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Kim Hill

Illinois Wesleyan University

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Eckley Award Allows Flowers '16 to be Composer-in-Residence

Aug. 6, 2015

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – David Allen Flowers '16 (Evanston, Ill.) is enormously grateful to be a composer-in-residence at Illinois Wesleyan University this summer.

At least that's how the **music composition** major feels as a recipient of the **Eckley Scholars & Artists** program. Established by President Emeritus and Mrs. Robert S. Eckley before President Eckley passed away, the program's fellowships are awarded to meritorious students to remain on campus over the summer under the supervision of a faculty mentor.

Flowers' project is *Sky*, a soundscape composition for symphony orchestra. Carefully constructed sound structures, soundscapes typically do not carry melodies or harmonic progressions in the traditional sense, Flowers explained.



David Allen Flowers '16 works on his composition, *Sky*.

"It's very rare for student composers to get this sort of residency-like position," he said. "If they get anything at all, it's to get into a [composing] camp that's three weeks long. I have the entire summer to spend all my time on this piece and use the empty campus as my writing center."

For his project, Flowers is among hundreds of composers to ask if music can convey an abstract concept such as Life, Death, or God? Some composers believe it can; others say that's silly. Music without words is itself an abstract, Flowers explains – it's not fixed or tangible. A score is not music, Flowers said; the written notes are merely instructions, so the idea of conveying something abstract (Life) through something abstract (Music) is intriguing. "Whether that will be actually be perceived is still up in the air," he said of his work in progress.

He chose the *Sky* as his abstract concept because it seemed an easier attempt than others such as Life or Death. His work is outlined by the conveyance of the movement of clouds, the progression and dissipation of storms, and a serene blue sky. "The sky itself doesn't make a sound, nor does the movement of clouds, but the images of these events elicit emotions and these emotions can be approached via music," he said.

It's a lofty ambition – one to which Flowers is devoting more than four hours each day. That self-discipline and the luxury of having uninterrupted time are his greatest takeaways.

"During the school year I often find myself competing with work and classes to keep up with my projects, and this gets rather frustrating," he said. "Having the opportunity to focus my efforts on this one massive project has allowed me to spend lots of time thinking about orchestration, pitch collections, form and other elements."

"I've also found myself being able to write for longer periods of time," he added. "It's like conditioning. I've also had the time to re-work sections of the piece already, which is helping me mature as a composer and as an artist."

Flowers has already composed more than 15 pieces, but *Sky* is completely different than any other work he's ever written. In his role as director of the choirs at Bloomington and Eureka Grace Church of the Nazarene, he writes the vocal arrangements for both choirs and adds his take to piano parts for their music. He's also written scores for several student films. Flowers plays piano and flute and will resume playing with the Illinois Wesleyan Wind Ensemble and Civic Orchestra this

year. He graduates in December and plans to apply to graduate school for a master's degree in music composition.

Flowers said a premiere of one of **his works** is nerve-wracking, and when *Sky* makes its debut it will be no different. "When it



David Allen Flowers '16

all works, you just kind of melt,” he said. “It’s very gratifying, and you’re really proud of it, and then a week later you go back and drill holes in it and think ‘everything is wrong with this,’ and you sort of start over. I think that’s healthy because that’s how you get better, in that you are increasingly dissatisfied with your work so that you put more care into it, and you build better work.”

Such development and deepening of a student’s creative and research competencies is the core of the Eckley Scholars program. Working with a faculty member – Flowers’ mentor is School of Music Director Mario Pelusi – students are guided in their independent research or artistic projects. Eckley Scholars receive a \$4,000 stipend and complimentary on-campus housing.