt chuckled and remarked that because her career path wasn't through academia, she didn't have her own commencement to attend, and yet the few she has witnessed have been nothing like her experience at Berklee's. "The first time that I visited Berklee, I felt that I had tumbled into Hogwarts,” she said. “I think the reason for that is because the most important function that music performs for us is transcendence. And, transcendence is the truest meaning of magic."

Upon receiving his honorary degree, Guerra, in English, thanked President Brown, Berklee faculty members and students, and dedicated the moment to his wife, children, and his Dominican friends in attendance and cheering. He added, "I would also like to give praise and love to Jesus, my Lord and savior, knowing that all my inspiration comes from Him."

Massenburg began his acceptance remarks by referring to the graduates as his new colleagues. He welcomed them to the music business, but not without warning: "The record business has been eaten, its young have been eaten, and there is a great place for you out there,” he began. “We're looking for you to help us rebuild it. We're looking for you to try to understand that there is quality music to be made that can be valued, and that something can sound better than an MP3. We've been told that the MP3 carries our business, but it's not very good. And, we can't prove it yet, but this will be your job. I remind you that the absence of evidence, is not evidence of absence. There is a great deal of work that we all have to do

together."

Before wrapping up, he added one more thing, "I'd like to reinterpret carpe diem as stated by Thelonious Monk, who said, "You gotta dig it to dig it, you dig?' "

This year's honorary doctorate recipients were recognized for their achievements in contemporary music, for their enduring contributions to popular culture, and for the influence their careers and music have had over Berklee's international student body. Robinson, Ronstadt, Guerra, and Massenburg join the ranks of such esteemed recipients as Duke Ellington, David Bowie, Count Basie, B.B. King, Sting, James Taylor, Aretha Franklin, Pat Metheny, Loretta Lynn, Dizzy Gillespie, Billy Joel, Bonnie Raitt, Quincy Jones, Aerosmith's Steven Tyler, and Patti Labelle.

Berklee's class of 2009 included more than 850 students graduating with bachelor of music degrees or professional diplomas. Female graduates numbered 242, representing 28 percent of the total class. International students from 37 different countries - the largest portions from Japan and South Korea- made up 13 percent of the class. Domestic students were from 44 U.S. states - the greatest number from Massachusetts, New York, and California. The top three majors were Professional Music, Music Business/Management, and Performance. Guitar, voice, and piano were the three most common means of musical expression among students of the graduating class.

Berklee College of Music was founded on the revolutionary principal that the best way to prepare students for careers in music was through the study and practice of contemporary music. For over 60 years, the college has evolved constantly to reflect the state of the art of music and the music business. With over a dozen performance and nonperformance majors, a diverse and talented student body representing over 70 countries, and a music industry "who's who" of alumni, Berklee is the world's premier learning lab for the music of today — and tomorrow.