Intern Finds His Calling in Film

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Acquiring his way to Louisville

Zane Johnston ‘09 popped out from below the stage in Marshall Theatre. He had been helping adjust the elaborate lighting for Linfield College Theatre’s presentation of Book of Days, in which he played the Rev. Bobby Groves. Johnston took a short break to talk about his next major role: 2009-10 apprenticeship at the prestigious Actors Theatre of Louisville.

Relieved to know “I’ve got something lined up after graduation” is how Johnston modestly described his reaction to landing the apprenticeship. Then he added, “Ecstatic. This is the first choice for acting. It is unlike almost all other apprenticeships that have you work in the box office, push papers and get coffee.”

Johnston is an inclusive company: Of the 2,600 actors who auditioned, only 22 were chosen, said Amy Attaway, assistant director of Actors Theatre’s Apprentice/Intern Company. Its alumni include actors Timothée Chalamet, who apprenticed in the 1978-80 season, and Jason Butler Harner, who was in the 1992-93 company and recently had roles in the movie John Adams.

Johnston auditioned at the Kennedy Center/American Theatre Festival Conference, Region VII, in February at the University of Idaho. “I was really sick and had almost no voice,” he remembered. “I think the thing they liked about me the most was that I was trying to be easy to work with – kind of joky, nice and fun.”

Attaway concurred: “Zane impressed us with his candor and sense of humor in addition to his talent.”

Johnston, who majored in theatre arts with a math minor, said his first role was in community theatre, at age 5. When he visited Linfield, theatre arts Professor Ty Marshall spotted Johnston from his office window, invited him in and gave him a tour. “It was so welcoming, and this facility is amazing; it’s so versatile,” Johnston said. He was immediately won over.

After his nine-month apprenticeship, the Issaquah, Wash., native hopes to pursue an acting career in New York.

— Beth Rogers Thompson

Intern finds his calling in film

If Nick Jauregui ‘09 were an animated object, he just might be a sponge.

“Sitting in the production studio of Coraline, an animated feature film released this year about a young girl who enters an alternate version of her life, Jauregui absorbed all he could from the great creative masters of animation.

“I would sneak in, watch their shots and listen to them,” said Jauregui, a double major in electronic art and studio art. “The best of the best were talking and I was trying to soak up everything they were saying.”

Fascinated with animation, Jauregui was searching for a summer internship that would test his skills and teach him new techniques. A field trip to LAIKA, an animation company specializing in commercials, music videos and feature films, captured his imagination. Through persistence and luck he landed the position of Data Wrangler 2.

Jauregui realized immediately that the internship had a steep learning curve. On a daily basis he juggled various digital camera formats and computer programs. As the work load increased, the time frame for Coraline became tighter. If a cameraman didn’t get his shots to Jauregui on time, he immediately fell behind. Assistant directors demanded shots in time for Henry Selick, the film’s director and co-writer, to view the film. Any delay at Jauregui’s station slowed production and post-production of the entire movie.

“It was stressful because there was so much pressure on us to have Selick approve shots that were all laid out on my desk,” Jauregui said. “It was responsible for so much, and had access to so much, that if I hit the wrong keys I could literally delete the whole movie.”

Jauregui learned the multitude of ways to shoot specific scenes, most of which never make the final cut. Animators shoot from numerous angles to test different possibilities for a scene in the movie. A scene can be put together dozens of different ways, but only one will make it into the film.

One of Jauregui’s biggest challenges came when the director changed the format of the entire movie, requiring that all of the lines on the faces of each puppet be removed by a computer program that Jauregui had never used before. Jauregui had to capture and peulate the puppet’s arms that crossed each character’s face so they disappeared and the face looked smooth. Shadows made the process even more difficult. With a steady hand and patience, he finished his three shots.

“The program required that we do the work frame by frame,” Jauregui explained. “It was so time consuming and I only did 3.5 seconds of the total movie, which took me 24 hours.”

Working tirelessly on a major motion picture does have its perks. Jauregui’s memorabilia includes one of the dancing mice and a pair of specialty Cowboy shoes. Inside information is another bonus. The address of the pink palace in the movie is the address of the Hildsboro production building and the face on the dollar bill in the movie is Selick’s. Jauregui also hinted that a picture of Jack from the Nightmare Before Christmas can be seen somewhere in the Coraline movie and challenges viewers to spot it.

Dan Ford, Jauregui’s electronic art advisor, believes that Jauregui’s personality and hard work are what set him apart from the internship of a lifetime.

“For an intern he was given a great deal of responsibility and credit,” said Ford. “He was able to work for a premier animation studio and contribute, in his own way, toward the creation of a successful feature film.”

Jauregui’s experience on Coraline has sharpened his career focus on entertainment and animation. After graduating next fall, he hopes to work on the next LAIKA animation movie, Pananorman, which begins shooting in the fall.

“Movies are so different because there are magical elements to them,” he said. “Once I started doing it I never wanted to stop.”

— Megan Will ’09