



Summer 7-13-1998

IWU Students Star in "Greater Tuna"

Stew Salowitz
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

Recommended Citation

Salowitz, Stew, "IWU Students Star in "Greater Tuna"" (1998). *News and Events*. 7001.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/7001>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

13 July 1998

CONTACT: Stew Salowitz, 309-556-3206

IWU Students Star in "Greater Tuna"

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. -- Illinois Wesleyan University seniors Thomas Taylor and Paul Kneer are starring in the school's summer theatre production of the two-man comedy "Greater Tuna."

The play, which is directed by IWU theatre arts professor John Ficca, opened July 6 and will run July 9, 11, 16, and 18 at 8 p.m.; July 10, 13, and 17 at 7 p.m.; and July 12 and 19 at 2 p.m. at McPherson Theatre, 304 E. Graham St., Bloomington.

Taylor, a theatre arts major from Wauconda, Ill., portrays Thurston Wheelis, Elmer Watkins, Hank Bumiller, Bertha Bumiller, Yippy, Leonardo Childers, Pearl Burras, R.R. Snively, Reverend Spikes and Sheriff Givens.

Taylor also appeared as "Lloyd Dallas" in the IWU Summer Theatre production of "Noises Off" in June. As an Illinois Wesleyan student he has performed in the ensemble of "The Caucasian Chalk Circle"; in the productions of "Arcadia" (as "Bernard Valentine"); "Into the Woods" (as "Cinderella's Prince"); "The Crucible" (as "Governor Danforth"); "You Can't Take it With You" (as "Grandpa"); and "Blue" (as "Derek Jarman").

A graduate of Wauconda High School, Taylor is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Harold W. Taylor, 26125 W. Laurel Ave., Wauconda.

Kneer, a theatre arts major from Appleton, Wis., plays the roles of Arles Struvie, Didi Snively, Harold Dean Lattimer, Petey Fisk, Jody Bumiller, Stanley Bumiller, Charlene Bumiller, Chad Hartford, Phinas Blye and Vera Carp.

As an Illinois Wesleyan student, Kneer has appeared in the productions of "Orphans" (as "Treat"); "Impromptu" (as "Tony"); "Counting the Ways" (as "He"); "Moonchildren" (as "Mike"); "Into the Woods" (as "Rapunzel's Prince"); and most recently, in the ensemble of "The Caucasian Chalk Circle."

A graduate of Appleton West High School, Kneer is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene E. Kneer, 3030 N. McDonald St., Appleton, Wis.

The History of "Greater Tuna"

Few shows have sustained the longevity and popularity that "Greater Tuna" has enjoyed over the years. "Greater Tuna" began as a simple party skit based on a political cartoon more than 15 years ago in Austin, Texas. Creators Joe Sears, Jaston Williams and Ed Howard were the imaginative authors that parlayed the sketch into a critically-acclaimed production that has entertained audiences across the country ever since.

"Greater Tuna" is the hilarious comedy about Texas' third smallest town, where "the Lion's Club is too liberal and Patsy Cline never dies." The eclectic band of citizens that make up this town are portrayed by only two performers, making this satire on life in rural America even more delightful as they depict all of the inhabitants of Tuna — men, women, children and animals.

The early tour dates found an instant audience coast to coast as the show played to packed houses in San Francisco, Atlanta, Houston and Hartford before original stars Sears and Williams found themselves performing "Greater Tuna" for over a year Off-Broadway at Circle in the Square Theatre. This successful New York run led to an HBO Special produced by Norman Lear which took the "Tuna" phenomenon to every city in America.

By 1985, "Greater Tuna" was the most produced play in the United States with schools, colleges, community and professional theaters all anxious to add the hit comedy to their repertoire. Meanwhile, Sears and Williams were continuing their whirlwind tours in such prestigious theaters as the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. and the Marines Memorial Theatre in San Francisco.

The show's popularity crossed the Atlantic in 1988 as the highlight of Scotland's famed Edinburgh Festival while in the U.S., the Marines Memorial Theatre in San Francisco began a local production of "Greater Tuna" that ran continuously for a record-breaking seven years. The popularity of "Greater Tuna" has even extended to the most distinguished home in the country, with Command Performances at the White House upon the invitation of President and Mrs. Bush in 1990 and again in 1991.

The demand for a sequel then became so great that Williams, Sears and Howard created "A Tuna Christmas," in which the beloved citizens of Tuna contribute their special brand of humor to that holiday. In December of 1994, "A Tuna Christmas" took Broadway by storm, playing to rave reviews and earning Sears a Tony Award nomination for Best Actor in a Play.

Meanwhile, "Greater Tuna" has been entertaining audiences at the Tuna Little Theatre in the Wyndham Anatole Hotel as Dallas' longest-running comedy. This November will mark the 1,000th performance of "A Tuna Christmas" as they make their way around the country this holiday season.

To complete the "Tuna Trilogy," Williams, Sears and Howard have been writing the final installment entitled "Red, White and Tuna" which will go on its national premiere tour in the spring of 1998.

About Illinois Wesleyan University

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,000 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 center opened in fall 1995. The \$5.1 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, opened in August 1997, as did a new \$6.8 million residence hall. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 159 highly-selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive +" in its latest edition.