



## Local Friends and Family Join the Virginia Symphony Orchestra for *Holiday POPS!* This Year

Vocalist Kathryn Whitbeck and Pianists Angela and Valerie Zhang

**HAMPTON ROADS, VA [December 4, 2024]** The Hampton Roads tradition of *Holiday POPS!* continues this year with special performances suited for the whole family.

Former U.S. Navy Fleet Forces Band Vocalist Kathryn Whitbeck joins the Virginia Symphony Orchestra and Virginia Symphony Orchestra Chorus as the featured soloist. Whitbeck will be performing pop hits like “All I Want for Christmas is You”, made famous by Mariah Carey, and traditional carols like “We Wish You a Merry Christmas”.

“I am absolutely thrilled to be performing with the Virginia Symphony Orchestra at their *Holiday POPS!* concert!” says Whitbeck, “It’s an incredible honor to be part of such a talented group, and to share the joy and magic of the holiday season through music. I can’t wait to experience the energy of the audience and help bring these festive songs to life. As a classically trained musician, I’ve spent years immersing myself in the rich, intricate world of traditional repertoire—learning to appreciate the precision, control, and structure that define classical music.

Whitbeck’s love for classical and contemporary music will be highlighted in this year’s program. “As much as I love this world, I’ve found myself increasingly drawn to contemporary music. Contemporary music allows for a freedom of expression that feels both exhilarating and liberating, encouraging me to explore a more spontaneous approach to singing” says Whitbeck, “Of all the pieces in the program, I’m most excited for the Jeff Tyzik arrangement of “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” because it blends the timeless qualities of classical music with a modern twist.”

The VSO is also keeping it in the family this year with Associate Concertmaster Yun Zhang’s daughters, Angela and Valerie, performing on the piano during the concert.

Angela Zhang is a twelve-year-old pianist currently attending Greenbrier Middle School in Chesapeake, Virginia. She grew up in a musical family and started her music training when she was five years old. Angela is the Grand Prize Winner of the 2023 Young Artist Competition hosted by the Hampton Roads Philharmonic and successfully made her debut performance with the orchestra in March 2024 at the historic American Theater. “It’s such a special moment to celebrate the holiday season with the Virginia Symphony Orchestra on the stage!” says Angela.

Valerie Zhang is a nine-year-old pianist from Greenbrier Intermediate School in Chesapeake, Virginia. She started her musical training with her parents when she was four



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Contact: Cara Camichael, Communication and Digital Media Manager

Phone: 757-213-1424 | Email: [ccarmichael@virginiasymphony.org](mailto:ccarmichael@virginiasymphony.org)

Instagram: [@vasymphony](https://www.instagram.com/vasymphony) | Facebook: [Virginia Symphony Orchestra](https://www.facebook.com/VirginiaSymphonyOrchestra)



and began taking piano lessons at age six with Ms. Rebecca Willett. Valerie has performed in masterclasses with guest artists presented by the Virginia Symphony Orchestra and Symphonicity Orchestra of Virginia Beach. "It's so cool to perform with daddy on the same stage!" says Valerie.

*Holiday POPS!* is presented December 12 at 7:30PM at the Ferguson Center for the Arts in Newport News, December 14 at 7:30PM at Chrysler Hall in Norfolk, and December 15 at 7PM at the Sandler Center for the Performing Arts in Virginia Beach.

More information are available at [virginiasymphony.org/holiday-pops](https://virginiasymphony.org/holiday-pops)

Tickets: \$25/39/56/79/119, \$15 Student/Child Tickets.

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As the region's most celebrated musical, educational, and entrepreneurial arts organization, the Virginia Symphony Orchestra continues to challenge expectations and push the boundaries of what an American orchestra can be. Innovation and excellence are at the heart of the VSO's narrative. The VSO has received national attention for its unique mission serving a home area of 1.7 million across the diverse communities of southeastern Virginia. Through appearances at the Kennedy Center and Carnegie Hall and its commitment to adventurous programming, the VSO and its musicians have been highlighted in the media including The New York Times, The Washington Post, National Public Radio, and BBC Worldwide News.

As the largest performing arts organization in southeastern Virginia, the VSO and VSO Chorus present more than 150 concerts and events annually for more than 100,000 residents and visitors. Recent innovations include health and wellness programs, including interactive therapeutic experiences for people living with Alzheimer's and dementia, and adopting welcoming concert environments for those who are neurodiverse. Since 2019, the VSO has been recognized nationally for striving to reflect the region's ethnic and racial diversity in its members, its programming, and its leadership.

The selection of the young and dynamic conductor Eric Jacobsen as music director in 2021 was another bold step forward for the VSO, further expanding its vision to attract wider and larger audiences with engaging concert experiences and creative and relevant programming. Rounding out the artistic leadership team is Norfolk native Thomas Wilkins in the role of Principal Guest Conductor, reflecting the VSO's commitment to tell its community's stories and advance the important conversations that will promote understanding and belonging among all residents.