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***First TV Production: "Porgy & Bess," Oct. 6***  
**IWU Professor, Wife, Star in Landmark Production of Gershwin's Opera**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--When the first-ever television production of George Gershwin's opera "Porgy and Bess" is broadcast on public television Oct. 6, an Illinois Wesleyan University music professor and his wife will headline the cast.

Cynthia Haymon, wife of IWU voice professor Barrington Coleman, co-stars as "Bess" in the telecast, based on Trevor Nunn's acclaimed 1986 Glyndebourne Festival production of the classic American opera. Coleman plays the role of "Mingo," the third character to appear in the opening scene of "Porgy and Bess."

American Playhouse and Great Performances have teamed up to present "Porgy and Bess," in Central Illinois, according to "TV Guide," on Wednesday, Oct. 6, 7:30 p.m. (CT) on the Public Broadcasting Service (check local listings).

A review in the Oct. 4 edition of *Time* said: "The young, attractive actor-singers give heartfelt performances . . . , never condescending to the characters but finding dignity in their primal passions.

"In particular," *Time* added, "Willard White ["Porgy."] and Cynthia Haymon invest the title roles with wrenching believability."

Coleman describes "Mingo" as a gambler and a bridge to most of the opera's prominent characters. "Mingo," he explained, "admires the flash in Sportin' Life, a drug-dealer, but he also empathizes with Porgy, a cripple. Mingo is happy-go-lucky, but he also sympathizes with other people's concerns. He's a well-known personality in Catfish Row, the community where the opera takes place."

"Mingo" plays a key role in the opera's opening scene, a craps game that abruptly ends with a murder.

### **Production History**

Trevor Nunn--a veteran of more than 30 productions, including "Macbeth," "Peter Pan," "Les Misérables," "Cats," and "Aspects of Love"--directed the British production of "Porgy and Bess."

Initially, Nunn's version of the Gershwin opera was produced in 1986 at England's Glyndebourne Festival. A subsequent revival of the opera with Coleman, Haymon, and many original cast members was recorded on the EMI label, winning 1989 Opera Recording of the Year honors from *Gramophone* Magazine, the 1990 British Record Industry Classical Award,

and other international recognition. This recording was used as the sound track for the film of the opera PBS will telecast.

London's Royal Opera staged "Porgy and Bess" last November and December with many of the original Glyndebourne Festival cast members, including Coleman and Haymon.

"Porgy and Bess' is widely known in the United States, but it was new to England in 1986," Coleman explained. "Before the Glyndebourne production, it had only been done once in England--in the 1950s or 60s."

### **Unique Aspects**

Coleman sees two unique aspects to Nunn's version of "Porgy and Bess." First, the production featured an international cast--Black-Americans, Blacks from the West Indies, and Blacks from France. Second, Nunn's looser-than-typical directing style encouraged cast members to place their own stamp on dramatic interpretations.

Coleman explained that Nunn's directing technique "allowed us the privilege as actors to write in our own dramatic motivation. He also let the music define the dramatic flow.

"American theater was new to many of the cast members," Coleman added. "They came to the production with no preconceived notions of Gershwin's meaning. We had many sessions when we just talked about the opera. What made this production special was that everyone brought something fresh to it."

Coleman says that performing for the camera presents different challenges than performing on stage before a live audience.

"Unlike the immediacy of the stage, where you react to other actors and the audience," Coleman explained, "everything is directed when you're performing for the cameras. When you walk left you have to look out for the camera," he joked.

### **Coleman Profiled**

Coleman, a tenor and 1980 IWU graduate, earned a master's degree in music from Northwestern University and a doctorate from New York's famed Juilliard School of Music. He appeared in London in 1990 in the role of civil-rights leader Andrew Young in the musical production "King," by British composer Richard Blackford. The play is based on the life of Nobel Peace Prize-winner Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

A native of Chicago, Coleman has performed as a soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Music of the Baroque Ensemble, London Symphony Orchestra, and the Sunday Evening Club of WTTW-TV in Chicago.

In the fall of 1991, Coleman and his wife were in concert in Valencia, Spain, and in January, 1992, he had his debut with the Venice Opera in Italy. He has performed with the Baltimore Opera, Chamber Opera of Chicago, Des Moines Metropolitan Opera, Sarasota

Opera, Boston Concert Opera, and the Santa Fe Opera. Coleman made his Royal Opera debut last year in "Porgy and Bess."

