



“Art: Luxury or Necessity?” You Decide



Stew performing in Oshkosh November 2011. (Photo courtesy of Jacob Browning/UW Oshkosh)

BY JULIE RUSSO

The University Honors Program (UHP) at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is pleased to announce that guest artist Stew will present “Art: Luxury or Necessity?” on Thursday, October 17, in Reeve Union 227BC at 7:00 p.m.

The UHP is coordinating the talk/performance with Dr. Don Dingledine of the Department of English, who has invited Stew to address “the importance of art in our society and the importance of taking an artful approach to one’s life.”

Stew, an exceptional singer, songwriter, and playwright, is probably best known for his award-winning Broadway musical *Passing Strange*, the final performances of which were captured by director Spike Lee in the acclaimed film of the same name. *Passing Strange* is a complex, electrifying work that explores issues of race, identity, artistic expression, family, and community. Among his many other accomplishments, Stew has composed scores for musical adaptations of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet*; released more than ten albums of original music under his own name and with his band, *The Negro Problem*; and will premiere two new musicals in 2014, *The Total Bent* at New York’s Public Theater and *Family Album* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

“Art: Luxury or Necessity?” will be Stew’s second engagement here, for UW Oshkosh hosted him once before in 2011. His visit materialized by total chance and a dose of good timing when Dingledine attended a 2010 Negro Problem concert in Chicago. During a post-show CD signing, Dingledine introduced himself as a longtime fan visiting from Oshkosh, Wisconsin. “Oshkosh?” Stew wondered. “How far is that from Madison? I’ll be an artist in residence there next fall.” Dingledine immediately recalled the well-attended screening of *Passing Strange* he had cohosted with Dr. Roberta Maguire as part of the African American Studies Program’s film series the previous February, and realized the incredible opportunity that Stew’s news posed.

Might he consider visiting Oshkosh while in Madison? Stew was “enthusiastic and unbelievably nice,” but it would depend on his schedule. The two exchanged business cards. Back in Oshkosh, Dingledine and Maguire, who had seen *Passing Strange* off and on Broadway, respectively, crossed their fingers. They knew the considerable punch this artist’s live performances could deliver. When Dingledine extended an invitation a few months later, Stew did not hesitate to accept. That fall, Stew gave an especially entertaining and well-received presentation, “How to Get to Broadway by Accident: Stew Talks about *Passing Strange*, Rock and Roll vs. Musical Theater, and the Pleasures of Personal Chronology,” in a venue that was filled to capacity despite the arrival of the season’s first major snowfall.

As a Tony, Obie, and Drama Desk Award winner, Stew has been a guest of theater and music departments near and far, but our campus provided him with his first opportunity to speak to a college wide audience. In fact, Stew credits Oshkosh with reinforcing his commitment to connecting those from diverse disciplines, sensibilities, and career paths with the arts. “Anything I can do to help young people see that art is not created by magicians, but by people just like them, is worth any amount of time and energy,” he replied when Dingledine asked him about the possibility of returning this fall.

The “Stew Effect” on individuals from all backgrounds, disciplines, and fields of experience is significant, as evidenced by the response to his 2011 appearance as well as by students’ insightful reactions when they study *Passing Strange* and songs such as “Black Men Ski.” Stew’s work enriches UW Oshkosh syllabuses ranging from African American Literature, a general education and ethnic studies course, to Culture Connection, a UHP requirement in which students attend, engage in, and write about local art exhibits, music performances, and

Guest artist Stew will present “Art: Luxury or Necessity?” on Thursday, October 17, in Reeve Union 227BC at 7:00 p.m. Free parking is available in Lot 15, across from Reeve Union on Algoma Blvd

theater productions. Dingledine tells us that “How to Get to Broadway by Accident” continues to guide his approach to Culture Connection, for it presented to the audience an inviting challenge: Stew summons all of us to find our calling as artists in our own right.

While in Oshkosh, Stew will also visit an African American Literature class and two Culture Connection classes, one taught by Dingledine and the other taught by Dr. Alan Lareau of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures.

In anticipation of Stew’s return, Dingledine and Lareau will host a screening of *Passing Strange* on Thursday, October 10, in Sage Hall 1232 at 7:00 p.m.

Both events are free and open to the public. ■

Julie Russo is Assistant Director of the University Honors Program at UW Oshkosh.



BERRY FRESH
FROZEN YOGURT

**2271 Westowne Ave.
Oshkosh, Wisconsin 54904**

find us on Facebook
[facebook.com/BerryFreshFrozenYogurt13](https://www.facebook.com/BerryFreshFrozenYogurt13)

We offer

10 flavors

of frozen yogurt

& over

40 toppings!

Coming Soon!

Serving Soups & Gourmet Sandwiches

