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## World-Renowned Tenor Polenzani, an EIU Grad, to Perform at Doudna

Mar-14-2011

Matthew Polenzani, one of today's most celebrated lyric tenors, will return to Eastern Illinois University this month to sing in the building where his stellar career began.

Polenzani, a 1991 EIU graduate whose accolades include the Metropolitan Opera's 2008 Beverly Sills Artist Award, will perform at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 31, in the Doudna Fine Arts Center's Dvorak Concert Hall.

Polenzani is renowned for the artistic versatility and fresh lyricism that he brings to concert and operatic appearances on the world's most prestigious stages, but he is quick to show gratitude for the guidance he received at Eastern.

In the late 1980s, Polenzani was a fledgling music-education student who had no plans to become a singer, let alone one of the world's most celebrated classical artists.

One day, EIU Professor Jerry Daniels handed him a cassette of classical music. Polenzani threw the tape into a box and ignored it -- until one fateful day three years later, when he ran across it and decided to give it a listen.

"The first thing on it was one of the great tenors," Polenzani said. "I didn't realize that music like that, or singing like that existed. That was the first time opera got under my skin.

"I was green," he said. "I'd never been to the opera. The first one I saw was the first one I was in."

That opera, he remembers well, was EIU's production of "La Finta Giardiniera." It was the beginning of an opera career that has led Polenzani to star roles and concert work on the world's finest stages, with the world's greatest artists.

Polenzani has been acclaimed in symphonic appearances with Lorin Maazel and the New York Philharmonic, Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony, Pierre Boulez and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and many more. He was the 2004 Richard Tucker Award winner.



Matthew Polenzani

In a single recent season, he was honored to have appeared on all three stages of Carnegie Hall.

This season, his schedule includes performances at the Metropolitan Opera, the Bayerische Staatsoper and the Opéra National de Paris, as well as a tour of Japan with the Royal Opera House.

Looking back, Polenzani is amazed and grateful for the guidance he received at Eastern.

"I didn't understand, and I didn't know what was out there," he said. "It took time and patience from the faculty, who saw I had talent but lacked focus. They nurtured it and allowed it to grow.

"Jerry Daniels is the one who did the pushing in the opera direction. He was just extremely instrumental in getting me on the right track. It's the special gift of an educator to recognize a student's talent and that that talent needs a special type of nurturing to move it forward, and I got that here (at Eastern)."

At the age of 23, Polenzani earned a significant scholarship to attend Yale. Although he was one of the youngest in the master's program -- some were 30 and older -- he had had more practical experience than most, thanks to Eastern.

"I had sung with an orchestra three or four times. I had sung some full-length operas," he said. "Others had maybe understudied or only done scenes programs."

"I always tell kids, it doesn't matter where you go to school. What is important is that you find a good teacher and get a chance to practice your craft," he said.

"A seed was planted, and that's the point of an undergraduate institution -- to plant a seed, to help it grow as much as you can, and not to harm the holder of the seed. That was absolutely the case for me at Eastern."

Tickets for Polenzani's EIU recital are \$15 for the general public, \$12 for EIU employees and senior citizens, and \$7 for students. Tickets may be purchased in person at the Doudna Fine Arts Center Box Office, by telephone at 217-581-3110, or online at <http://www.doudnatix.com>.

The recital is made possible by gracious support from the EIU Classical Music Series Endowment Fund. The Doudna Fine Arts Center is a division of the EIU College of Arts and Humanities.