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Original Children's Musical Play to Premiere at IWU

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Local
Chicago
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Original Children's Musical Play to Premiere at IWU

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--"Molly and the Opposite Elf," an original children's musical play written by an award-winning Illinois Wesleyan University professor, will premiere on Feb. 27-28 at 7:30 p.m. in IWU's Westbrook Auditorium.

Admission is free and the performance is open to the public. IWU's Westbrook Auditorium is located in Presser Hall at 303 E. University Ave., Bloomington.

According to composer David Vayo, an IWU associate professor of music, the play combines original musical scores with acting, featuring a young girl whose life becomes chaotic when she encounters an elf from another planet.

Vayo explains that on the elf's planet, everything occurs in opposition to life on earth; thus the elf turns Molly's life into an "opposite" world. For example, the elf resets Molly's alarm clock to go off at the time opposite to the time for which it was set.

"The play really provides some fun opportunities," Vayo commented. "I'm hoping that we can get an interaction going, where the children in the audience start responding to the actors and yelling back at them."

The play will feature an IWU opera theatre class under the stage direction of Associate Professor of Voice Linda Farquharson. Kristen McManus, an IWU junior from Palos Park, Ill., will play Molly, supported by the narration of Rachel Rodenborg, a junior from St. Paul, Minn., and Matt Wolfe, a junior from Sesser, Ill..

Accompanying the actors on musical instruments will be:

- IWU Assistant Professor of Music William West on flute.
- IWU Assistant Professor of Clarinet/Music Education Roger Garrett on clarinet.

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- Sharon Chung, an IWU freshman on violin.
- IWU Visiting Instructor of Music Karl Levine on cello.
- IWU Associate Professor of Music Todd Tucker on piano.
- IWU Lecturer in Music/Percussion Ensemble Director Kevin Nichols on percussion.

Vayo spent two years composing "Molly and the Opposite Elf," including time spent in four residencies at artists' colonies across North America.

"The biggest challenge in writing this piece was to look at music in a different way," Vayo explained. "Usually when you compose, the music itself is the driving force, but when you're writing for theatre, the action on stage is the driving force. The music becomes a servant to the drama, a supporting player instead of a main one."

"It was fun to write the script as well, to use poetry," Vayo added. "Now, I get to see the piece go out of my own hands--the final polish will be put on by the performers and their tremendous musical insight."

Vayo, who has composed approximately 20 other works, defines music as "an affirmation of humanity, a way of communing with other people emotionally."

When composing, Vayo uses a technique which he encourages students to try as well.

"I actually begin by performing, with the raw musical impulse," he explained. "I use a tape recorder, and talk or sing my ideas into it. Then, by listening to it again, I figure out how to write it down."

Vayo's next projects include a piece for woodwind quintet and two percussionists set to premiere at the University of Georgia in 1999, and a composition for "Orkest de Volharding," a Dutch musical ensemble which performs throughout Europe and will tour the U.S. next year.

Vayo's 20 compositions include: "Symphony: Blossoms and Awakenings"; "Five Small Packages" for string quartet; "Study in Carmine and Coral" for piano; "Poem," a chamber music piece for flute, violin, clarinet, cello, and piano; and "Wings," a piano and cello piece paying homage to Vayo's interests in Brazilian pop music and jazz.

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In 1993, maestro Leonard Slatkin led the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra in four performances of Vayo's "Symphony: Blossoms and Awakenings," a composition the St. Louis Post-Dispatch praised as "ear-catching to the extreme."

Vayo, born in 1957, joined the IWU faculty as an assistant professor of composition and theory in 1991 after teaching at Connecticut College, the National University of Costa Rica, and the National Symphony of Youth Program of Costa Rica. He coordinates the annual Symposium of Contemporary Music and the New Music Café concert series.

A native of New Haven, Conn., Vayo earned bachelor's and master's degrees in music composition at Indiana University. He was awarded a Doctor of Musical Arts in Composition degree in 1990 from the University of Michigan.

Among Vayo's professional honors are annual Standard Awards from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (1988-97); first prize in the Third International Spectri Sonori Composition Contest from Tulane University (1992); a Charles E. Ives Scholarship from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters (1988); and a Margaret Fairbank Jory Copying Assistance Award from the American Music Center (1992), which partially covered copying costs of instrumental portions of his symphony.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,900 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. A \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994; and a \$25 million science building opened in the fall of 1995. The \$4.6 million Center for Liberal Arts--a facility housing 60 faculty offices, six classrooms, and other facilities for social science, humanities business and economics, and interdisciplinary studies' faculty--is slated to open next August, as well as a new \$6.8 million residence hall. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 161 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition.