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March 1, 1996

Contact: David Brown (309)556-3181David Gehrenbeck

IWU Organist to give final faculty recital

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.—After 32 faculty recitals during his 25 years as professor of organ and sacred music, David Gehrenbeck will give his final faculty recital Thursday, March 7 at 7:30 p.m., in Illinois Wesleyan University's Evelyn Chapel.

The event is free and open to the public.

Gehrenbeck, who retires this May, will play nine pieces. A reception will follow his performance.

Gehrenbeck will be accompanied on some of the pieces by The Chapel Choir; IWU senior Christopher Frey, violoncellist; The Franklin Park Brass, an IWU student-initiated ensemble; and IWU Assistant Professor of Music John Michael Cooper, timpanist.

The first piece, titled *Nova*, is a contemporary work written by Myron Roberts in celebration of the cosmic phenomenon of star explosions.

"This composition is not an attempt to describe a nova outburst in musical terms; it was more a contemplation of the awesome forces which lie within atomic particles," Roberts said.

Gehrenbeck also chose three fugues written by Illinois Wesleyan School of Music students Yvette Cataneo, a senior music major from Champaign, and 1995 IWU graduates Matt Ellenwood and Cara Dutko.

The third piece marks the first time Gehrenbeck has played Bach's famed *Toccatina and Fugue in D minor* at Illinois Wesleyan. *Toccatina* was the thundering, angst-ridden opus performed by Captain Nemo in the movie, "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea." The piece also has had guest appearances in "Phantom of the Opera," and often signals the presence of Count Dracula in TV commercials.

"I've been waiting all this time to play it," Gehrenbeck said. "So I'm not going to put it off any longer."

Toccatina will be followed by Cesar Franck's *Dextera Domini*, accompanied by The Chapel Choir and soloists Gwendolyn Buchanan, a freshman soprano from

Austin, Minn., Eric Doolittle, a senior tenor from Maryville, Tenn., and Thomas Tropp, a senior bass from Lake Forest, Ill.

Alice Jordan's *Devotion on Schönster Herr Jesu* and Karl Höller's *Improvisation on Schönster Herr Jesu*, Gehrenbeck said, are two pieces tied together and will feature Frey.

Jordan used the *Schönster* melody of 1677 to publish *Devotion* last year, as it was commissioned to celebrate the 150th anniversary of First United Methodist Church, Des Moines, Iowa. Jordan and her husband, Frank Jordan, a 1929 IWU graduate, are longtime friends of Illinois Wesleyan, with the organ in Evelyn Chapel bearing their names.

To wrap up the evening's events, Gehrenbeck chose Felix Mendelssohn's Overture to the oratorio *St. Paul*. The piece not only brings closure to the concert, but to his career at Illinois Wesleyan as well. Gehrenbeck played the overture when he applied for his IWU position 25 years ago, and has not played it since.

"It's going to feel funny," Gehrenbeck said about playing his final faculty recital. "I've been nostalgic lately. I feel fortunate I've been able to keep this up so many years."

Before coming to Illinois Wesleyan, Gehrenbeck already had a distinguished career as an organist.

It started when he was five years old when he fell in love with the old Tracker Action Organ at his church.

Gehrenbeck started taking piano lessons from a teacher who was also an organist. Though he really wanted to play the organ, Gehrenbeck said his teacher wisely put off organ lessons until he was in eighth grade. By then, he had shown the ability to switch instruments and tackle the pipes.

In 1953, Gehrenbeck graduated with bachelor's degrees in music and journalism from Macalester College, Saint Paul, Minn. He went on to study sacred music at Union Theological Seminary in New York, after some prodding by music professors at Macalester.

When Gehrenbeck received his master's degree in sacred music in 1957, he worked as a full-time organist at a Presbyterian Church in Caldwell, N. J., until 1961.

Gehrenbeck spent the next 10 years working part-time on his doctorate at the seminary, while he supervised other students who went on to play organs in their respective churches. Seven of those years were spent working on his

dissertation, a four-volume, 1,931-page study that coincided with the year of his birth—1931.

“I think it originally came out to 1,928 pages,” Gehrenbeck joked. “So I added a couple more indexes to bring it to 1,931.”

The dissertation focused on a collection of 16th -century motets by Italian Ottaviano Petrucci, who created works for chorus. Motets are vocal compositions used in church services.

“Petrucci was the Johann Guttenberg of music printing,” he said.

Gehrenbeck came to Illinois Wesleyan in 1971 after receiving his doctorate, and moved into a house across from Dodds, a residence hall. That same house was physically moved to Douglas Street two years ago to make way for the Center for Natural Science Learning and Research parking lot.

Despite the campus changes Gehrenbeck has witnessed during the past 25 years, he said things in the School of Music have “remained remarkably stable.”

Gehrenbeck said his best memories of those stable times include a semiannual series he coordinated in celebration of Johann Sebastian Bach’s 300th birthday in 1985. The series began in 1976, ran for 10 consecutive years and incorporated 43 organists.

Gehrenbeck will also miss his second home—Evelyn Chapel.

“I love that place, I love that organ. That will be the hardest thing about leaving,” Gehrenbeck said. “That chapel is a real jewel on this campus.”

In 1994, Gehrenbeck had a chance to leave his love for the chapel for posterity. His recital celebrating the chapel’s 10th anniversary was recorded on compact disc.

“If I had to sum it all up, I’d say the biggest joy has been teaching so many promising students who’ve gone on to do wonderful things in church and university settings,” Gehrenbeck said. “We keep in touch, and that’s very gratifying.”

Though the Bach series remains one of Gehrenbeck’s fondest memories, he plans to continue his homage to the famed composer well into his retirement.

“A project I’m wanting to get going on is a hymnal strictly for Bach,” he said.

Gehrenbeck began work on the project during a recent sabbatical, and is anxious to work on the project, which he predicts will take at least five years.

Retirement also will give Gehrenbeck time to work on his second love—journalism.

“I’d like to get into desktop publishing, at least part-time,” he said.

Gehrenbeck also wants to travel and play the organ at various churches.

"There is a real need for organists, since so few organists are coming out of secondary or undergraduate education," Gehrenbeck said. "I think it has to do with economics. Students realize they can't make a living playing the organ."

"People today are fascinated with electronics and the sounds they can make. But for me, the thrill and the mystery of the organ is still there."