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Classical Pianist to Speak at Commencement

March 26, 2012

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Internationally acclaimed classical pianist Awadagin Pratt will deliver the address for Illinois Wesleyan University's **Commencement** ceremony on Sunday, April 29 at 1 p.m. on the Eckley Quadrangle. Pratt will also receive an honorary doctor of humane letters degree during the ceremony. Over 500 graduates are expected to participate.

In the event of heavy rains or weather alerts, the ceremony and reception will be held in the Shirk Center (302 E. Emerson St., Bloomington).

Originally from Pittsburgh, Pa., Pratt, whose first name is pronounced (ah-wah-dodge-in), is currently an associate professor of piano and artist-in-residence at the College Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati. He began studying piano at the age of six. After moving to Normal, Ill., three years later, he began studying the violin as well, and participated in the IWU Music Preparatory Program. At the age of 16, he entered the University of Illinois to study piano, violin and conducting.



Awadagin Pratt

Following his studies in Champaign, Ill., Pratt enrolled at the Peabody Conservatory of Music at Johns Hopkins University, where he became the first student in the school's history to receive diplomas in three performance areas--piano, violin and conducting. Pratt recently received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Johns Hopkins University in recognition of this achievement, in addition to his work in the field of classical music.

In 1992, Pratt became the first African American pianist to win the Naumburg International Piano Competition. He has held performances across the nation, including recitals at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Carnegie Hall. In 2009, he performed in concert at the White House as part of the Music Series organized by First Lady Michelle Obama. He has also performed at the White House during President Clinton's term.

Pratt has performed with a number of orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic and the Minnesota Orchestra, as well as a number of symphonies throughout the United States. He has toured internationally, from Japan to Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Poland, Israel and South Africa.

In 1997, Pratt, along with family members, created the Pratt Music Foundation, established to promote music education with an emphasis on classical strings and piano. Music scholarships are granted to elementary and secondary students in the Bloomington-Normal area through Illinois Wesleyan's Music Preparatory Program.

As a conductor, Pratt has worked closely with Leonard Slatkin, music director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. He has also participated in the American Symphony Orchestra League and has conducted a number of symphonies across the nation, as well as two orchestras in Japan.

Pratt is signed under the Angel/EMI label. His recordings include A Long Way From Normal, an all Beethoven Sonata CD, Live from South Africa, Transformations and an all Bach disc with the St. Lawrence String quartet. His recent recordings

include Brahms Sonatas for Cello and Piano with world-renowned cellist Zuill Bailey, as well with the Harlem Quartet for a recording of the music of Judith Lang Zaimont.

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