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Student Digs Up Playwright's Telluric Identity

December 18, 2006

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - IWU senior Peter Gray's camera pans over a statue of Spanish playwright Federico Garcia Lorca in Madrid's Plaza de Santa Ana, capturing the protagonist of his first documentary film, *Lorca and Telluric Identity*. Cutting to romantic images of Andalusia, the southernmost region of Spain, Gray reveals the diverse landscape and culture that was Lorca's home, as well as the site of his dramatic inspiration.

The BFA acting major and Hispanic studies minor said that transporting the audience to the world of a highly influential author was a driving force behind completing the project. The documentary, which focuses on the life and work of Federico Garcia Lorca, was created in anticipation of the IWU School of Theatre Arts' production of Lorca's *Blood Wedding*, in which Gray played the role of the spurned groom. The play ran Nov. 14-19 in the McPherson Theatre (2 Ames Plaza, Bloomington).

Set in rustic Spain in the 1930s, *Blood Wedding* is part of a best-selling "rural trilogy" which also includes *Yerma* and *The House of Bernarda Alba*. The play is a timeless tale of star-crossed lovers, based on a real-life newspaper account of a bride who, on the night of her wedding day, leaves her husband to elope with a former lover.

From the warm Guadalquivir valley to the low mountain landscapes of the Tabernas Desert, Andalusia is characterized by its high, mountainous landscape and dry plains. The region is famous for its rich flamenco culture and Moorish architecture reminiscent of the eight centuries of African Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula. Gray's recordings of Andalusia's resonant flamenco music and characteristic dialect bring the region to life for viewers of the documentary.

Gray's creative process began in December 2005 when Associate Professor of Theatre Arts Sandra Lindberg, who directed IWU's production of *Blood Wedding*, approached Gray, with a copy of the play and an idea about the show's dramaturgy. He had already planned a trip to Spain in May and was able to combine business with pleasure to create the film.

In January 2006, Gray began his long, arduous research process as dramaturg that included a deep analysis of *Blood Wedding* as well as finding information about Lorca, his life's work and the Andalusian culture. Through hard work, the support of the University's administration and with funding from the University, Gray planned his trip to Spain in May, finding historical sites at which to film and setting up interviews with Spanish scholars.

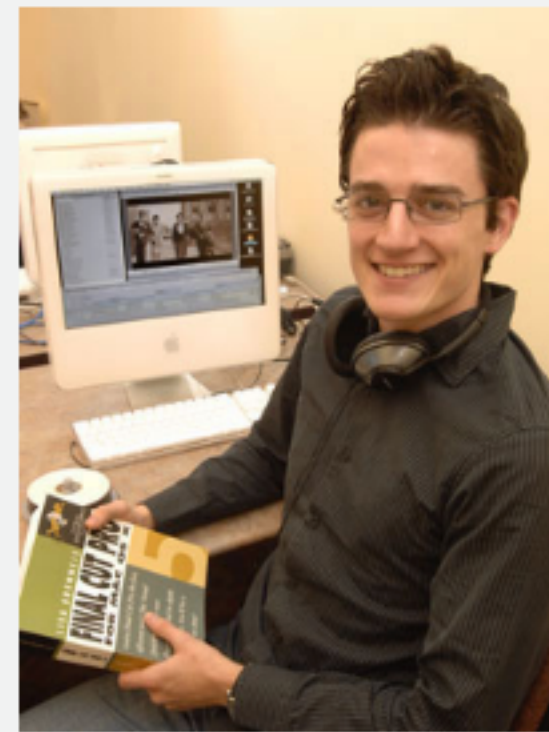
"I was very fortunate to have gotten interviews with the people that I did and to have found so many great sites at which to film," said Gray. "I was given permission by the Garcia Lorca Foundation to film at closed sites, where it was previously off-limits to film. I really built this 'house' from the roof down."

During his summer months, Gray visited a house carved out of the side of a mountain where he filmed a gypsy "zambra" and witnessed these flamenco performers achieve *duende*, a concept regarding artistic epiphany. He also filmed at Lorca's home where he saw the writer's original living space and the Andalusian countryside where the author found much of his inspiration. In this time, Gray, who has studied Spanish for nine years, including a semester abroad in Madrid in Spring 2005, had the opportunity to interview such Lorca scholars as Garcia Lorca Foundation in Madrid President Laura Garcia Lorca, University of Granada Professor Juan Carlos Rodriguez, University of Granada Professor Antonio Chicharro Chamorro and Madrid's Teatro Karpas Theatre Director Jose Manuel Pardo.

After returning to the IWU campus for the fall semester, Gray began the process of editing his footage and translating the interviews to create subtitles for the video. In November, he was ready for the public to view his first full-length documentary and held a two-day showing at the Ames Library (1 Ames Plaza, Bloomington).

After the viewing of Gray's documentary, Lindberg said, "Peter's dramaturgical work added richness and authenticity to our work on *Blood Wedding*. Especially valuable was his footage of the flamenco dancers in the Andalusian cave. The images helped us all to understand how pleasure and pain live side by side in Lorca's drama of star-crossed lovers."

"It was great to see the University take so much interest in my project," said Gray. "I know it was informative for the cast and crew. If it did that much, I am satisfied, because that's what it did for me. There is no doubt it changed my perspective not just on my character in the play, but on the play as a whole," said Gray.



Peter Gray