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## Teacher, Director, Author, Former, Radio-TV Actor, Jared Brown, Head of IWU's Theatre Program

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April 17, 1997

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Teacher, Director, Author, Former Radio-TV Actor

### **Jared Brown, Head of IWU's Theatre Program, Named 1997 DuPont Teaching Excellence Award Winner**

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Jared Brown, professor and director of the School of Theatre Arts, will receive Illinois Wesleyan University's top teaching award at the annual Honors Day Convocation, April 23 (Wednesday).

The \$1,000 DuPont Award for Teaching Excellence--which will be presented to Brown at an 11 a.m. university-wide convocation--is sponsored by DuPont Agricultural Products, Inc., of El Paso, Ill., a subsidiary of the Delaware-based chemical industry leader, E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Co. Ken Cook, plant manager of DuPont Agricultural Products, will make the award presentation.

"I'm thrilled to receive the DuPont teaching excellence award," Brown said. "I've heard seven speeches by other award recipients and the level of those speeches has been very high. I'm thrilled to be in that company.

"There's no greater honor for a teacher," than to receive an award for teaching excellence, Brown added, "I'm very appreciative."

Brown's speech is entitled, "The State of the Art." It will focus on his belief that the American theatre--including the film and television industries--is in crisis. Brown also will offer remedies to the crisis.

"I see signs of hope," Brown said, "and they are linked in some ways to the type of training actors and other theatre professionals receive in the liberal arts."

The Honors Day Convocation, which is open to the public, free-of-charge, will be held in Westbrook Auditorium, Presser Hall, 303 E. University St., Bloomington.

The 1998 recipient of the teaching award will be announced at the Honors Day Convocation.

James Matthews, associate professor of French, received the DuPont teaching award in 1995, and Kathleen O'Gorman, associate professor of English, received the award last year.

IWU's Promotion and Tenure Committee selects award recipients, based on teaching, scholarship, and service.

#### **Brown's Background**

As a student, Brown was headed toward a career as a professional actor. After a year at Ithaca College, he left campus for two years during which he performed in some minor acting roles on television.

"I was unhappy with the kind of work I was doing," Brown said. "When I was in college I was

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moved by the great plays I was acting in and excited by my work. But acting on uninspired television shows didn't excite me at all."

Brown returned to Ithaca College in 1957, graduating in 1960. In 1960-61, Brown was on the West Coast trying to launch a career as a TV scriptwriter.

"I found that work unrewarding," Brown said. In 1961, he entered graduate school at San Francisco State College, earning a master's degree in 1962, and a doctorate in theatre from the University of Minnesota in 1967.

"I love the academic theatre," Brown said, "and I'm very pleased with the choice I made."

### **Brown on Teaching**

Brown, who has been teaching theatre arts for about 30 years, has some very definite opinions about what makes for a good teacher.

"A good teacher," he said, "has a love for his or her discipline, students, and the academic life. A good teacher is curious, always attempting to learn more. And, of course, the teacher wants to share his views, his knowledge, and his passions with students. But, in the best of times, that's a reciprocal process, for the students share as well, and, in some mysterious way, we come to enlighten and inspire one another."

### **Brown's Teaching Philosophy**

Brown has taught courses on theatre history, directing, theories of acting and directing, and play writing at IWU. Every other year, he takes a travel course to London and Stratford, England.

Brown's approach to directing plays offers insights into his teaching philosophy. As a director, his goal is to work with each actor on an individual basis.

"That means finding what motivates each actor," he explained, "and what can help to elicit the best performance from that actor. Similarly, as a teacher, I try to discover how each student can be stimulated to produce his or her best work."

Good teaching and directing for Brown also require planning. Brown earmarks much time to carefully plan classes, with a clear eye on concepts and goals. He plans classes months in advance and spends at least 60 minutes going over lesson plans before class.

### **Approach to Research and Writing**

Writing also is an integral part of Brown's approach to teaching.

"As a writer," he said, "I'm not interested in repeating what others have done. I write about areas that excite me and fill a need."

Brown was spurred to write "The Theatre in America During the Revolution," published in 1995 by Cambridge University Press, because he couldn't find adequate sources for students to use for research papers in various theatre history courses. Only one book, a 19th-century effort by historian George O.

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Seilhamer, has attempted to chronicle this period in detail. However, Brown points out, that work is riddled with errors.

His book, "The Fabulous Lunts: A Biography of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne" (1986), was inspired by the fact that the memory of these great American stage actors was fading.

"While they were alive," Brown explained, "only one biography was written about them and it focused on them as socialites and celebrities--not as great artists. Lunt and Fontanne were not pleased by that book and they told their heirs they didn't want another biography written. I had to persuade the heirs to allow me to interview them and to give me access to the Lunts' correspondence."

