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IWU Offers Student Actors Directing Opportunities

Chelsey Iaquina
Illinois Wesleyan University

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CONTACT: Chelsey Iaquina (309) 556-3181

IWU Offers Student Actors Directing Opportunities

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – In their four years as students at Illinois Wesleyan University, Allan Quiaoit and Tripp Burton have shared the same stage, the same major, and the same close-knit group of friends. However, this year the IWU seniors gave up the stage and spotlight to share the view from backstage as the directors of the May Term productions *Tape* and *Polaroid Stories*.

The plays ran from May 20 through May 23, 2004, in IWU's E. Melba Johnson Kirkpatrick Laboratory Theatre.

Burton of Naperville, Ill., and Quiaoit of Galesburg, Ill., first met as seniors in high school when they were selected to participate in an All-State theatre production put on by the Illinois High School Association. Burton attended Naperville High School, while Quiaoit was from Hinsdale South High School in Darien. When the curtain went down on their final show that summer, the two returned to their hometowns not expecting to see each other again. Less than a year later, they were reunited as freshmen at IWU and quickly became friends. "It was really amazing," said Quiaoit, "I had no idea that we had chosen the same school."

Their friendship was a source of support again when Burton and Quiaoit were chosen to be the student directors for this year's May Term show. May term is a shortened semester intended to provide an intense, focused, high energy three weeks of study tempered by co-curricular experiences that are artistically or intellectually stimulating.

"For a year Allan and I have been bouncing ideas off each other," said Burton. "Even when the designing process started in February we were both right there the entire time, so I feel like I have been a huge part in the development of *Polaroid Stories* and Allan has been a huge part in the development of *Tape*."

Quiaoit, who directed *Polaroid Stories* by Naomi Iizuka, described the play as a story about telling stories. "In the end it is the oldest kind of love story being retold for the umpteenth time, only this time it is being retold by street kids," he said.

Tape, written by Stephen Belber and directed by Burton, is about three high school students, two boys and a girl who were once close friends. In the ten years since high school they have drifted apart because one has accused the other of rape. "It's very much about stories changing and bending the truth, but in the end it's about how far you can push the boundaries of a friendship in different ways, and how much you can push someone and still call them a friend," said Burton.

Performed in repertoire, *Tape* and *Polaroid Stories* meshed well together, according to Quiaoit and Burton. "The shows are very different stylistically," Burton said, "but they do share common themes."

Although their two plays may appear on stage as visual opposites, Quiaoit and Burton have discovered that their directing styles are pretty similar. "We both share the same idea that on stage things should be organic," said Quiaoit. "Impulses are important, as is making sure the performance is derived from the actors and not from us imposing our opinions on them."

Now the two directors have a new outlook on acting and directing that they hope will help them in the future. "We have learned that while the end product is important, what's most important is that the process is creative and energized and that everyone gets involved," said Quiaoit, who plans to continue acting. He has a job with a group based out of Maryland called The National Players, which in August will tour the country performing *Oedipus* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

Burton returned to Naperville where he directs sixth through twelfth graders in the Young Actor's Ensemble.