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Lithuanian Choir to Raise Voices at IWU

"Now, more than ever before, we need to encourage cultural understanding. Giving students opportunities to have personal and professional contact with people from other countries is a crucial part of their personal and educational development."

-J. Scott Ferguson, IWU professor of music and director of choral activities

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. --The Lithuanian "Aukuras" Chamber Choir under the direction of Alfonsas Vildziunas, will take center stage at Illinois Wesleyan University on Sept. 29 at 7:30 p.m. in Westbrook Auditorium in Presser Hall.

Formed in April of 1993 and 35-members strong, the chamber choir is composed of music teachers, students and others in the arts. They have given more than a hundred performances in Lithuania and abroad: Italy (1994, 1995, 1999), Germany (1994, 1996), Switzerland (1995, 1997), Austria (1996), France (1996), Sweden (1998) and Spain (1999). The "Aukuras" Chamber Choir has earned numerous awards since its inception including third prize at the 1999 C.A. Seghizzi (Gorizia, Italy) and third prize at the 2001 Spittal an der Drau (Austria). The "Aukuras" Mixed Choir also represented Lithuania in the 2000 Nordic-Baltic choir festival in Skien, Norway.

The choir's tour throughout Canada and the United States will include Toronto, Montreal and Boston among other cities. They will be in Bloomington from Friday, Sept. 28 through Sunday, Sept. 30.

The choir looked to J. Scott Ferguson, IWU associate professor of music and director of choral activities, in order to assist in their plans abroad.

"I met the conductor in Slovakia in 1999 at a choral competition in which his choir competed. He contacted me last spring to ask if I would be able to help with his U.S. tour," Ferguson said.

With help from the IWU School of Music, the Student Chapter of the American Choral Directors Association, the IWU President's Office, and the Second Presbyterian Church, Ferguson arranged for the choir's visit. Members of the Second Presbyterian Church Chapel Choir, Illinois State and Illinois Wesleyan faculty will house choir members.

While at IWU, Aukuras Mixed Choir also will participate in an informal exchange with the IWU Collegiate Choir during its rehearsal time on Friday, Sept. 28 at 4 p.m.

"This is the first time students here will have had the chance to hear a semi-professional chamber choir from Europe," Ferguson said. "There are many more choirs of this type in Europe than in the states. I am eager for our students to see what choral music can mean for them after graduation."

On Saturday, in addition to their performance at IWU, the choir will tour the Lithuanian World Center in Lemont (Ill.). Their final local performance will be at the 9 a.m. Sunday worship service of the Second Presbyterian Church, 313 N. East St., Bloomington.

"For our choral students and young music educators, [the "Aukuras" Chamber Choir's] visit will be especially important. They will have a chance not only to listen and learn, but to have a personal cultural exchange that will enhance their educational experience," Ferguson said.

About Vildziunas

Born in Vilnius in 1955, Vildziunas began his musical education with the "Azuoliukas" Boys' Choir. He graduated from the Choir Conducting Department at the Lithuanian Academy of Music in 1979 and from a post-graduate course in the Moscow Gnesin Musical-Pedagogical Institute in 1985. Additionally, Vildziunas has worked with the choir conducting department at the Klaipeda Faculties, Lithuanian Music Academy; as Dean of the Culture Faculty at the same academy; and as artistic director and chief conductor of the Chamber Choir of Lithuanian Radio. He has been the conductor and manager of the "Aukuras" Mixed Choir at Klaipeda Music Centre and the Head of the Klaipeda Department of Lithuania State Philharmony Society. Vildziunas also serves as artistic director of the IV Nordic-Baltic choir festival in Klaipeda and of the 2002 Lithuanian National Song Festival in Vilnius.