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## Theatre Alumni Honored at Jeff Awards

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## Theatre Alumni Honored at Jeff Awards

Nov. 14, 2013

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Illinois Wesleyan was well represented at the 45th Annual Jeff Equity Awards for Chicago Theatre held at Drury Lane Oakbrook on November 4. Veteran Steppenwolf actress, Mariann Mayberry, Class of 1987, was honored for her performance as a principal actress in David Lindsey-Abaire's play, *Good People*.

Mayberry, a native of Springfield, Mo., has performed with Steppenwolf since 1989, eventually becoming an official member of the company in 1993. She has accrued more than 20 credits in their productions, most recently *The March* (2012) and *August: Osage County* (2007). She was also nominated for Jeff Awards for her performances in *Hysteria* (1999) and *Time of My Life* (1995). Mayberry has appeared on Broadway in *Metamorphoses* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and also has numerous Off-Broadway, film and television credits.

"The Jeff Committee has given me a lovely gift - a gift that says keep going, and keep creating. For that, I thank them," said Mayberry.

Jeff Award Winner Mariann Mayberry  
featured on Steppenwolf's  
poster for *Good People*



David Rice also accepted the Jeff Award for New Adaptation, as well as the award for Original Music in a Play for his musical version of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*. The show premiered at First Folio Theater, which he founded with his wife, Alison Vesely, Class of 1979. While Vesely serves as artistic director and co-founder of First Folio, she says she had minimal involvement in the actual production of *Cymbeline*, but rather was preparing to direct her own production of *The Rainmaker* for later in the summer. Coincidentally, that production starred another IWU alum, Hayley L. Rice, Class of 2004, and has received rave reviews and a Jeff Recommendation. However, it is considered part of the 2014 Jeff Season and will not be up for a nomination until next year. For *Cymbeline*, Alison assisted with casting, conducted "Folio Method training" and was "verse nurse." The production was directed by Michael Goldberg, one of the company's artistic associates, however Vesely was instrumental in the development of her husband's script as it went through the daunting process of re-writes and readings before its production.

First Folio's Production of *Cymbeline*  
(Pictured: Ryan Czerwonko, Kate McDermott, Ronald Keaton, Tyler Rich; Photo Credit: D. Rice)



"We are very, very proud of the production and will be marketing it to other theatrical producers around the country," said Vesely.

First Folio has a third IWU alumna in their group of artistic associates, Melanie Keller, Class of 1997, who will star in the world premiere of *Salvage* by Michigan playwright, Joseph Zettelmaier, in the spring.

In addition, recent IWU graduate, Michael Holding, Class of 2012, interned for First Folio's production of *The Merchant of Venice*, playing a series of small roles "excellently," according to Vesely. Holding was later cast in the company's fall 2012 production of *The Madness of Poe: A Love Story*. When the actor he was understudying for was injured during an invited dress rehearsal, Holding took his place, playing three major roles (the Madman in *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the Prisoner in *The*

*Pit and the Pendulum* and Fortunato in *The Masque of the Red Death*) for the first preview the following night and continued in those roles for the rest of the run.

"We have often had IWU alums work with our company," Vesely notes. "They come to us with terrific training and preparation for the professional world of theater. We are all very proud to be IWU drama alumni!"

### **Perspective on a successful career in Chicago Theater from Mariann Mayberry:**

*"I've been very lucky. I stumbled upon an internship at the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago during "Short Term" of my junior year at Wesleyan. I Xeroxed plays all day, every day, for the entire month. I would go back to my apartment (five girls in three bedrooms) just weeping from the monotony, however, Steppenwolf asked me to come back after my senior year to do whatever they needed. Eventually, I was allowed to start acting in plays and then I just never left. In 1993, I was asked to join the Steppenwolf ensemble -- the only job security an actor can have really besides winning the lottery or becoming a film star. Once you become an ensemble member you're in it for life -- an unheard of opportunity, really -- place, a home, where plays are chosen for and by and ensemble of 43 actors/writers/directors and where our repeated involvement is necessary and valued. I've been in almost 30 Steppenwolf productions. I couldn't be luckier.*

*"This is not an easy profession. Sometimes, though, after years of continued hard work, sacrifices, public embarrassments, professional humiliations, rejections, sometimes you're given an enormous gift. You're given a play that shifts your life. A great play and an amazing character that speaks to you on such a deep level that people hear you, and her, and the play and say 'That was good. I have been affected by that.' That combination was GOOD PEOPLE by David Lindsay-Abaire. The Jeff Committee noticed and acknowledged the production and myself. They've given me a lovely gift- a gift that says keep going, and keep creating. For that, I thank them."*

*"An actor's legacy disappears as they speak. It's momentary. An audience has to be there to experience it and acknowledge that something actually even happened. For them, the only evidence is the program and the feeling and thoughts as they leave the space. The only tactile evidence of my legacy, to me, is the newspaper clippings my mother puts in a box and some B-roll footage for the theatre's advertising department. My niece and nephew will never know*

*all the work I've done. I can't hand them my performance of "Ophelia" when I was 29. Why do we, as actors, do this? Why are we okay with constant disappearing acts? Well, I hope that I'm living a life not just as an entertainer, but as someone who has held up a lot of mirrors and touched someone in some way that has shifted their life, and in turn has shifted society -- hopefully for the better. I hope that I'm doing my small part to better the life of someone, and then hopefully, their better life has shifted someone else's, and so on, and so on, and so on."*

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