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News Release

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New York playwright is WWCC visiting artist this year

Rock Springs ___ Award-winning New York City playwright, lyricist and director Rob Lauer is a familiar face on the Western Wyoming Community College campus this semester.

A visiting artist at WWCC during the entire 2006-07 academic year, Lauer directed the October Musical Theatre and Dance production of *Guys and Dolls*, wrote the

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script and lyrics for November's world premiere of *First Freedom*, is writing the script and lyrics for February's new musical version of *Little Women*, has designed or is designing costumes for all of the year's productions and is also teaching classes.

"I'm bowled over by the quality of everything here. The facilities are first rate and the students are very talented," Lauer said. "It's a challenge to work with students just out of high school but Jamie Young (director of WWCC's Musical Theatre and Dance program) is such a good teacher and is really serious about students getting an education and really learning the craft of theater," he added.

Lauer has 16 plays under his belt ranging from musicals to one-acts, dramas and children's plays. All 16 have been produced. In 1982, his first play *Digger* earned him the Mayhew Award and in 1990 he received both the Deep South Writers Conference Best Play Award for the satire *Tom and Penny's Yard Party* and the Paul T. Nolan Award for the gritty play *The Church Street Fantasy*.

In addition to his WWCC work on *First Freedom* and *Little Women*, Lauer is writing a novel set in Utah in the 1880s about Mormons, polygamy and freedom of religion—more specifically, "the right to have a religion that offends other people." He tries to write every day.

"*First Freedom*, a musical along the lines of *1776* that tells the story of how religious freedom and separation of church and state came about, is so important because when you mention religious freedom, both the left and the right have their own takes on it. And both miss the point," Lauer said. "Some of today's arguments, you find here.

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Patrick Henry and James Madison are the central characters and the play does not take either a right-wing or left-wing approach. A secular government is necessary in order to maintain freedom of religion,” he added. *First Freedom* is a collaborate effort envisioned and produced by Larry Sidwell of Charlottesville, Va., directed and choreographed by WWCC’s Young, scripted by Lauer and composed by Emmy winner Sam Cardon of Salt Lake City.

Raised in Portsmouth, Va., Lauer acted in high school and became interested in directing and writing plays in his late teens. He earned his bachelor’s degree, with an emphasis in writing for television and screen, from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, and then ran The Old Theater Company in Portsmouth for eight years before moving to New York City in 1990. He was an actor for three of those eight years and continues to act periodically. His younger brother is also an actor in New York City and plays a role in the Broadway musical *Lion King*.

For Lauer, writing plays provides the opportunity to explore human nature and human relationships. “I have the luxury of living in my imagination. It’s fun to see something go from an imaginary state to a living, breathing thing distinct from myself. It’s like having a child,” he said. He tends to focus on the individual, including personal autonomy and responsibility, which serves the basis of leading an ethical life. He hopes to be doing the same thing ten years from now. “I’m really blessed, I’ve never had a job outside of theater. It hasn’t done much for my pocketbook but I’ve been happy,” he said.

According to Lauer, breaking into the business is not as difficult as some people

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think. “It just takes hard work, There’s no room for being lazy and the joy of doing it is the reward,” he said. In addition to theater, he has also written for television, including a documentary for cable, and he once performed in a situation comedy as a stand-in for a child actor.

Lauer’s scriptwriting and lyric writing talents will be evident with the world premiere of *First Freedom* at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 10 **[Friday]** in the WWCC Theatre. The show is also scheduled at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 11, 16, 17 and 18 and at 9:30 a.m. Nov. 14 and 15. Adult tickets are \$9 and student and senior tickets are \$5. Call 382-1600 for more information.

— End, photo of Lauer provided —