

For Immediate Release



**CEDILLE RECORDS TO RELEASE *CHILDREN'S STORIES*
FEATURING WORLD-PREMIERE RECORDINGS OF MICHAEL ABELS AND
AUGUSTA READ THOMAS INSPIRED BY CLASSIC CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE, ON FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15**

Music Director Stilian Kirov leads the Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra in Abels's *Frederick's Fables* with narrator Michael Sumuel and Thomas's *Gwendolyn Brooks Settings* with Anima – Glen Ellyn Children's Chorus and ChiArts Chamber Choir



CHICAGO, ILLINOIS (October 11, 2024) — Led by Music Director Stilian Kirov, the Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra makes its commercial recording debut this fall on Cedille Records with ***Children's Stories***, comprising the first-ever recordings of Michael Abels's *Frederick's Fables* and Augusta Read Thomas's *Gwendolyn Brooks Settings*. These works were adapted from short stories by celebrated children's author and illustrator Leo Lionni and the poetry of former U.S. Poet Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks, respectively. Joining the orchestra in this recording are narrator Michael Sumuel (in *Frederick's Fables*) and youth choirs Anima – Glen Ellyn Children's Chorus and ChiArts Chamber Choir (in *Gwendolyn Brooks Settings*). *Children's Stories* is available **Friday, November 15**.

An early work of Pulitzer Prize-winning composer **Michael Abels**, *Frederick's Fables* is a musical adaptation of four stories by Leo Lionni. These settings for narrator and orchestra were written, the composer says, "like the score to an unseen animated film—meaning that the music and the narration are often closely interwoven so that the story unfolds in both simultaneously." All four fables—"Frederick," "The Greentail Mouse," "Theodore and the Talking Mushroom," and "Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse"—feature mice as their central characters, a common device in Lionni's writing. As fables, they each also communicate a moral lesson.

The part of the narrator was originally written for legendary actor James Earl Jones, who expressed to the commissioner a desire to narrate children's stories. He performed in the world premiere presented by commissioner VocalEssence (then named the Plymouth Music Series) on February 5, 1994. More recent career highlights for Michael Abels include the Pulitzer Prize-winning opera *Omar*, co-written with Rhiannon Giddens, and his scores for director Jordan Peele's hit films *Get Out*, *Us*, and *Nope*.

Augusta Read Thomas's *Gwendolyn Brooks Settings* draws upon text from Brooks's classic picture book and children's poetry collection *Bronzeville Boys and Girls*, in which the poet draws upon her upbringing on the South Side of Chicago to paint a timeless and universal portrait of childhood in all of its beauty and complexity. The book was published in 1956, six years after the poet became the first African American to receive a Pulitzer Prize. Thomas's musical adaptation, scored for treble chorus and orchestra, is divided into six uninterrupted parts that quote freely from poems in the book, with quotes from other of Brooks's writings also integrated throughout. Composed from 2018 to 2020, *Gwendolyn Brooks Settings* was written at the suggestion of Dr. Charles Sundquist, the former artistic director of Anima – Glen Ellyn Children's Chorus, which co-commissioned the work with the Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra. The work received its world premiere on March 16, 2024, performed by the musicians on this recording. Upcoming premieres of Thomas's music this season include *Bebop Kaleidoscope – Homage to Duke Ellington* for the New York Philharmonic, a new solo violin work for Clarissa Bevilacqua, and *Solstice Ritual* for AXIOM.

Children's Stories exemplifies collaboration across Chicago's musical scene, spotlighting local talent in every facet of its creation—from literary sources, to musical composition, to performance, and to recording.

The album cover artwork is Faith Ringgold's cover illustration for the 2007 edition of Gwendolyn Brooks's *Bronzeville Boys and Girls*.

ILLINOIS PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra (IPO) is a leading performing arts organization in Chicago's Southland and the region's only professional orchestra. IPO's repertoire champions symphonic music in all its forms—from the baroque and classical canon to 21st-century masterpieces and cross-genre musical experiences. The Illinois Council of Orchestras named IPO "Illinois

Professional Orchestra of the Year” in 2020, 2010, and 1991, recognizing IPO’s overall artistic excellence. IPO’s history dates back to 1954. Then known as the Park Forest Symphony, it was formed at the community level with volunteer musicians. In 1978, the orchestra was re-formed into a professional chamber orchestra performing in Park Forest. In 1982, the orchestra was renamed to reflect its regional mission. In 2017, following a search that attracted over 170 applicants from around the world, IPO announced the hiring of Stilian Kirov as Music Director beginning with its 40th Anniversary Season. Kirov has expanded IPO’s repertoire and developed *Classical Evolve*, the company’s first Composer-in-Residence Competition. The orchestra presents its mainstage concert season at Ozinga Chapel at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, IL. Learn more about the Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra at ipomusic.org.

