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## Acclaimed Contemporary Composer Libby Larsen Featured at IWU

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## **Acclaimed Contemporary Composer Libby Larsen Featured at IWU 2000 Symposium of Contemporary Music**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Libby Larsen, the acclaimed contemporary composer, will be featured at the 2000 Illinois Wesleyan University Symposium of Contemporary Music on Feb. 9 and 10.

Free and open to the public, all events will be in Westbrook Auditorium of Presser Hall, 303 E. University Ave., Bloomington.

The IWU Symposium of Contemporary Music was established in 1954 to promote and encourage the performance of contemporary music and to recognize contemporary composers. Recent featured composers include John Corigliano, Arvo Pärt, Joseph Schwanter and David Diamond.

The two-day event will feature a panel discussion with Larsen on Wednesday, Feb. 9 at 7:30 p.m. Entitled "Poetry, Music and Melody," Larsen and faculty members from the IWU Department of English and the School of Music will discuss the relationships between text and music and finding musical implications within language itself.

On Thursday, Feb. 10 at 7:30 p.m., a concert of Larsen's vocal and instrumental music will conclude the Symposium. Performers will include members of the IWU faculty, students and alumni of the School of Music.

Larsen has created a large catalogue of works spanning virtually every genre and has established for herself a permanent place in the concert repertoire.

This catalogue of musical compositions includes many pieces inspired by the words and language of such literary and historical figures as Calamity Jane, Mary Shelley, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Willa Cather and Jihan Sadat. USA Today describes Larsen as "the only English-speaking composer since Benjamin Britten who matches great verse with fine music so intelligently and expressively."

"I love poetry. I love prose. I read voraciously. I memorize the text and read it over and over, using different tempos until I find the natural flow of the words, the textures and the colors; the text suggests the meter to me," said Larsen. "I sometimes think of the text as setting itself. Each text that I ultimately choose to work with needs to inspire me on an emotional level and speak to me on a musical level."

In addition to her interest in setting text to music, Larsen is also involved in the development of electric sound within the contemporary music sphere. Spending a year-and-a-half studying logarithmically based sound manipulation programs, Larsen composed her first electric sound

piece, "Ghosts of an Old Ceremony." In 1990, through the use of electric sound and multimedia effects, Larsen created a refreshed perception of the operatic genre in "Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus."

"It is now clear to me that electronically produced sound is its own sound with its own set of unique performance instruments," said Larsen. "These instruments need to be integrated into the traditional classical ensembles in our concert halls. I would go so far as to say that the electric guitar, an instrument that has evolved in our culture, has a legitimate place in the symphony orchestra."

Born in Wilmington, Del., in 1950, Larsen and her family moved to the Minneapolis area three years later. Earning undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Minnesota, Larsen studied composition and theory with Dominick Argento, Paul Fetler and Eric Stokes.

From 1983 to 1987, Larsen served as composer-in-residence with the Minnesota Orchestra. "Symphony: Water Music," a piece inspired by the motions and rhythms outside Larsen's lakeside home, was the result of this appointment. Larsen has also held the position of composer-in-residence with the the Charlotte Symphony from 1994 to 1995 and the Colorado Symphony from 1997 to 1998. She has also served as a visiting professor at the University of Minnesota in 1988 and the California Institute of the Arts in the winter of 1991.

Larsen's awards and accolades include having her 1990 opera, "Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus," being named one of the eight best classical events of the year by USA Today and a 1994 Grammy for her work as producer on the CD, "The Art of Arleen Auger." Larsen has also received honorary doctorates from St. Mary's College/Notre Dame and the University of Nebraska.

In 1998, Opera Omaha premiered Larsen's work, "Eric Hermansson's Soul," a two-act opera based upon an early work by Nebraska's most famous author, Willa Cather. The Colorado Symphony premiered and recorded Larsen's fifth symphony, "Solo Symphony," in 1999. The Colorado Symphony also recorded Larsen's "Marimba Concerto: After Hampton" for Koch International Classics.

This year, Koch International Classics will release orchestra and vocal works performed by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra with soprano Benita Valente and conductor Joel Revzen. In July, Larsen's violin piece for Pamela Frank and the Rochester Symphony Orchestra will premiere at the Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival in Vail, Colo. Larsen's song cycle for mezzo-soprano Susanne Mentzer and pianist Christoph Eschenbach will premiere at the Ravinia Festival in Highland Park, Ill. in August.

In addition to composing, Larsen also works with the American Composers Forum--a composers' advocacy group formed by Larsen and fellow University of Minnesota graduate student, Stephen Paulus, that produces concerts, offers fellowships, runs recording series and provides technical assistance negotiating and writing contracts. Since 1973, the Forum has become a model for other composers' advocacy groups around the country.

Larsen also serves as a member of the Minnesota Orchestra Executive Board, American Symphony Orchestra League Board of Directors, American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) Board of Review and Meet the Composer National Board of Advisors.

The Symposium of Contemporary Music is now part of the IWU School of Music's New Music Series 1999-2000. A celebration of 20th century music, musical elements of the early part of the 20th century to the present are featured in performances of world premieres, music by Eastern European composers, music by contemporary American composers and student compositions. The New Music Series 1999-2000 also includes performances by the IWU Jazz Ensemble and Collegiate Choir.

For more information on Libby Larsen, the Symposium of Contemporary Music and the New Music Series 1999-2000, contact the IWU School of Music at (309) 556-3061.