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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Edmund Toliver, a 1970 Illinois Wesleyan University graduate and an internationally acclaimed bass with the Dortmund Stadt Opera in Austria, will debut Aug. 11 with the New York City Opera in a production of Verdi's tragic story of lust, betrayal, and murder, "Rigoletto".

Toliver, a native of Greenport, Long Island, N.Y., will sing the role of Sparafucile, a cutthroat and "hit man" who for 10 crowns offers his "services" to Rigoletto, the hunchback court jester.

"This New York debut," says Robert Kvam, director of IWU's School of Music, "brings full circle the career of Ed Toliver, returning him to the United States from a highly successful tenure in European opera houses."

Kvam characterizes Toliver's voice as "powerful yet sensitive" and predicts that Toliver "will soon be discovered by American directors and impresarios, which should take his career to even greater heights."

As an IWU student, Toliver studied voice with David Nott, a professor of vocal music, and sang in the Collegiate Choir, conducted by Nott. He had roles in School of Music productions including "Madame Butterfly", "Falstaff", "Magic Flute", and "Cosi fan tutte".

Toliver earned a Master of Music degree (1972) and a Doctor of Musical Arts degree (1976) from the University of Michigan.

Following completion of his graduate work, Toliver went to Vienna to study for seven years with Professor Franz Schuch-Tovini. Toliver was one of only two Americans in the final round of the prestigious International Tchaikovsky Musical Competition in 1978 in Moscow. He also was a member of the Opera Studio of the Vienna State Opera (1979) and received a study grant from the National Opera Institute in Washington, D.C., in 1980. Toliver toured Japan with the Solo Ensemble of the Vienna State Opera in 1982.

During the 1980's, Toliver performed at New York City's famed Carnegie Hall and Avery Fisher Hall and continued his studies under an award from the Metropolitan Opera National Council.

Toliver's European engagements include performances with the Regional Theatre in Coburg, Bavaria, and the Graz Opera in Styria, Austria. While at the Graz Opera, Toliver performed an array of roles in "Tosca" and "La Boheme" by Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924); "Magic Flute" by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791); "Carmen" by Georges Bizet (1838-1875); "Mefistofele" by Arrigo Boito (1852-1918); "Don Carlos" and "Rigoletto" by Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901); and "Siegfried", "Die Walkure", and "Das Rheingold" by Richard Wagner (1813-1883).

"Rigoletto", based on an unsuccessful 1832 play by the French writer Victor Hugo, was first performed in Venice in 1851. Much of the opera surrounds relationships among various nobles and courtiers and their various mistresses and seductions.

Rigoletto is cursed by the Count Monterone for his taunts when the count's daughter is seduced by the Duke of Mantua, a libertine. Brooding over the curse, Rigoletto meets Sparafucile, a hired assassin, in a dark alley. The killer offers the jester his services. Rigoletto questions the murderer--noting his name and where he can be found--but doesn't accept the offer. Rigoletto ponders the parallels between himself and the killer--one uses his tongue as a weapon while the other uses a sword. Rigoletto also indulges in self-pity over his lot as a jester and reflects on his hatred for the other courtiers.

Rigoletto becomes the target of revenge-minded courtiers when his daughter, Gilda, is abducted--a symbol of the curse's reality. He combs a palace, searching for his kidnapped daughter. As the plot unfolds, it becomes clear that Rigoletto's beloved daughter is another of the Duke's conquests. Rigoletto vows revenge on the Duke; Gilda pleads with her father to forgive the nobleman.

Rigoletto and Sparafucile hatch a plot to kill the Duke of Mantua, while Gilda pleads with her father to save her lover. The plot features Gilda's betrayal when the Duke consorts with another woman. Gilda is instructed to dress as a man and leave for Verona. Rigoletto and Sparafucile transact their business: 10 sovereigns are paid before the murder with 10 more promised after the evil deed is done. Rigoletto savors the thought of personally tossing the Duke's corpse into the river Mincio.

Sparafucile's daughter, Maddalena, the most recent object of the Duke's lust pleads with her father to spare the nobleman. Father and daughter cut a deal: If a stranger should visit the inn before midnight, Sparafucile will murder the stranger and hand that body over to Rigoletto instead of the Duke's corpse. Gilda overhears the plan and decides to sacrifice herself for the man she loves. Sparafucile murders Gilda with a dagger when she enters the inn.

At midnight after a storm, Rigoletto meets Sparafucile, pays him off, and receives a bag containing a body. Dragging the sack to the river, Rigoletto hears the supposedly dead Duke's voice singing a refrain from one of the opera's leading arias. Rigoletto rips open the bag, finding Gilda inside. Grief-stricken, he watches his daughter die, knowing that Monterone's curse has been fulfilled.

The New York City Opera production of "Rigoletto" will be performed Aug. 11, 21, 26, and Sept. 3, 9, and 12 at 8 p.m (EDT); matinee performances at 1:30 p.m. are scheduled for Aug. 15, 29, and Sept. 20. Performances are at Lincoln Center in New York City. Ticket prices range from \$10 to \$68. Tickets may be purchased by calling the New York City Opera at 212/870-5570.