STILIAN KIROV, CONDUCTOR

Stilian Kirov became the Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra’s (IPO) Gibb Music Director in the 2017–2018 season. He is a First Prize Winner of the “Debut Berlin” Concert Competition and a prize winner at Denmark’s 2015 Malko Competition and the 2010 Mitropoulos Competition. Kirov has received multiple Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Awards and debuted at the Berlin Philharmonie in 2017. He has served as Music Director of New Jersey’s Symphony in C (2015–2020) and the Bakersfield Symphony since 2015. For the 2024–2025 season, he is Interim Artistic Advisor for the Southwest Florida Symphony. A graduate of Juilliard’s orchestral conducting program, where he was was a student of James DePreist, Kirov also studied with conductors Kurt Masur, Michael Tilson Thomas, Gianluigi Gelmetti, George Manahan, Robert Spano, and Asher Fisch, among others. Also a pianist, he was Gold Medalist of the 2001 Claude Kahn International Piano Competition in Paris.

MICHAEL SUMUEL, NARRATOR

Michael Sumuel is an acclaimed bass-baritone known for his dynamic performances in both opera and concert settings. A native of Houston, Texas, he has performed at the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago Opera Theater, Glyndebourne, and the Houston Grand, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Dallas, Seattle, Santa Fe, Detroit, and Pittsburgh opera companies. Displaying versatility across a broad range of classical repertoire, he has also sung with the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics, the Cleveland Orchestra, Chicago’s Grant Park Orchestra, the symphonies of San Francisco, Baltimore, Seattle, Cincinnati, and Washington DC, and Chicago’s Music of the Baroque. He is a Richard Tucker Career Grant awardee, Metropolitan Opera National Council audition Grand Finalist, and a winner of the Dallas Opera Guild Vocal Competition.

ANIMA – GLEN ELLYN CHILDREN’S CHORUS

Founded as the Glen Ellyn Theater Chorus in 1964, Anima – Glen Ellyn Children’s Chorus has a rich heritage of artistic and educational excellence. Anima frequently performs with Chicago area professional music organizations, including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Music of the Baroque, and Grant Park Music Festival. The chorus also tours around the country and internationally. Anima has been recognized by Chorus America, American Composers Forum, and the National Endowment for the Arts, among other awards.

CHIARTS CHAMBER CHOIR

The ChiArts Chamber Choir is the advanced choral ensemble at The Chicago High School for the Arts and is one of the leading high school vocal ensembles in Illinois. The group performs a wide variety of repertoire from classical to contemporary styles. The choir has performed for First Lady Michelle Obama, for the Millennium Park Sing-A-Long at the Bean in Chicago, and was part of the American Choral Directors Association sponsored “Join Voices” Festival, hosted by Northeastern Illinois University. The vocalists in the ensemble have been chosen for numerous Illinois Music Education Association Festivals as well as Illinois Music Education Conference Festivals.

ABOUT CEDILLE RECORDS

Launched in November 1989 by James Ginsburg, Grammy Award-winning Cedille Records (pronounced *say-DEE*) is dedicated to showcasing and promoting the most noteworthy classical artists in and from the Chicago area. A nonprofit record label, Cedille’s mission is to produce and disseminate audiophile recordings presenting the finest classical music performers and composers in and from Chicago. The recordings further the careers and legacies of these Chicago artists as Cedille invests in not only the recordings but in the artists represented on them. The label’s catalog of more than 200 front-line albums brims with attractive, off-the-beaten-path repertoire from the Baroque era to the present day, including world premieres of more than 400 classical compositions. Works from the classical canon, when they do appear, are usually heard in particularly imaginative pairings. Cedille never removes albums from its catalog and each recording is a permanent documentation of the artist’s work. With more than 180 Chicago artists and ensembles, over 80 making their professional recording debuts on the label, Cedille brings the area’s most significant classical music artists to a worldwide listening public. Cedille recordings are available on CD, as MP3 and hi-resolution FLAC downloads, and on all major streaming platforms. Learn more about Cedille Records and explore the label’s catalog at cedillerecords.org.

CHILDREN’S STORIES

ILLINOIS PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

CEDILLE RECORDS — CDR 90000 233

Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra

Stilian Kirov, conductor

MICHAEL ABELS

Frederick’s Fables (38:33)

with Michael Sumuel, narrator

1. I. Frederick (8:05)
2. II. The Greentail Mouse (9:06)
3. III. Theodore and the Talking Mushroom (8:53)
4. IV. Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse (12:05)

AUGUSTA READ THOMAS

Gwendolyn Brooks Settings (31:07)

with Anima – Glen Ellyn Children’s Chorus and ChiArts Chamber Choir

5. Part 1 — Live in the along (5:13)
6. Part 2 — Poetry is life distilled (4:35)
7. Part 3 — I’d keep you with me always (4:06)
8. Part 4 — We are each other's magnitude and bond (6:00)
9. Part 5 — That clock is ticking me away! (5:40)
10. Part 6 — Shine Star Shine! (5:28)

TT: (69:50)

Produced and engineered by James Ginsburg and Bill Maylone.

Recorded on March 12, 2022, (*Frederick's Fables*) and March 17, 2024, (*Gwendolyn Brooks Settings*) at Ozinga Chapel, Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, IL. Additional recording for Michael Sumuel's narration took place on April 12 and 15, 2024, at Hyde Street Studios in San Francisco, CA.

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