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Contact

Melissa Weber, Director of Communications
Phone: 320-589-6414, weberm@morris.umn.edu

Jenna Ray, Editor/Writer
Phone: 320-589-6068, jrray@morris.umn.edu

Joseph Carucci composes theme music for new Pioneer Public TV program

Summary: "Postcards" theme music underscores stories of the people of western Minnesota.

(August 4, 2010)-Joseph Carucci, University of Minnesota, Morris assistant professor of music and jazz ensembles and combos director, was featured on "Postcards," a new weekly Pioneer Public Television program. He composed the theme music and was featured in the program's first episode: "Postcards: The Making of Postcards." It may be seen on the Pioneer Web site at pioneer.org/Postcards_Episodes.

"Postcards" explores the art, history, and cultural heritage of western Minnesota and beyond. It airs on Sundays at 7 p.m. with rebroadcasts on Thursdays at 7 p.m.

Familiar with his "creative and curious attitude toward music," Athena Kildegaard, poet, UMM English instructor, and "Postcards" contributor, recommended Carucci to Eric Olson, Pioneer executive producer and the show's host. Their collaboration began as a "conversation"—not about how the theme should sound but what words provoked musical images in the composer's mind. Carucci's charge was to bring the words alive, connecting the theme music with the show's format of "travel and talk."

"When Joe and I first met," says Olson, "I had not yet produced a single episode of "Postcards." So Joe had nothing visual to use as a guide. All we had for Joe were vague words to describe what we hoped our show would be." But Carucci was unfazed. This was just another variation on the literary references and images of the natural world that are the usual sources of his compositions. Of the many possibilities offered—words like "art," "outdoors," "history," and "heritage"—Carucci chose "wandering" as most representative of the show's spirit.

Carucci accomplished the job by mingling tradition with technology, using instruments, piano and woodwinds, to compose and a computer to document and manipulate the composition. He then orchestrated it and finalized the work with an ensemble of local musicians, tweaking as he went along, keeping in mind the words and their visual associations. Composing several variations of the theme to use throughout the program completed the cycle.

The synthesis of spoken word and music became, in Olson's words, "a grand theme song that had a distinct local flavor to it." Kildegaard was equally pleased. Observing that "Joe doesn't stop with the expected," she praised his music for giving "Postcards" "a vibrant and surprising depth."

For Carucci's part, he considered it an honor to collaborate with Eric Olson and compose the theme music for "Postcards." "The documentary does a wonderful job presenting the beautiful landscape and the inspiring culture and history of western Minnesota," he said.

Pioneer is preparing for a new "Postcards" season and looking for more stories of the people of western Minnesota to tell. Having lived in the area for only one year, Joe Carucci has already become one of them.

“Postcards” is funded by a Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund grant.

Pioneer Public Television is a Public Broadcasting System (PBS) affiliate serving more than 375,000 households across Minnesota, South Dakota, and Iowa.

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