



Winter 3-26-2015

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University Communications, Illinois Wesleyan University
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Recommended Citation

University Communications, Illinois Wesleyan University, "School of Music to Offer Unique New Degree Program in Contemporary Musicianship" (2015). *News and Events*. 2712. <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/2712>

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School of Music to Offer Unique New Degree Program in Contemporary Musicianship

March 26, 2015

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Illinois Wesleyan University's School of Music (SOM) will offer a unique new degree program in contemporary musicianship designed to better prepare students interested in performing professionally. The program will provide undergraduate students with a broader range of knowledge and skills needed for today's professional music world.

Beginning this fall, students can work toward the Bachelor of Music degree in Contemporary Musicianship. The new degree program builds on IWU's traditionally strong emphasis on performance and adds coursework in composition, improvisation, world music, recording techniques, music technology and music entrepreneurship.



Soprano Jacklyn Klimczak '15 rehearses with the Illinois Wesleyan Civic Orchestra prior to the annual Henry Charles Memorial Concerto-Aria Concert.

SOM Director Mario Pelusi said a professional musician today should be comfortable performing a variety of genres including traditional and contemporary concert music, jazz, the numerous forms of commercial music, non-Western music and other forms. Today's musicians are frequently required to compose original material, improvise, self-produce recordings, incorporate electronics and other technology into their performances, and manage their careers.

In the new degree program, students will become skilled vocalists or instrumentalists and learn a second instrument as well. They will also become familiar with styles outside of traditional concert music, play in both large and small ensembles, and learn to compose, improvise, conduct, record, use music-related hardware and software, and manage their careers.

"We are not aware of any undergraduate degree programs that combine these aspects of the new musical world in the comprehensive manner that we have developed," said Pelusi.

As one example of the broader range of skills undergraduates will develop, students' junior and senior recitals are intended to be self-curated programs that depart from the standard recital format in innovative ways. This self-curated format provides experience in developing the sorts of presentations that are helping to create a growing, younger and more diverse audience for concert music, SOM officials said.

Music faculty noted the continually changing nature of the traditional world of concert music performance companies. While some longtime opera companies are closing, young musicians are creating and performing new music influenced by jazz, folk or international styles and thriving in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and other major cities.

"This realm of musical activity has come to be called 'alt-classical,'" said Fern Rosetta Sherff Professor of Composition and Theory David Vayo, one of three faculty members who helped develop the program.

Another of the faculty members who helped develop IWU's new degree program, Assistant Professor of Music William Hudson, was a self-employed musician in the Boston area for 10 years. As founder of the vocal ensemble LIBER: Ensemble for Early Music, Hudson regularly negotiated contracts and coordinated self-producing and self-promoting the ensemble's recordings.

"I consider it the liberal arts version of a professional music degree, because it gives students an especially wide background in musical subjects," said Vayo. "When students in this program graduate and enter the professional world, they'll have the breadth of knowledge and experience that will enable them to build a career of their choosing rather than following a more restricted path dictated by external factors."