Coleman received IWU's Robert Montgomery Outstanding Young Alumnus Award in 1991.

### **Haymon Background**

Haymon, a soprano, last appeared on Great Performances as Bess in "Celebrating Gershwin," a 1987 production in which she sang "Summertime" and introduced the world premiere of "Lonely Boy," a gem dropped from "Porgy and Bess."

Born in Jacksonville, Fla., Haymon studied at Northwestern University and in New York. She created the title role in Thea Musgrave's "Harriet, the Woman Called Moses" with the Virginia Opera in 1985.

Haymon made her British debut as Bess at the 1986 Glyndebourne Festival. Her Royal Opera debut was as Liù in Giacomo Puccini's opera "Turandot" in 1986. She played the role of Coretta Scott King, wife of the slain civil-rights leader, in the musical production, "King."

Haymon is in Amsterdam for a production of Claude Monteverdi's opera "The Coronation of Poppea." In the title role of Poppea, Haymon portrays a woman who connives her way to the top of the Italian aristocracy, in the 17th-century Baroque work. The production opens next month and runs to Dec. 1.

### **Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess"**

The music for "Porgy and Bess" was composed by George Gershwin (1898-1937), who already was a legend on Broadway and Tin Pan Alley with 15 hit shows when his opera premiered in New York on Oct. 10, 1935, after a tryout in Boston.

Gershwin's goal with "Porgy and Bess" was to seriously attempt to put into operatic form an American theme. "If I am successful," he said, "it will represent a combination of the drama and romance of 'Carmen' and the beauty of 'Meistersinger.'"

"Porgy and Bess" features several songs, which have become American standards, including: "Summertime," "I Got Plenty O-Nuttin'," "It Ain't Necessarily So," and "Bess, You Is My Woman Now."

The opera is set in Catfish Row, a once affluent community in Charleston, S.C., now experiencing hard times. It is home to an African-American community. Principal characters include: "Porgy," a crippled beggar who uses a goat-drawn cart to get around; "Bess," a sultry woman, disdained by the respectable crowd; "Crown," a tough stevedore whose woman is "Bess;" and "Sportin' Life," a drug-dealer from Harlem who lusts after "Bess."

"Crown," sniffing some of "Sportin' Life's" happy dust, quarrels with "Robbins," a stevedore, killing him and breaking up a craps game. "Crown" flees and "Bess" is sheltered by "Porgy," who admires her.

The opera builds to an inevitable showdown over "Bess," when "Crown" attacks "Porgy," who uses his enormous strength to choke "Crown." When the police investigate "Crown's" death, the neighbors feign ignorance. "Porgy" is taken away and "Sportin' Life" takes the opportunity to "move in" on Bess. When Porgy is freed, he returns to Catfish Row, looking for "Bess." When he learns she has left, he sets off in his cart to find her.

Initially, "Porgy and Bess" received a chilly reception from New York critics and the Broadway production lost money. However, the opera's long-term success began with a 1938 revival in Los Angeles and a 1942 New York production.

The text for "Porgy and Bess" is by Du Bose Heyward and lyrics are by Heyward and Ira Gershwin, George Gershwin's brother and frequent collaborator.

Gershwin's musical legacy also includes works like "Rhapsody in Blue," which introduced the element of jazz into concert music, and classical pieces such as "Piano Concerto" and "An American in Paris." His credits also include popular songs like "Someone to Watch Over Me," "Fascinating Rhythm," and "I Got Rhythm," as well as Broadway musicals like "Of Thee I Sing," the first musical comedy to win a Pulitzer Prize..

#### **Production Details**

"Porgy and Bess" was filmed at Shepperton Studios in London, England, in December, 1992.

Renowned conductor Simon Rattle leads the London Philharmonic orchestra in the production.

American Playhouse is presented by KCET/Los Angeles; South Carolina/ETV; WGBH/Boston, and WNET/New York; it is funded by public television stations, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Chubb Group of Insurance Companies. Great Performances is presented by WNET/New York; KERA/Dallas-Fort Worth; KQED/San Francisco; Maryland Public Television/Maryland; SCETV/Columbia, S.C.; and WTTW/Chicago; it is funded by Duracell, Inc., the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts, and public television stations.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,800 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. For five consecutive years, *U.S. News & World Report* has ranked IWU No. 1 in the Midwest among regional colleges and universities in its annual "America's Best Colleges" edition.