



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Announces Recipients of the 2014 VSA International Young Soloists Competition

**Five Soloists to Give Free Performance on the Kennedy Center's
Millennium Stage June 1, 2014 at 6pm**

(WASHINGTON, D.C.)— Five young musicians have been named as the winners of the 2014 VSA International Young Soloists Competition, a Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability Program in its 30th year highlighting the talents and skills of young musicians living with disabilities. Andrew Bambridge, Michael Casey, Juna Gjata, Eliot Heaton, and Evan Pensis will spend the weekend of May 30 – June 2 participating in a full array of pre-professional activities including rehearsals, round table discussions with music professionals, and a master class with renowned percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie. The weekend culminates with a cash award of \$2,500 given to each winner and a performance on the Millennium Stage on June 1 at 6pm in Washington, D.C. This performance is free and open to the public.

Andrew Bambridge is a 17 year-old multi-talented musician from New Jersey. Andrew, who has achondroplastic dwarfism, first began piano lessons at the age of six. At the age of seven, he participated in a school musical where he discovered his love of singing and acting. He continued with his studies of piano and voice, and later on moved to percussion as well. After three years of studying percussion privately with Greg Giannascoli, Andrew was accepted at The Juilliard School's Pre-College Division and studies with Jonathan Hass, Pablo Rieppi, and Greg Giannascoli. Along with

studying percussion at Juilliard, Andrew also is a part of the JPC Orchestra and Percussion Ensemble. He performs with both ensembles at Juilliard, and also conducts and composes for the Percussion Ensemble regularly.

Jazz saxophonist Mike Casey, originally from Storrs, Connecticut, is currently a Jazz Studies student at the acclaimed Jackie McLean Institute of Jazz (University of Hartford's Hartt School, C.T.) and a graduate of the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts. Mike, who has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, has been fortunate to study with some of the world's top jazz musicians, including saxophonist Abraham Burton, trombonist Steve Davis, and bassist Nat Reeves. Mike has performed at well-respected venues such as Smalls Jazz Club (NYC) and the Hard Rock Cafe (Boston), as well as venues across Connecticut such as Black Eyed Sally's, The Russian Lady, Wadsworth Atheneum, The Firebox, Shish Lounge, J.Rene Coffee Roasters, and more. Past festival appearances include The Boston GreenFest, the Hartford Jazz Society's Monday Night Jazz in Bushnell Park, Willimantic Third Thursday Street Fest, and the New England Autumn Fest.

Born in Fieri, Albania, Juna Gjata and her family moved to Boston when she was four. Juna, who is legally blind, started learning the piano at age seven, and participated in the Longy School of Music Young Performers program from age 11 to 17. There, she received various merit awards, including the Award for Excellence in Piano Duo, and the Judith Kudok scholarship. Graduating with honors from Longy School of Music and Boston Latin School *summa cum Laude*, Juna is now a freshman at Harvard University. She has played at the Edward M. Pickman Hall and this year will perform at Carnegie Hall. She is also a winner of this year's American Fine Arts Festival competition.

Eliot Heaton, a native of Geneva, N.Y., has played the violin since he was three. Eliot, who has had Type I Diabetes since he was thirteen years old, has appeared as a soloist with numerous orchestras in upstate New York. He attended Oberlin College and Conservatory where he double majored in History and Violin Performance. During this time he frequently served as the Concertmaster of the Oberlin Chamber and

Symphony orchestras, and also played, recorded, and toured with the Contemporary Music Ensemble. Eliot is now entering the final year of his Master of Music degree at Indiana University. Last year, he won the school concerto competition, performing Stravinsky's Concerto in D with the IU Chamber Orchestra. In addition to his studies, he serves as the Assistant Concertmaster in the Terre Haute Symphony and the Columbus Indiana Philharmonic. He also enjoys playing chamber music and will spend this summer at Kneisel Hall Chamber Music Festival.

Evan Pensis is a pianist based in Los Angeles, California. Pensis, who has protanomaly, a form of color-blindness, has won numerous national and international piano competitions, including the 9th Siegfried Weishaupt International Klavierwettbewerb, Grand Prize and Audience Award (Bad-Wuerttemberg, Germany, 2013). In the past year, Pensis also won the Redlands Bowl National Young Artist, First Place (Redlands, CA, 2013) and the Susan Torres International Piano Competition, Second Place (Fresno, CA, 2014). Pensis has been featured in several music festivals including Redlands Bowl National Young Artist Festival, ISAM Ochsenhausen Sommerakademie, Colorado Piano Festival, Arizona Musicfest, Classical Exposure, Chandler Symphony Young Geniuses, and many more. Pensis is currently studying music on scholarship with Maestro Daniel Pollack at the University of Southern California with a Minor in Linguistics. He was recently invited to be a USC Renaissance Scholar and Fellow of the Sidney Harman Academy for Polymathic Study. Pensis plans to continue his musical studies, working toward a Master's degree, and to continue performing on national and international stages.

Since 1984 the VSA International Young Soloists Competition, founded by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith, has annually recognized emerging young artists ages 14-25, with disabilities from all over the world who demonstrate exceptional musical talent. Previous winners have gone on to have careers with top symphony orchestras around the world, become international recording stars, and achieved success on television programs such as *American Idol* and *Platinum Hit*. Past award recipients include international recording artist Melody Gardot, violin virtuoso Adrian

Anantawan, and award-winning jazz pianist Justin Kauflin.

About Education at the Kennedy Center

The Kennedy Center retains its commitment as the nation's cultural center to educating and enlightening children in Washington and around the country. The Center's national education programs include: Ensuring the Arts for Any Given Child, which is currently working in 14 municipalities and their school districts around the country to develop a long-range strategic plan for arts education; ARTSEDGE, a website that offers standards-based materials for use in and out of the classroom, Partners in Education, which forges relationships between an arts organization and its neighboring school systems to build effective arts education programs for teachers and teaching artists; Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network works with 33 state organizations on arts education policy issues; Explore the Arts, which provide insight into the cultural and historical context of the works presented on stage and sparks dialogue between audiences and the artists who have created the performances through participatory workshops, demonstrations, panels, master classes, and open rehearsals; and the Kennedy Center Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Awards, which acknowledge teachers of grades K-12 whose efforts have made a significant impact on their students.

Locally, the Kennedy Center's programs include Changing Education Through the Arts, a program that works with 15 schools in the area to affect long-term change in school culture through professional learning in arts integration; Professional Development Opportunities for Teachers, which trains Washington-area educators to teach the arts or other subject areas through the arts; and Washington, D.C. Partnership Schools, where the Center provides resources and teaching artist residencies to 20 elementary, junior, and senior high schools in Washington, D.C. The Center also mounts more than 100 events and performances of theater, music, dance, and opera throughout the season for more than 100,000 local school-aged children.

In addition, the Center offers multiple career development programs for young artists both locally and nationally, including the National Symphony Orchestra's Youth Fellowship Program, Summer Music Institute, and High School Competition; Washington National Opera's Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program, Opera Institute, and Kids Create Opera Partnership; the biennial New Visions/ New Voices forum for development of new plays for young people; Exploring Ballet with Suzanne Farrell; Betty Carter's Jazz Ahead; VSA's Playwright Discovery Program, Young Soloists, and Visual Arts Programs; internships and fellowships; and the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival which impacts hundreds of thousands of college-aged theater students across the country and marks its 47th anniversary in 2015.

About Dame Evelyn Glennie

As one of the most eclectic and innovative musicians on the scene today, Dame Evelyn Glennie is constantly redefining the goals and expectations of percussion, and creating performances of such vitality that they almost constitute a new type of performance. Out of the 30-plus recordings so far, Evelyn's first CD, *Bartok's Sonata for two Pianos and Percussion* won her a GRAMMY® in 1988. A further two GRAMMY® Awards followed, one for a collaboration with Bela Fleck and another for

the premiere recording of Corigliano's 'Conjurer'. Evelyn's twelfth solo CD, *Shadow Behind the Iron Sun*, was based on a radical improvisational concept and once again questioned people's expectations. In July 2012 Evelyn was honoured to take a lead role in the Opening Ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games. Evelyn has used her influences as a solo percussionist to create three ranges of jewelry: one for men and two others called 'Percussion' and 'Sound Colour'.

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