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Alumni to Appear on *The Oprah Show*

September 13, 2010

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – A group of Illinois Wesleyan alumni will have the unique opportunity to appear on the farewell season of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, performing with members of their choir on an episode airing Tuesday, Sept. 14.

The four alumni: Mark Tomasino '06, Joan (Teitelman) Cinquegrani '06, Hilary Barry '06, and Angela Latkowski '07 are part of Wicker Park Choral Singers (WPCS), which will perform behind the Grammy award-winning duo, The Judds.

Tomasino founded WPCS in 2008, but never dreamed it would land them a spot on America's longest-running daytime television talk show. 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,'" said Tomasino. 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," Barry said. "We were in the studio with the almighty Oprah Winfrey," said fellow member 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 said 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. 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," said Latkowski.

When Tomasino first started the choir, he turned to his friends and fellow veterans of the Illinois Wesleyan music program. He noted that his inspiration to form the group stemmed from his happy memories of performing with the Illinois Wesleyan Collegiate Choir. Latkowski agreed, 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 IWU alumni. "It gives me a warm, comforting feeling to know that we all have a place to come back together and sing," said Latkowski.

The love of music that transformed their time at Illinois Wesleyan continues to influence the work of the alumni today. Latkowski explained, "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."

To learn more about Wicker Park Choral Singers, visit their website at wickerparksings.org.

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