



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **LIONS AND TIGERS AND BEARS – OH MY! 2014 YOUNG PEOPLE’S CONCERT**

Waukegan, IL FEBRUARY 10, 2014—The Waukegan Park District – Cultural Arts Division is pleased to invite children of all ages to the annual Young People’s Concert to be held on Saturday, February 22, 2014 at 11 am in the Waukegan High School Trapp Auditorium, 2325 Brookside Avenue in Waukegan. Each spring the Waukegan Symphony Orchestra offers a program that is designed to appeal to children in all of us. This year the program will feature the Waukegan Symphony Orchestra performing a lively selection of animal-themed pieces under the baton of Music Director Stephen Blackwelder. This year’s program includes Vaughan-Williams’ Overture to *The Wasps*, Anderson’s *The Waltzing Cat*, the finale to Haydn’s “*The Bear*” *Symphony*, Mancini’s *Pink Panther*, and Saint-Saëns’ *Carnival of the Animals*. Piano soloists in the Saint-Saëns work are the prize-winning pianists; 15 year-old brother and sister, Nicolas and Nova Xu. Listeners will be introduced to the sections of the orchestra and then invited on stage to explore the instruments at the conclusion of the concert. The audience will also be treated to the narration of Saint-Saëns work by Rodney Stapleton, a Chicago bass with a long and varied list of credits to his name. Admission is free for students (18 and under) and youth 12 and under should be accompanied by an adult. Adult tickets are only \$5. For more information, please call the Jack Benny Center for the Arts at 847-360-4740.

Additional information about the cultural arts programming may be found at the Waukegan Park District website; [www.waukeganparks.org](http://www.waukeganparks.org) or [www.jackbennycenter.org](http://www.jackbennycenter.org) Information may also be found when you visit the Jack Benny Center on Facebook and Twitter. Partial sponsorship of the Cultural Arts programs is through a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, an agency of the State of Illinois.

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Additional information included:

Photographs of soloists (3)

Biographies of soloists (2)

Arrangements can be made to interview Music Director Stephen Blackwelder

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### About the Waukegan Park District

Established on December 26, 1916, the district has 47 properties and 720 acres of land, including the 18-hole Bonnie Brook and 9-hole Greenshire Golf Courses. Properties are managed to the highest environmental and conservation standards. Facilities operated by the district include the Field House Sports and Fitness Center, the Jack Benny Center for the Arts, the Waukegan SportsPark, the Waukegan Skate Park, the Waukegan BMX Track, recreational centers, an outdoor swimming pool, disc golf course, dog exercise area, outdoor sports fields, picnic areas, playgrounds, and sports courts including basketball and tennis. A full range of programs and services are offered year round for all ages, from infants to seniors as well as special needs populations. Healthy lifestyles, wellness initiatives, and a connection with the outdoors and nature are integrated throughout programs, services, and special events. Cultural events are provided by the Waukegan Symphony Orchestra and Concert Chorus, the Bowen Park Theatre Company, and the Waukegan History Museum. There is something for everyone! The award-winning District employs 57 full-time and over 250 part-time, year round, seasonal, and temporary employees. The District is a member of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD), and Illinois Park and Recreation Association (IPRA). The district maintains national accreditation from the NRPA Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA), the Illinois Association of Park Districts' (IAPD) Distinguished Agency accreditation and the Park District Risk Management Agency (PDRMA) accreditation and sustains a Level A Loss Control Program. The district was a NRPA Gold Medal Finalist in 2012 and 2013, and awarded the NRPA National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management in 2013.

**Nicolas Xu** is a 15-year-old sophomore at Walter Payton College Preparatory High School. He has studied piano from the age of 6, and has been a student at DePaul University's *Community Music Division* with Regina Syrkin since 2011. He has received a Gold medal at the Chicago Area Music Teachers Association's *Sonata Festival* (2012), placed third in the Roberta Savler Piano Solo Contest (2012), placed 1<sup>st</sup> in the ISMTA West Suburban Scholarship contest (2007), won the second place in the Confucius Fine Arts Competition (2006, 2009), and placed 1<sup>st</sup> with his sister in the Chicago Duo Piano Competition (2010). He was awarded the "Outstanding" rating at the Granquist Music Competition in 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2010. He also plays violin in Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra. At school, he is on the Payton chess, swimming and math teams. In his spare time, Nicolas enjoys reading, playing ping-pong and videogames.



**Nova Xu**, also 15 and a sophomore at Walter Payton College Preparatory High School, has been studying piano for nine years—first with Julia Tsien and now with Regina Syrkin at DePaul’s *Community Music Division*. She has participated in many piano competitions, and won “Outstanding” ratings in the Granquist Music Competition, first place in the ISMTA State Piano Junior Division, first place in the Chicago Duo Piano Competition, and has received a Gold medal at the Chicago Area Music Teachers Association’s *Sonata Festival*. She was also a winner in the Steinway Young Artists Competition. Recently, Nova performed the Beethoven piano concerto with the Oistrach Symphony Orchestra under maestro Mina Zikri. Besides piano, Nova also plays violin in the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra. She enjoys swimming, reading and listening to pop songs.



### **Rodney Stapleton, narrator and bass**

Chicago bass Rodney Stapleton has a long and varied list of credits to his name, including appearances in opera, operetta, musical theater and concert. Rodney has mastered over two dozen leading bass roles such as Mephistopheles in *Faust*, Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte*, Colline in *La Bohème*, Alfio in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Porgy in *Porgy and Bess*, Don Alfonso in *Così fan Tutte*, Leporello in *Don Giovanni*, Balthasar in *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and the title roles in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Rigoletto*. Rodney has performed with the Elgin Symphony, Lincoln Opera, American National Opera, Goodman Theater, Illinois Valley Symphony and others. Rodney toured Germany in the late 1980’s in productions of *La Bohème*, *La Traviata* and *Madama Butterfly* and has returned to that country annually since 1999 for a series of well-received recitals of American spirituals.



In March of 2003, the Illinois Arts Council honored Rodney in Springfield with an award recognizing his exceptional contributions to arts education. Recently, Rodney was heard as the Voice of God in Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s production of Britten’s *Noye’s Fludde*. Currently Rodney is the music artist in residence at Alcott College prep. In his capacity as an educator, Rodney not only teaches music to the pre-K through 8th grade students, but also develops new music curricula and arts integrated curricula for the classroom. His hope is to not only inspire a new generation of musicians, but also a new generation of learners for the new millennium.