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Scoring Success: Aidan Byrnes Composes Music for Shakespeare's 'The Winter's Tale'

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Aidan Byrnes has turned his experiences into real success over the last year.

A sophomore music business major at Lindenwood University, Byrnes was approached by Lindenwood Instructor of Music Professor Adam Donohue last spring about composing music for an upcoming production. Byrnes jumped at the opportunity and began scoring music for Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale," a Lindenwood student production that sold out five of six shows at the Emerson Black Box Theater inside the J. Scheidegger Center for the Arts last month.

"The Winter's Tale" was originally published in the First Folio of 1623. The play takes place in what is now modern-day Italy and the Czech Republic. It centers around the theme of love, with tragedy and some comedy intertwined. Since then, it has been remade in various productions worldwide, including the 2014 Warner Bros. film starring Colin Farrell.

When Byrnes accepted the role of producing the music for the production, he quickly went to work. He spent most of last summer relentlessly researching, reading, and studying. He listened to and took notes on specific musical instruments to incorporate into his work.

Byrnes' involvement in this production demonstrates Lindenwood's commitment to putting students first by providing ample opportunities to gain real-world experience that translates into real success.

This experience also presented many unique challenges for Byrnes, mainly because there were many moving parts from numerous people involved in the play's production.

"Everyone's ideas built off one another, creating this 'interlocking' between it all," Byrnes said. "For me, I had made judgments based on the designs for the set and costumes. Throughout rehearsals, too, I made decisions influenced by the performances of the actors."

Byrnes also experimented with different sounds. His process for finding the perfect musical tones for the production was unique: He used synthesizers, acoustic recordings of instruments, and he even took a violin bow to a metal magazine rack to gauge which sounds he liked best.

“What was particularly challenging was figuring out how to make music that could support what’s on stage and not overwhelm, but still be emotionally effective,” Byrnes said. “Many of the pieces were created from a combination of improvisation and sound design. I worked with colleagues and professors in the music department to get acoustic recordings of guitar, violin, and double bass.”

With aspirations of working in music and multimedia after graduation, Byrnes was thrilled with this experience. He will use this collaboration as a springboard in his professional endeavors.

“Being a part of the production was incredibly inspiring and educational,” he said. “I had the opportunity to experience what it’s like to work in an environment with multiple designers working on a single project.

“Being my first time working with theater, I was exposed to avenues I hadn’t considered before, and I learned new ways to approach writing. I really enjoy collaborating with all the talent at Lindenwood, and I had a fantastic experience working with the theater department.”