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Waterbury Symphony Orchestra celebrates Duke Ellington and George Gershwin with *Rhapsody in June*

WATERBURY, CT – Waterbury Symphony Orchestra presents *Rhapsody in June*, Saturday, June 12, 2021 at 4:00 p.m. at the Waterbury Arts Magnet School Courtyard, and Sunday, June 13, 2021 at 4:00 p.m. on the lawn at Five Points Center for the Visual Arts in Torrington. The weekend long celebration is a salute to two masters of swing, Duke Ellington and George Gershwin.

The concert will feature some of Ellington's most loved works including : *It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)* and *Jubilee Stomp* and, of course, Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* will be a centerpiece of the concert. This program underscores the WSO's long history in the Waterbury community. On March 26, 1963, Duke Ellington was the piano soloist with the Waterbury Symphony Orchestra in a performance of *New World A-Comin'*, a landmark jazz score composed by Ellington. "I'm very excited about our salute to the music of Ellington and Gershwin. This concert is at the heart of the WSO's history and mission, to use music as a bridge to connect audiences from different generations and diverse communities. We believe it is an opportunity to foster shared musical experiences and build community. It is the first in what we hope will be an ongoing series celebrating jazz, Latin music, and the rich legacy of the Great American Songbook," says WSO Music Director & Conductor Leif Bjaland.

The concert will showcase more than twenty WSO musicians and will feature three guest artists. Internationally renowned pianist Andrew Armstrong will be the featured soloist for *Rhapsody in Blue*. Both vocalist, Maria Wirries and pianist, Alex Rybeck have performed with the Symphony's **Great American Songbook Project**, an annual weekend-long workshop, for talented young singers to be coached in songs from the 1920s, 30s, 40s, and 50's, collectively known as "The Great American Songbook."

The weekend expands the Waterbury Symphony's community partnerships, as well. "Collaborating with Waterbury Arts Magnet School to perform in their spectacular courtyard and with Five Points Center for the Visual Arts to perform in their brand-new Torrington center is an exciting way to connect with different areas in our community," explains Bjaland. Judith McElhone, Executive Director & Founder of Five Points Arts, agrees, "All of us at Five Points Arts are delighted to partner with the Waterbury Symphony Orchestra on the presentation of *Rhapsody in June*. We believe the intersection of visual art and music is important for healing and hope in today's world, and we celebrate this new partnership with WSO as the perfect vehicle for bringing our collective audiences together in new and exciting ways." Nicholas Albini, Waterbury Arts Magnet School Principal sums up the region-wide enthusiasm for this event, "It is with the utmost joy and satisfaction that Waterbury Public Schools, Waterbury Arts Magnet School, and the Waterbury Symphony Orchestra have a community partnership that benefits so many young adults and enjoyed by music

enthusiasts throughout the region. This relationship is cemented and will remain in place for as long as music is taught, learned, and appreciated. Feel the vibe!”

This event is Waterbury Symphony’s gift to the community. Admission is FREE but tickets are REQUIRED. A suggested donation of \$25 per person will be gratefully accepted. Tickets are available at waterburysymphony.org or 203-574-4283. In the event of inclement weather on either date, the concert will move to indoor facilities at each site.

The WSO has developed concert guidelines in accordance with the CT Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) so that everyone can relax and enjoy the music. Capacity is limited and these concerts are expected to sell out. Attendees will be required to wear masks.

These concerts are sponsored by:

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Special thanks to Waterbury Arts Magnet School and the Five Points Center for the Visual Arts

About Andrew Armstrong

Praised by critics for his passionate expression and dazzling technique, pianist **Andrew Armstrong** has delighted audiences across Asia, Europe, Latin America, Canada, and the United States, including performances at Alice Tully Hall, Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Grand Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, and Warsaw's National Philharmonic. Andrew’s orchestral engagements across the globe have seen him perform a sprawling repertoire of more than 50 concertos with orchestra. He has performed with such conductors as Peter Oundjian, Itzhak Perlman, Günther Herbig, Stefan Sanderling, Jean-Marie Zeitouni, and Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, and has appeared in solo recitals in chamber music concerts with the Elias, Alexander, American, and Manhattan String Quartets, and also as a member of the Caramoor Virtuosi, Boston Chamber Music Society, Seattle Chamber Music Society, and the Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players. The 2019-2020 Season takes Andrew across the globe with concerts in London, Glasgow, Amsterdam, Bergen, Dresden, Copenhagen, Prague, and across the US, Canada, and Australia. Also this season, Andrew and violinist James Ehnes team up to release the complete cycle of 10 Beethoven Violin Sonatas to celebrate the master’s 250th birthday in 2020. The duo performs the cycle in cities around the world this year. On top of his performance activities, Andrew serves as Artistic Director of Columbia Museum of Art’s Chamber Music on Main series in South Carolina, and enters his third year as Director of the Chamber Music Camp at Wisconsin’s Green Lake Festival of Music.

Andrew’s debut solo CD featuring was released to great critical acclaim: “I have heard few pianists play [Rachmaninov’s Second Piano Sonata], recorded or in concert, with such dazzling clarity and confidence” (American Record Guide). He followed that success with a disc on Cordelia Records of works by Chopin, Liszt, Debussy, and the world premiere recording of Bielawa's Wait for piano & drone. He has released several award-winning recordings with his longtime recital partner James Ehnes -- most recently Beethoven’s Sonatas Nos. 4, 5, & 8, to stellar reviews. Andrew is devoted to outreach programs and playing for children. In addition to his many concerts, his performances are heard regularly on National Public Radio and WQXR, New York City’s premier classical music station. Mr. Armstrong lives happily in Massachusetts, with his wife Esty, their three children Jack (14), Elise (9), and Gabriel (2), and their two dogs Comet & Dooker.

About Alex Rybeck

Alex Rybeck, Music Director, is a pianist, arranger, and composer who has worked with such showbiz legends as George Abbott, Hal Prince, Tommy Tune, Burt Bacharach, and Eartha Kitt. Broadway credits include *Merrily We Roll Along* and *Grand Hotel*. He has served as Music Director for Faith Prince, Karen Akers, Lis and Ann Hampton Callaway, Donna McKechnie, Marni Nixon, Kitty Carlisle Hart, Keren Mason, Jeff Harnar, Lee Roy Reams, and Jason Graae, to name a few. Numerous CDs include “The 1959 Broadway Songbook” (Jeff Harnar), “Sibling Revelry” (The Callaways), “Leading Men Don’t Dance” (Ron Rains & Others), and every solo album by Liz Callaway. As a grad student (NYU Musical Theater Writing Program), he was mentored by Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, Stephen Schwartz, Arthur Laurents, and Comden & Green. He lives in New York City.

About Maria Wirries

Maria Wirries is a graduate of the musical theatre program at Penn State. She was most recently seen in the Broadway traveling company of *Dear Even Hansen*. Her other theatre credits include the Broadway revival workshop of *Once on This Island*; The Artist Series *Hot and Cole*; Penn State School of Theatre’s *Be More Chill*, *Sweet Charity*, *Hair*, *Titanic*, and The Players Theatre’s *Master Class*. Maria also performs solo cabarets and often collaborates with the Sarasota Orchestra on their Master Works series.

Maria has a huge appreciation for new work and has performed newly commissioned pieces by composers and artists James Grant, Dick Hyman, Alex Rybeck, and Sheridan Seyfried. At Penn State, she also participated in a commission project of a new theatre piece written by Mike Reid and Sarah Schlesinger as well as participating in the world premiere of *Love in Hate Nation*, a Joe Iconis musical.

Maria also writes her own songs that can be heard on Spotify, iTunes, and all other streaming services.

About Waterbury Symphony Orchestra

The WSO builds connections across the region with exploratory concerts, events, and educational programs. The WSO maintains a firm commitment to produce programs that are of value to its patrons, participants and community partners. This commitment is rooted in the Symphony’s core belief that music education and shared cultural experiences are essential to creating community. Founded in 1938, the Symphony has assembled talented musicians across New England and the Tri-state area to perform throughout Northwest Connecticut. Leif Bjaland has served as Music Director and Conductor of the WSO since the 1994-1995 season. The Symphony has been the Orchestra-in-Residence at Naugatuck Valley Community College since 1992.

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