Brown's book, "Zero Mostel: A Biography" (1989) chronicles the life of the Tony Award-winning actor best known for his role in "Fiddler on the Roof," who was blacklisted as a communist during the McCarthy era of the 1940s and 1950s.

### **Blacklisting**

Brown's interest in writing a book about Mostel originated in his wish to tell the story of how actors, directors, writers, and other Hollywood figures were blacklisted in the late 1940s and 1950s on charges that they were communists.

Brown has a personal interest in this unsavory period of American history since his father, John Brown, a radio and movie actor, was "turned in" as a communist sympathizer to the U.S. House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) by his best friend, another actor.

In an article about his book on Mostel, published in the winter, 1994, edition of *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine*, Brown told Managing Editor Elaine Graybill: "What I remember [of my father's experience] is just terror and real devastation.

"Prior to testifying," Brown said of his father, "he had been on more radio programs as an actor than anyone, ever. He used to do as many as 25 shows a week, performing say, at NBC, then jumping into a taxi to go to ABC for a show, then doing the same to get to CBS."

Brown's father performed with entertainment legends such as Fred Allen on radio and in the early 1940s he followed Jack Benny to the West Coast as part of the ensemble cast of Benny's radio program. He also appeared in the Benny film, "The Horn Blows at Midnight."

Brown told Graybill he never asked his father if he was a communist, but he believes his father was a suspect, in part, because he helped establish the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) and because he was an activist in the union.

Brown also was interested in writing about Mostel's life and career since he became more popular after he was blacklisted, an unusual circumstance.

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"Most lives and careers," Brown recalled, "were ruined and lost. Illnesses related to blacklisting caused the death of many people."

Brown's father died at age 52 of a heart attack. He told Graybill: "There's no question in my mind that the blacklisting killed him. Almost no one came out of it whole."

For a brief period, starting when Brown was about age 10, he and his father had their own radio program, "Barnaby and Mr. O'Malley." As a teenager, Brown also worked in "The Life of Riley," on radio, then on television as a friend of Riley's son. He also acted on other national radio and television programs, including: *Lux Radio Theatre*, *Ozzie and Harriet*, and *Lassie*.

#### **First Novel, Director**

While on a recent teaching leave, Brown wrote his first novel, a work that begins comically, but deepens and turns dark in tone, as the lives of two people are traced over the 27 years spanning 1954-81, with emphasis on the years 1954, 1966, 1979, and 1981. The manuscript is being reviewed by a publisher.

He also spent part of his leave writing five articles for "American National Biography," a multi-volume reference to be published by Oxford University Press.

Brown is an accomplished director, who last summer directed Broadway, television, and film actor James Sutorius, a 1967 IWU graduate, in a production of Herb Gardner's comedy-drama, "A Thousand Clowns" at IWU's McPherson Theatre. During the summer of 1995, Brown directed famed actor John Randolph in his Tony Award-winning role in Neil Simon's play, "Broadway Bound." Brown has directed 13 plays at IWU, ranging from modern musical comedies to Greek tragedies.

He joined IWU in 1989 as professor of theatre and director of the School of Theatre Arts. Brown was a faculty member at Western Illinois University from 1965 to 1989.

#### **Brown's Favorites**

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) is Brown's favorite playwright and his favorite Chekhov play is "Three Sisters," which he once directed. Brown is drawn to the Russian writer's work because his plays combine different elements, such as comedy and drama.

"Bringing together disparate facets of life," Brown explained, "is a very special accomplishment."

Brown also is attracted to dramas with a strong subtext, material that lies beneath the lines.

#### **IWU Theatre Program**

"I'm sure there's not a better place to get an undergraduate degree in theatre than at Illinois Wesleyan," Brown said.

He credits the strength of IWU's theatre arts program to its scope--acting, set design, direction--as well as the commitment of faculty to students and the opportunity undergraduate students have to practice

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## **IWU Teaching Excellence Award/5**

the theatre arts since they are not competing against graduate students.

"IWU faculty are real teachers," Brown said. "They aren't frustrated actors who really want to be somewhere else. They are outstanding teachers who know how to bring out the best in our students.

"Among my proudest moments at IWU," Brown added, "are the interactions I've had with students. I prize and value them."

IWU enrolled 112 theatre majors for the 1996-97 school year. Brown estimates the program will grow to about 120 students next year.

### **About IWU**

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,900 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. A \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994; and a \$25 million science building opened in the fall of 1995. The \$4.6 million Center for Liberal Arts--a facility housing 60 faculty offices, six classrooms, and other facilities for social science, humanities, business and economics, and interdisciplinary studies' faculty--is slated to open next fall, as well as a \$6.8 million residence hall, accommodating about 118 students. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 161 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Baron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition.