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Excellence in Teaching Award Citation for Richard Bjella

Lawrence University

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University Award for Excellence in Teaching

Richard Bjella, Professor of Music

"Rick Bjella, you came to Lawrence in 1984 from the University of Iowa, where you did your graduate work in Choral Conducting. Immediately, you established yourself as a superb Director of Choral Studies, helping to bring the joy of music to your many students and to the large and enthusiastic audiences that have had the good fortune to hear the choirs and chorales you have directed. The performances you have led have been praised with words such as 'amazing,' 'incredible,' and 'miraculous.' It is well known that anyone attending a Rick Bjella concert can expect to experience music that is beautiful, performed with exquisite ability, and profoundly moving.

As a teacher, you are described as passionate, inspiring, energetic, spirited, and knowledgeable. In addition to leading the Concert Choir and the Viking Chorale, you also teach courses in conducting and music education, achieving noteworthy success in each of these activities. Your high standards are applauded by all who know you. The work you demand from your students is accepted with the grace of those who know the final result will be worth every bit of expended energy. A significant number of students cite you as the most influential faculty member they have experienced at Lawrence. Faculty praise you as warm and sincere. Your accomplishments have led to many awards, including the Hanns Kretzschmar Award for Excellence in the Arts. Your humanitarianism and desire to share your passion for music have led you to devote time to teaching young children at a summer music camp in Haiti as well as at many schools, both locally and nationally.

Those who have watched you work with choir groups have described your effect as magical. Before a concert you are able to make the most anxious of performers feel relaxed and ready to achieve great success. During the concert itself, you conduct with tremendous energy and a clear sense of joy that transforms the music hall into a cathedral of beauty and fulfillment. It is this magic that makes you a wonderful teacher.

For your skill, dedication, and sense of joy that have contributed so richly to the education of Lawrence's students and the pleasure of so many others, I am pleased to honor you today with the 2007 Award for Excellence in Teaching."

Citation read by President Jill Beck at Commencement, 2007