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Raising the Baton

As the University's new provost, Jonathan D. Green plans to promote a collaborative tenor.

Story by NANCY (STEELE) BROKAW '71
Photos by MARC FEATHERLY



Green leads the Danville (Va.) Symphony in a performance that included one of his own compositions, “Ars Vitae.”

While visiting campus as a candidate for the job of Illinois Wesleyan's new provost, Jonathan D. Green sensed it was a friendly place. But nothing prepared him for what he saw outside his Shaw Hall office on his first day of work.

It was a banner with the words “Think Green.”

The slogan — denoting both IWU's official school color and its current eco-initiatives — became a triple entendre when Green officially joined the University administration in August.

“Well,” he concludes, flashing a smile, “I guess I was Green before it was popular.”

Green arrived in central Illinois by way of Sweet Briar College. Located in the foothills of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, Sweet Briar is one of 53 women's colleges in the United States. Green served as dean of the college and vice president for academic affairs. His previous administrative roles included music department chair and associate dean.

“As provost and dean of the faculty, Jonathan takes on one of the key leadership positions of the University,” says President Richard F. Wilson. “Jonathan's collaborative style, sense of humor and previous experience as a provost and faculty member at Sweet Briar will serve him well in his new role. He is a very engaging person and an articulate spokesperson for liberal arts colleges.”

Green succeeds Beth Cunningham, who left the University last year to become executive officer at the American Association of Physics Teachers. His selection concluded a nationwide search that began in the fall of 2010. “Jonathan shined early on and continues to shine,” says Mike Theune, associate professor of English, who chaired the search committee.

Explaining the importance of the provost's role, Theune says, “At many universities, the provost is called the chief academic officer. He or she oversees all things academic at the university.”

The provost works primarily with the faculty and the curriculum but also with students, alumni, administrators and the community. For all of that, Green says, he's been in training most of his life.

Green grew up in the wine country of upstate New York, near the vineyards of both Welch's and Mogen David. Lake Erie was literally in his backyard. Early on, Green says he knew he wanted to be an academic. He earned a bachelor's degree in music from the State University of New York at Fredonia in 1985. "I spent my undergraduate days in a practice room," Green jokes, "and I've been trying to catch up ever since." He studied voice and composition at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where he received a master's degree. At the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, he earned a doctorate in conducting as a University Excellence Fellow.

Joining Sweet Briar's music faculty in 1996, Green received the college's Award for Teaching Excellence in 1999. As an administrator, many of his efforts focused on developing programs and study-abroad opportunities, expanding external support for faculty and integrating the career center and advising process.

Green says he and Lynn Buck — his wife of 23 years and a fellow musician — were attracted to Illinois Wesleyan for many reasons. "I've known people connected to this university for many years and it's been on my radar screen," he says. "We were attracted to the location and the size of the school."

"Illinois Wesleyan has been a blend of preprofessional schools [art, music, theatre and nursing] and a liberal arts college for a very long time, and that's rare," Green continues. "Here we can see how all the intellectual enterprises are interconnected. The combination allows for all areas to enrich each other — plus, it should provide lots of opportunities for faculty development."

Long before Green was making academic policy at Sweet Briar, he was making music.



Green appreciates faculty creative and research endeavors. "When someone says 'I need time to write,' I understand. Part of my job is to help faculty balance scholarship and professional development within their workload."

An award-winning composer, Green has written seven symphonies and three piano concertos, as well as songs, choral works and chamber music for all conventional instruments. Also active as a conductor, he served as the Danville (Va.) Symphony Orchestra's interim music director and as the Greensboro (N.C.) Symphony Youth Orchestra's co-conductor. As a musical scholar, he's written six reference books for conductors.

Although he knows his responsibilities as IWU provost will fill his days, Green plans to make time for his music. "Composing is just part of who I am," he says. "An advantage to what I do is that I can sit down at the kitchen table at 10 at night and grab my pencil and put dots on paper."

Theune sees a connection between Green's music background and the skills required to be an effective provost. A conductor, or a provost, Theune says, "needs to be at once precise but also convey the spirit that everyone is commonly working toward. It's about management; we see flair, drama, and vivaciousness but underneath is a real managerial style and feel for leadership."

Green also sees a connection. From conducting, for example, he says has learned time management skills (rehearsal time is precious), strategic planning, triage (prioritizing what must be fixed first), listening (musicians listen in complex ways) and the most transposable skill of all, he says: learning to "let your players play."



Green and President Richard F. Wilson backstage prior to the fall President's Convocation.

"A university is a rare enterprise," Green observes. "On the one hand, a university fits the business model, with a budget, a board of trustees, regulatory requirements and so forth. But, because of the nature of a university, a lot is governed by the employees — a whole collection of decisions is determined by the professors. And I think 200 well-informed professionals can make better decisions than two or three, so my job is to help facilitate the decision-making process and then provide an interface with the administration and other entities to make things happen."

As a composer and scholar, Green also understands "the importance of creative endeavors and scholarly research," he says. "When someone says 'I need time to write,' I understand. Part of my job is to help faculty

balance scholarship and professional development within their workload.

"At universities like Illinois Wesleyan," Green continues, "those who teach are also practitioners. ... For example, the best teacher of music is a good musician. A lot of the best instruction comes from experience, not just theory."

Theune sees in Green “both substance and spark. He’s quick, agile, creative, energized and energizing. ... He embodies the argument for liberal arts.”

Green speaks with passion about the value of a liberal arts education. “All the knowledge in the world doesn’t equal wisdom,” he says. “Liberal arts universities produce people who can think; they are lifelong learners who have the ability to look holistically at situations, spot problems and work collaboratively toward solutions.”

As the University’s new academic conductor, Green says he looks forward to collaborating with every part of the campus community to build on strengths and face new challenges. In the meantime, he’s already enjoying what he calls the “incredibly rich life that Illinois Wesleyan offers.”

“Lynn and I are ready for the adventure,” he says.