Lights, camera, curtain: Undergraduate explores cross-pollination of film, theatre

By Niki Kapsambelis

Brenden Gallagher is only at the beginning of his career, but already, he has something in common with Ingmar Bergman, Sam Mendes, Kenneth Branagh, and Mike Nichols: All have directed both plays and films.

The main difference is that Gallagher is a college undergraduate.

A fifth-year senior from York County, Pennsylvania, Gallagher is triple majoring in film, fiction writing, and theatre in pursuit of the prestigious Bachelor of Philosophy (B.Phil. degree) through Pitt’s Honors College.

To earn this demanding degree, students are required to work closely with a faculty member to design and implement a research project as well as write and defend a thesis based on their research.

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— Brenden Gallagher, undergraduate researcher, budding director

Kathleen George, professor of Theatre Arts and Gallagher’s adviser on his B.Phil. degree readily admits that he is a talented scholar and student. “If I didn’t know Brenden and just how interesting he can be as analyst, I would be telling him, ‘No, you can’t do this,’” “I would say he actually has the equivalent of three B. Phil. projects.”

Gallagher began his research by investigating what it means to compare the experience of directing in each of the two mediums — film and theatre — and to see what directors who have done both can borrow from each discipline.

Finding that his first research thesis was a bit broad, Gallagher refined his project to focus on how theatrical directors approach film.

“Rather than approaching each individual art as its own enterprise, [I wanted to] encourage others to realize that a film can have any number of things in it to be the artwork it should be,” he says. “All too often, we restrict ourselves formally. That’s something I’d like to dispel with my project.”

Gallagher has learned from his own research on directing and is incorporating this knowledge in his own direction of the Jane Martin play Middle-Aged White Guys, and while also directing a self-writ-

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Theatre Arts Professor Kathleen George stands with undergraduate researcher and budding director, Brenden Gallagher.

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