



Fall 2010

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Recommended Citation

Griffin '12, Hannah (2010) "High Note," *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine, 2002-2017*:
Vol. 19 : Iss. 3 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/iwumag/vol19/iss3/7>

This is a PDF version of an article that originally appeared in the printed Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine, a quarterly periodical published by Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact iwumag@iwu.edu.

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High Note

From neighborhood choir to *Oprah*,
Wicker Park singers keep Wesleyan roots.

Story by HANNAH GRIFFIN '12

When Mark Tomasino '06 founded the Wicker Park Choral Singers (WPCS) in 2008, he never dreamed it would land them a spot on America's longest-running daytime television talk show. But that's exactly what happen on Sept. 14, when he and three other IWU alumni appeared on the farewell season of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, performing behind the Grammy award-winning duo, the Judds.



Mark Tomasino (above) and three other IWU alumni appeared on the farewell season of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.

Along with Mark, other alumni appearing on the show were Joan (Teitelman) Cinquegrani '06, Hilary Barry '06, and Angela Latkowski '07.

The group got their chance when a member of WPCS jokingly offered the choir's services to a friend who is an assistant executive producer of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. "He called us literally the next day and said, 'You're never going to believe this, but we need singers for the show,'" says Mark. The show ultimately took 10 singers from WPCS and 10 from another choir.

The IWU alumni were happy to get a behind-the-scenes look into the world of television production. "Everyone involved was so friendly. It was very cool to see top-level producers relaxed and loving what they do," Hilary Barry says. "We were in the studio with the almighty Oprah Winfrey," said fellow member Angela Latkowski. "She put her arm around a few lucky choristers. I'm not sure if they've washed their shoulders yet." Cinquegrani agreed. "She talked to the choir as a whole and she took a photo with us," she says of Oprah. "She's larger than life, that's for sure!"

Since its creation, WPCS has worked to make masterful choral music accessible to the Wicker Park neighborhood in Chicago. “It is always terrific to talk to audience members after a concert,” says Angela. “Each person can pinpoint a specific moment that really spoke to them, and I think being able to create that for people is something very special.”

When Mark first started the choir, he turned to his friends and fellow veterans of IWU’s music program. He says that his inspiration to form the group stemmed from his happy memories of performing with the Illinois Wesleyan Collegiate Choir. Angela agrees, saying “singing in the Collegiate Choir at IWU was one of my most valuable college experiences, and I wanted so badly to recreate the feeling I had making music with my peers.”

The choir continues to have a large number of Wesleyan alumni. “It gives me a warm, comforting feeling to know that we all have a place to come back together and sing,” says Angela.

The love of music that transformed their time at Illinois Wesleyan continues to influence the work of the alumni today. Angela explains, “There is something so powerful about standing up in front of a packed house full of people and allowing yourself to get lost in the music, the magic, the moment. Music has a way of stirring up emotions you never knew were there.”



Performing with the IWU Collegiate Choir was Tomasino's inspiration for starting the Wicker Park Choral Singers (shown above).