

## The State News

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### 'The Soloist' author speaks, inspires at Breslin Center

By [Anne O'Dell](#) (Last updated: 09/01/09 10:22pm)

The author of "The Soloist," Steve Lopez, came to inspire new Spartans to find passion at MSU on Monday morning at Breslin Center, as part of the university's "One Book, One Community" program.

Lopez spoke to new students with the intention to impact them just like the main character in his book affected him.

"The Soloist" details the life of Nathaniel Anthony Ayers, a classically trained violinist, homeless on skid row in Los Angeles.

The two men developed a friendship and Lopez documented Ayers as he discovered more about the man who attended Juilliard, but was homeless because of schizophrenia.

"It's not just what I've done for him, but what he's done for me," Lopez said to the audience.

Lopez said the biggest message for students was to open themselves to the possibility of human encounter and to what is right under their noses.

"Being at this university is a privilege," Lopez said. "Don't forget service, don't forget living beyond your own experience."

Lopez's message resounded with many MSU officials and students.

"Steve Lopez did a good job charging students," said June Youatt, MSU's senior associate provost.

Youatt said Lopez told students of the importance of discovery, service, and the opportunity and privilege of higher education.

Sociology freshman Mitchell Baldwin said although Lopez seemed to be a selfish person at first, it was great (to hear) how it took one person to change his life.

"He had humane intentions," Baldwin said. "He first tried to fill his role in society and then he figured out his real goal."

Lopez said he always was looking for what was next for his column at the Los Angeles Times and he hadn't known at the time the homeless violinist would be such an inspiration.

"I'm inspired by him and him staying faithful to the music," Lopez said.

Ayers' passion for music enabled him to find meaning, peace and pleasure, despite living on the streets, Lopez said.

Ayers taught him how to appreciate more than music and he also reignited Lopez's passion for storytelling in a business that is discouraging, Lopez said.

Lopez's column became a book and later was turned into a movie featuring Jamie Foxx and Robert Downey Jr.

"As I wrote about him, readers came alive," Lopez told the audience.

"I never had a response like that."

Computer Science freshman Chelsea Carr said it was "crazy" that Lopez's story was based on a real life situation.

"(Lopez's speech inspired me) to be more open and give more people a chance at first meeting," Carr said.

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