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A Villainous Voice

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Powers as "Dr. Miracle" in Offebach's opera "The Tales of Hoffman."

A Villainous Voice

Powers '64 will bring his wicked talents back to the Illinois Wesleyan stage.

Whether it's *Faust's* "Mephistopheles" or *Otello's* "Iago," William Powers '64 does not shy away from playing the convoluted roles of villains. Instead, the IWU School of Music graduate embraces this evil side brought to life by what has been described as "the stentorian, dark, penetrating color of his voice."

A world-famous bass-baritone, the Metropolitan Opera star has performed more than 100 operatic roles throughout the United States, Europe and South America. This autumn, he will return "to where it all began," giving a concert at 8 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 4, at the University. Also at 4 p.m. on Thursday, Powers will speak at the School of Music's annual convocation. At 10 a.m. Friday, he will offer a master class. All three events will be held in Presser Hall's Westbrook Auditorium and are open to the public.

Powers says his love of music blossomed early on. Born to parents with European ties, he often heard the music of Mozart and Beethoven filling his childhood home. Smitten by the recorded voices of Ezio Pinza and Nelson Eddy, the young basso auditioned for IWU with arias by Verdi and Mussorgsky, and the subsequent scholarship prompted him to enroll in the freshman class of '59. In his first year with the Opera Department, he sang the title role in Donizetti's *Don Pasquale* (a role which he reprises once again in the 2013 season of the Wichita Opera), beginning a career which he confesses he might not have found elsewhere.

"Whatever drawbacks may have been inherent in attending a small college," he says, "were far outweighed by the opportunities. At Juilliard or Indiana, I might have been swallowed up or, at best, ignored. ... At Wesleyan, I was a 'star.'"

As a winner of the Metropolitan Opera auditions, Powers moved to New York City and in 1972 made his debut at the New York City Opera in the production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.

"As a student of the great Wagnerian, George London, and under the further mentoring of the legendary Norman Treigle," Powers says he feels he has inherited a certain mantle of "singing-actorship," embracing that opera is "also theatre," not merely standing and singing.

In a recent review, *Opera News* calls Powers "a lively interpreter of opera characters from the entire bass-baritone spectrum. The sheer delight he takes in portraying these vignettes is equaled only by the care with which he details them." Powers has released two CDs, *Rogues and Villains* and *The Worst of William Powers*, both



Powers showed a different side of his talents in the title role of "Falstaff" by Verdi.

of which showcase the villainous characters he portrays with a “deep psychological penetration of character,” according to *The American Record Guide*. “All is sung with brilliance and flair, in a most immaculate, appropriate style — a warm burr to his solid pitch-black voice.”

Despite his success, Powers remains cognizant of the ongoing challenges of his field. “There can hardly be a profession in this entire world that demands more, with less promise of return, than one in the arts,” he says. “You almost have to be crazy — or have a total disregard for reality — to get involved with so unstable a profession in the first place! But, thankfully, there are those who are willing to face the odds.”

To visit William Powers' website, [click here](#).

To visit the School of Music website, [click here](#).