



Winter 2012

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Recommended Citation

Hatch, Rachel (2012) "Alumni Add Their Voices in tribute to Scifres," *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine, 2002-2017*: Vol. 20 : Iss. 4 , Article 3.

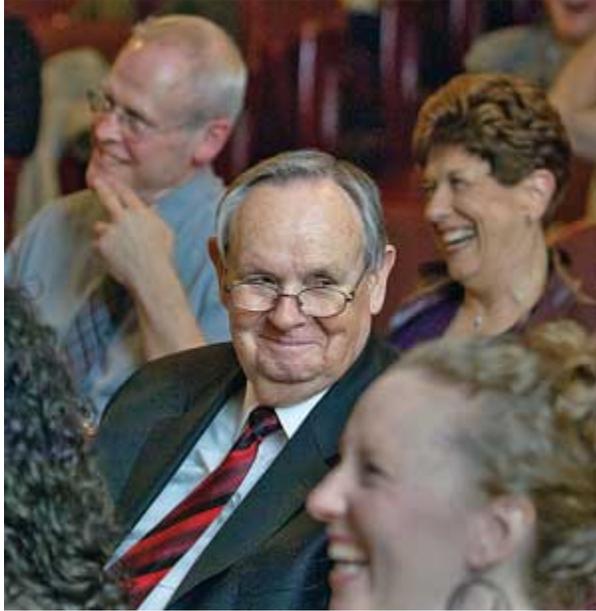
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This is a PDF version of an article that originally appeared in the printed Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine, a quarterly periodical published by Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact iwumag@iwu.edu.

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Alumni Add Their Voices in Tribute to Scifres

Story by RACHEL HATCH



Sammy Scifres enjoys a Homecoming concert in his honor. (Photo by Marc Featherly)

It has been more than 40 years since Associate Professor Emeritus Sammy Scifres gave voice lessons to his first students at the School of Music. Those students who have benefited from his instruction now number in the thousands.

“I wonder why time has gone by so rapidly, at least in my mind,” said Scifres, who retired this spring. “I look around and think, ‘Didn’t I just get started?’”

At Homecoming 2011 in October, the School of Music honored Scifres with a reception and concert of alumni vocal performers at Westbrook Auditorium.

Sitting on campus with his wife, Maxie, who has been an accompanist in the School of Music for 15 years, Scifres remembered how easy it was to fall in love with IWU, and how that love affair has endured.

“In 1967, as soon as I had my interview, I called Maxie and told her, ‘This is the place we should be,’” he said. “It just felt like home.”

As a high school student in the small Texas farming community where he grew up, Scifres was a vocal performer but dreamed of becoming a choral director. He said he had no intention of becoming a full-time performer. “That never interested me,” he said with a slight shake of the head. “I couldn’t have done that.” At that comment, Maxie rolled her eyes. “I totally disagree,” she said in an exaggerated whisper. “He is a wonderful singer. And his choir director agreed with me.”

After earning his master's in voice at Colorado State, Scifres joined IWU as a voice teacher in 1967. He considered the job a stepping stone toward choral direction, but soon became enamored with vocal instruction.

Scifres was accepted into the doctoral program at the University of Iowa, where he studied during summers. "One of the many things I love about Illinois Wesleyan is that there was no pressure to get my doctorate, but I was supported and encouraged to continue. There is that love of learning at IWU — for every person here — that is fostered and nurtured."



Alumni pay tribute to Sammy Scifres. (Photo by Marc Featherly)

In addition to his teaching and choral directing, Scifres served as head of the Voice and Choral Department. "In that capacity, he carried out his many responsibilities in highly skillful and congenial ways, for which I was particularly grateful," said Mario Pelusi, director of the School of Music. But it is his connection to students for which Scifres will be most remembered. "From among all of Sam's many accomplishments, most of us know him to be primarily the consummate professor of voice, who, over the years, has taught and mentored countless numbers of outstanding students, many of whom have stayed in touch with him ever since their graduations," said Pelusi.

Scifres said the students gave him the greatest joy. "It is a wonderful feeling to see them develop, doing what they love." He added that both he and Maxie will continue to work with Illinois Wesleyan. He plans to stay on as an adjunct faculty member of voice. "I may stay for a few more years," he said with a shy smile. "It's always a joy to see my kids graduate."