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Opera Singer Pfortmiller to Speak, Perform

February 15, 2012

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – From Wednesday, Feb. 22 to Friday, Feb. 24, the Illinois Wesleyan School of Music will host alumnus and acclaimed opera singer Kyle Pfortmiller, class of 1992, as he gives two master classes and a recital.

All events will take place in Westbrook Auditorium of Presser Hall (1210 Park St., Bloomington) and are free and open to the public.

On Wednesday at 11 a.m., Pfortmiller will give a master class for IWU music students, hoping to challenge singers to engage with a text emotionally and technically. The following day at 4 p.m., Pfortmiller will give a presentation on his career and hold an open-forum for questions. He will end his visit with a recital on Friday at 7:30 p.m.

A highly esteemed vocalist by critics across the country, Pfortmiller has performed with a number of opera companies, including the Metropolitan Opera (The Met), New York City Opera (NYCO), Florida Grand Opera and Tulsa Opera, in addition to others.



Kyle Pfortmiller

Although Pfortmiller has made a name for himself today, his journey is one that has taken time and dedication. In the fall of 1988, Pfortmiller was a first-year music student with a talented voice; however, as Professor of Music Linda Farquharson recalls, he was barely audible over the piano accompaniment.

During his time at Illinois Wesleyan, Pfortmiller grew as a performer, taking every opportunity available. He held roles in a number of shows, including Arthur Gilbert and W.S. Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore*, Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land* and Seymour Barab's *Little Red Riding Hood*. An active participant in a number of ensembles as well, Pfortmiller sang in the University Choir, Collegiate Choir, Chamber Singers and Limited Edition Jazz Ensemble, among others. During his sophomore year, he was a soloist in the School of Music's annual Henry Charles Memorial Concerto/Aria Competition, his performance so well-received that Associate Professor of Music Vadim Mazo invited him back to the stage for an encore. He ended his career at IWU with a performance of *Eight Songs for a Mad King* by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, a challenging baritone piece covering more than five octaves and requiring six instrumentalists. To this day, Pfortmiller is grateful for the number of performance opportunities he was given as an undergraduate student. According to Pfortmiller, his experience at IWU has made being on the stage that much easier.

After graduating from Illinois Wesleyan, Pfortmiller worked with the Ohio Light Opera, singing around 70 performances that summer. He continued his studies at the Manhattan School of Music to earn a masters degree in vocal performance. When enrolling in classes at the school, he was able to test out of remedial courses such as music theory and history, allowing for him to take the courses that truly interested him. "I had no idea how great my musical education was until I got to the Manhattan School of Music," Pfortmiller said, noting that the majority of his friends were required to take basic courses rather than moving ahead. "I was wonderfully prepared to move ahead as a student, as well as a musician and artist."

Following his graduate studies, Pfortmiller's path to the opera world was a little less conventional. While a small number of performers move on to programs that give young artists training and performance opportunities, such as the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program with The Met, Pfortmiller found himself without that option, trying to make ends meet.

From there, he recalls, it was temp jobs and auditions until he found something steady. Within a year, he was accepted into the Sarasota Opera Young Artists Program. “After that, it was a slow, steady, upward climb of smaller regional companies until my big break in 2000 with the Tulsa Opera,” said Pfortmiller.

Pfortmiller recalls working tirelessly with the Oklahoma-based opera company, performing in as many main stage productions as possible, traveling to every small town in the state. Through his work, Pfortmiller made connections and eventually got a manager, who helped him acquire five auditions for the New York City Opera.

After finally landing a performance job with the NYCO, Pfortmiller was given a weekly contract, as well as a few small roles and understudy parts. His major debut was in *Carmen*, where he played the role of Morales. Pfortmiller recalls being approached by a manager after his fourth performance in the show. The manager told Pfortmiller he was memorable, handed him his card and told Pfortmiller to call him the next day. Unsure of whom this man was, Pfortmiller was later informed by his wife, a singer as well, that the man was Alan Green, one of the best-known managers in the business. Pfortmiller did not hesitate to call and since then, his career has skyrocketed.

According to Pfortmiller, among his most surreal moments in the business was working at The Met alongside Renee Fleming in Strauss’ *Capriccio*. While in rehearsal with Fleming, he remembers seeing her walk offstage right and sitting in a chair, watching the ensemble perform. “She was glowing as she watched all of us perform. I faced her and I said to myself, ‘OK. That’s Renee and she’s smiling at us.’ It was a very surreal moment having her watch us,” Pfortmiller said.

When asked if he ever dreamed of reaching such heights, Pfortmiller responded, “I think everybody wants to play in the majors. You may have the dream, but there’s no way you can fathom the reality. This is certainly something I’ve wanted from the beginning, but there’s no way you can imagine what its actually like until you’re there.”

Pfortmiller’s advice to aspiring vocalists is grounded in reality and optimism. “No one ever ‘makes it’ in this business. Learn to love the plateaus and maximize the talent you have right now while you stretch and grow in other areas,” he said.

Pfortmiller is currently preparing for roles in *La Traviata* and *Billy Bud* at The Met. After those shows close, he will spend the summer performing as Fred/Petruccio in *Kiss Me Kate*, Valentin in *Faust* and Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady* before returning to The Met in the fall.

For further information, contact the School of Music Office at (309) 556-3061, or [read more about Pfortmiller](#) from the *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine*.

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