

P O E T R Y



F O U N D A T I O N

For Immediate Release

September 28, 2006

Media Contact: Anne Halsey 312.799.8016

**Poetry Foundation Names Jack Prelutsky
First Children's Poet Laureate**

***Third annual Pegasus Awards honor outstanding children's poet
with \$25,000 prize***

CHICAGO — Jack Prelutsky is the inaugural winner of the Children's Poet Laureate award from the Poetry Foundation. The announcement was made at the third annual Pegasus Awards ceremony last night on the stage of the Jay Pritzker Pavilion at Millennium Park in Chicago.

The new award aims to raise awareness that children have a natural receptivity to poetry and are its most appreciative audience, especially when poems are written specifically for them. Findings from the Poetry Foundation's recent research study—*Poetry in America*—demonstrate that a lifelong love for poetry is most likely to result if cultivated early in childhood and reinforced thereafter.

Prelutsky, the beloved author of more than 35 books of verse and editor of several poetry anthologies, has been charming children and adults with his witty, musical poems for nearly 40 years. His books have combined to sell well over a million copies, and his work has been translated into several languages. His anthology, *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children*, is a perennial favorite of librarians.

"Generations of children have learned to love poetry through Jack Prelutsky's work," said John Barr, president of the Poetry Foundation, in making the appointment. "His extraordinary service to an important branch of literature makes him the perfect first recipient of the Children's Poet Laureate award."

444 North Michigan Ave • Chicago, Illinois 60611-4034
312.787.7070 • FAX: 312.787.6650 • www.PoetryFoundation.org

Prelutsky, 66, will serve as the nation's first Children's Poet Laureate: Consultant in Children's Poetry to the Poetry Foundation for a two-year tenure. He received a \$25,000 cash prize and the Children's Poet Laureate Medallion, which includes the inscription "Permit a child to join," taken from an Emily Dickinson poem.

During his laureateship, Prelutsky will give two major public readings for children and their families, teachers, and librarians. He will also serve as an advisor to the Poetry Foundation on children's literature, and may engage in a variety of projects and events to help instill a love of poetry among the nation's youngest readers. The Poetry Foundation made the appointment with input from a panel of experts in the field of children's literature.

Born in Brooklyn in 1940, Prelutsky didn't begin writing until he was 24. Before that he worked as a plumber's assistant, piano mover, cab driver, standup comedian, and singer. He published his first book of humorous verse, *A Gopher in the Garden*, in 1967. Since then he has visited and given readings in classrooms all over the world. Prelutsky lives in Seattle with his wife, Carolyn.

Prelutsky's most recent collection of poetry is *Behold the Bold Umbrellaphant and Other Poems* (Greenwillow Books/HarperCollins). He has two collections of poetry forthcoming this spring, *ME I AM!* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) and *Good Sports: Rhymes About Running, Jumping, Throwing, And More* (Random House). To celebrate the award, Scholastic Book Clubs has announced that teachers who order from its October Lucky Book Club will receive a free copy of Jack Prelutsky's *I'm Glad I'm Me: Poems About You* for every child in their class. For more information, teachers should go to www.scholastic.com/lucky.

Last night the Poetry Foundation also announced the creation of a new prize for verse drama. Like other Pegasus Awards, the Verse Drama Prize seeks to bring renewed attention to an underrecognized area of poetry.

"With the creation of the Verse Drama Prize, the Poetry Foundation hopes to encourage poets to revitalize an old genre, thereby benefiting the art form as a whole," said John Barr.

The prize will honor a living poet who has written a previously unpublished, outstanding original verse drama in English. The award recipient will receive a cash purse of \$10,000 and a professionally staged reading of his or her winning manuscript in Chicago. Submissions for the award will be accepted from April 1, 2007, to May 15, 2007. The winner will be announced at the Pegasus Awards ceremony in the fall of 2007.

The audience at the Pegasus Awards was riveted by a preview of the Poetry Foundation's upcoming production of Molière's classic verse play *Tartuffe*. Actors Cedric Young and Bret Tuomi previewed a scene from the production, which runs November 17-19 at the Chicago Cultural Center.

The evening's festivities also included a poetry recitation by *Poetry Out Loud* National Champion Jackson Hille. A 2006 graduate of Columbus Alternative High School in Columbus, Ohio, Hille received a \$20,000 scholarship prize from the Poetry Foundation earlier this year. He was among 51 state champions from across the country who participated in the first national poetry recitation contest, sponsored by the Poetry Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. Currently a student at Otterbein College in Westerville, Ohio, Hille is pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in acting.

About the Pegasus Awards

The Poetry Foundation believes that targeted prizes can help recognize underappreciated accomplishments and diversify the kinds of poetry being written as well as widen the audience for the art form. With this in mind, the Poetry Foundation has established a family of prizes with an emphasis on underrecognized poets and types of poetry. Inaugurated in 2004, the Pegasus Awards honor achievements not already acknowledged by other poetry prizes.

About the Poetry Foundation

The Poetry Foundation, publisher of *Poetry* magazine and one of the largest literary organizations in the world, exists to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience. The Poetry Foundation seeks to be a leader in shaping a receptive climate for poetry by developing new audiences, creating new avenues for delivery, and encouraging new kinds of poetry through innovative literary

prizes and programs. For more information, please visit
www.PoetryFoundation.org.

The Solitary Spatuloon
By Jack Prelutsky

At home within a blue lagoon,
The solitary SPATULOON
Calls longingly as it glides by—
“Syrup!” is its plaintive cry.
The fowl, both curious and rare,
Now flips a pancake in the air.
Its tail, we note, is well designed
With this peculiar task in mind.

We watch with wonder and delight,
Until it vanishes from sight.
Yet, even as it disappears,
Faint strains of “Syrup!” fill our ears.
We wait, and as we wait we yearn,
In hopes the bird will soon return.
But sadly, in the blue lagoon,
We fail to spy the SPATULOON.

“The Solitary Spatuloon,” from *Behold the Bold Umbrellaphant and Other Poems*. Text copyright © 2006 by Jack Prelutsky. Reprinted by permission of Greenwillow Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.