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Alumna Performs in the New York Musical Theatre Festival

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – As the sunlight sneaks through the blinds of Casey Clark's apartment in New York City, the 2004 Illinois Wesleyan graduate is already up, navigating her way between play scripts, music and books strewn across the floor. Clark is on her way to rehearsal in midtown Manhattan for her upcoming production of composer Jay Alan Zimmerman's autobiographical, *The Incredibly Deaf Musical*, where she plays the role of the artist's supportive wife, Lisa. The musical is part of the New York Musical Theatre Festival, which will run from Sept. 30 to Oct. 10.

Checking her watch, she swiftly snags her duffle bags full of clothes, make-up, and hair-styling amenities. Clark then leaves to catch the subway just a few blocks away from her apartment.

Today, she will work with choreographers to prepare a dance routine for two songs in the show, which are about Zimmerman's life. The production describes Zimmerman's journey to New York City, and the struggles he encounters launching his music career. His principal adversity being -- he begins to go deaf in his 20s and 30s.

In between choreography practice and an evening class with a casting director, Clark will make her usual stop at Starbucks to refuel. Then after class, it's home to practice her lines. The following morning she will return to the theatre to continue preparing for the production.

Although her life is hectic and at times chaotic, she is reminded everyday of her passion for acting. "There is nothing so magical to me as the energy in a rehearsal room when huge, creative personalities with their own quirks and neuroses, come together to make a show come to life," said Clark.

Clark's inspiration for performing began at any early age, fueled, she says, by her vocally and instrumentally talented parents.

At Illinois Wesleyan, Clark says she was given the creative freedom to develop her skills as an actor and singer while studying a variety of disciplines. "I knew early on that I didn't want a conservatory program where I would focus exclusively on theatre without any academic classes," said Clark. "I believe that having classes in philosophy, psychology, literature and politics has made me a better, well-rounded actress."

During her four years at IWU, she performed in multiple campus productions such as *Rags*, *As You Like It*, and her senior project, *The Last Five Years*.

Clark, who was a National Merit Scholar, graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor's degree in music theatre. After graduation, she made the cross-country journey to the east coast where she hoped to find her big break. After her seventh audition in New York, she booked an Off-Broadway show called *Shout!*

Since then, she has performed in at least two shows per year across the country and two readings of new musicals every year.

In 2008, Clark says she earned her favorite part to date, playing the role of Jo March in *Little Women* in her hometown of St. Louis. For this role, she received the Kevin Kline Nomination for Best Leading Actress. The award recognizes outstanding achievement in professional theatre in the Greater St. Louis Area.

Once she finishes *The Incredibly Deaf Musical*, Clark will begin rehearsals for a 2011 national tour of *Les Miserables*.

Although she hopes the plays will open new doors professionally, Clark is content just being involved in music theatre.

"The reality of theatre is that it's rarely consistent work, and you don't do it for fame or money," said Clark. "I've been blessed to be a part of so many amazing shows and while I'm still waiting for Broadway, I'm having a blast in the meantime."

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