

Alumni Pride: Gillingham hits high note as top composer

by Natalie Johnson - Thursday, July 07, 2011

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/13150/alumni-pride-gillingham-hits-high-note-as-top-composer/>

A preeminent composer of contemporary wind and percussion music, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh alumnus David Gillingham '69 and MST '77, enralls audiences around the world with his rhythms, melodies and instrumentation.

Gillingham, a music professor at Central Michigan University, will be one of four UW Oshkosh graduates to return to campus during Homecoming 2011 to receive the Distinguished Alumni Award from the UWO Alumni Association. He will be honored at an awards reception and dinner Friday, Oct. 21.

After graduating with a bachelor's degree in music education and a master's degree in teaching from UW Oshkosh, Gillingham went on to earn a doctorate in music theory/composition from Michigan State University in 1980.

His doctoral dissertation, "Concerto for Bass Trombone and Wind Ensemble," won the 1981 DeMoulin Award.

From 1981 to 1984, Gillingham worked as an assistant professor of music at Spring Arbor University in Michigan, where he taught music theory and composition. In 1984, he joined the faculty at Central Michigan University.

In 1990, his composition "Heroes, Lost and Fallen" won the prestigious International Barlow Competition.

Peter Loel Boonshaft, the director of bands at Hofstra University, described "Heroes, Lost and Fallen," as "one of the finest works ever created, and will long stand the test of time and custom."

"Without question, Dr. Gillingham is one of the world's finest composers," he added. "His works for wind band number some of the most prized and cherished works for the medium."

Over the course of Gillingham's distinguished career, his musical vision has touched thousands of music professionals, tens of thousands of music students and hundreds of thousands of music patrons.

In his own words:

Favorite UW Oshkosh professor:

Two actually — Dr. Roger Dennis and Dr. James Kohn.

Favorite UW Oshkosh memory:

Band tour with Dr. Niece

Achievements you are most proud of:

- Winning first prize in the Barlow Competition for “Heroes, Lost and Fallen.”
- Publishing more than 100 band, choir, percussion and chamber works.
- Being recognized as one of the nation’s leading composers of band music.
- Winning the district championship with a barbershop quartet and chorus. Competing in the international barbershop competition four times with my MountainTown Singers.
- Traveling to Japan, Australia and the Czech Republic as a recognized American composer.

What does your UW Oshkosh education mean to you?

It provided the basis of my career in music. In 1976, I took a class in 20th century composition with Dr. Roger Dennis, and it changed my life. Dr. Dennis told me I had the talent to be a really good composer, and my career path changed at that point to music composition. I traveled to Michigan State University to pursue the Ph.D. in music theory/composition.

What advice would you give today’s UW Oshkosh students?

Pursue a career path that will make you happy and don’t use money to measure your happiness. When a window of opportunity opens, take it ... it opens for a reason.

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- [Seven UWO alumni to receive top honors](#)
- [UW Oshkosh Homecoming 2011](#)