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Mirza Foundation Makes \$2.5 Million Gift to IWU Theatre Program

Oct. 26, 2015

BLOOMINGTON, IL.—The theatre in Illinois Wesleyan's McPherson Hall has been named the Jerome Mirza Theatre in recognition of a \$2.5 million gift to the School of Theatre Arts (SoTA) from the Jerome Mirza Foundation. The gift announcement and naming of the Mirza Theatre took place in the theatre in conjunction with the Oct. 26 meeting of the Illinois Wesleyan Board of Trustees.

A 1960 graduate of Illinois Wesleyan, Mirza (1937-2007) was a well-known Bloomington and Chicago trial attorney, who often credited his courtroom success to the theatre training he received at Illinois Wesleyan. He earned his law degree at the University of Illinois College of Law in 1963. Upon passing the Illinois bar exam, Mirza returned to Bloomington to practice law and later founded Jerome Mirza and Associates in 1970.



Jerome Mirza '60

"The Mirza Theatre will be an enduring reminder of Jerry Mirza's passion for the arts and his affection for his alma mater," said President Richard F. Wilson. "We are indebted to the Mirza Foundation for this very generous gift. A portion of the gift will go toward improvements in the Mirza Theatre over the next few years, with the remaining funds used to establish an endowment to enhance the quality of the School's programs and facilities over time."



A crowd applauds the dedication of the Jerome Mirza Theatre.

"The Jerome Mirza Foundation is delighted to make this gift honoring Jerry," said Deborah Parsons, President of the Mirza Foundation.

"As a student at Illinois Wesleyan, Jerry found his niche acting and performing. He believed learning to relate to an audience contributed to his success as an attorney. Being able to give back to Illinois Wesleyan, an institution that provided Jerry with so much, is a privilege. And, I'm confident that having Jerry's name on this theatre, and associated with this fine theatre program, would make him proud."

Thomas Quinn, director and associate professor of the School of Theatre Arts, added his thanks to the Mirza Foundation, noting how important this gift is to both the Mirza Theatre and SoTA's academic program: "The School of Theatre Arts is deeply grateful to the Jerome

Mirza Foundation. Through improved facilities and enhanced programs, this extraordinary gift will enrich the educational experience of our students, and elevate the artistic life of our campus and community for years to come."

Reflecting on Mirza's time as a theatre student, John Ficca, professor emeritus, said, "In 1956, Jerry and I were both IWU freshmen—he a student/actor, I a new professor/director. I recall him in Fry's play *A Sleep of Prisoners* at old The Hut Theatre, which is now gone. Jerry had extraordinary instincts as an actor; he could have succeeded in the Brando, De Niro mode. I know this talent helped him in his dynamic legal career; our loss was their gain."

Mirza served as president of both the Illinois State Bar Association and Illinois Trial Lawyers Association. He was a member of the Inner Circle of Advocates and a fellow of the International Academy of Trial Lawyers, the International Society of Barristers, and the American Board of Trial Advocates. Mirza served as a member of the University of Illinois College of Law's Board of Visitors and hosted The Jerome Mirza College of Advocacy at Illinois Wesleyan and later at the University of Illinois. He was also a prolific writer, authoring three editions of *Illinois Tort Law and Practice*, and *Illinois Personal Injury and Winning Litigation the Mirza Way*.



New signage reflects the naming of the Jerome Mirza Theatre at McPherson Hall.

The School of Theatre Arts has a national reputation for training theatre and film actors, music theatre performers, Hollywood and Broadway producers, theatre company managers and theatrical designers and technicians. Recently three of its graduates were honored with Emmy Awards. Academy Award-nominated actor Richard Jenkins '69, received this year's Emmy for Outstanding Actor in a Limited Series for his role in HBO's *Olive Kitteridge*. Kevin Dunn '77 is a cast member on HBO's Emmy-winning comedy series *Veep*. Kat White '85 served as an executive producer of the documentary *The Trials of Muhammad Ali*, which won a News and Documentary Emmy.

Pulitzer Prize-winning author Edna Ferber's *GIANT* comes to the Mirza Theatre as a new American musical for performances Nov. 17-22. Contact the box office at (309) 556-3232 for ticket information.

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