

Trailblazer: Parker Callahan '13

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Parker Callahan always carries a copy of *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder in his backpack. Perhaps it's because Grover's Corners, the quintessential New England town, is not

unlike Callahan's own hometown of Holden, Massachusetts. But, more likely, Callahan is inspired by the play's huge sense of community.

On stage, whether it's performing Mozart's Adagio, K. 540 for his senior recital or doing late-night improv, Callahan has a relaxed, confident manner that puts an audience at ease.

So when he asks an Improv Anonymous audience member to recall three things from her day, there's something about him that gets her to tell all: he's tall, wears thick black-rimmed glasses, and tilts his head in a polite, patient manner. Callahan just asks, "And then what happened?" It barely needs the follow-up skit.

"I got into improv my first week at UNH. I was living on a music floor and one of the people was a member of the group," recalls Callahan. "Actually, I thought improv was annoying, but I went to the audition because a friend was trying out. Then she persuaded me to audition, too. I had to admit, it was fun. Both of us got in. Still it was a huge time commitment. I called my mom, who's an actress, and she said, 'Oh, do it.'"

Callahan considers his particular improv strength to be the development of characters. "The comedians I admire highlight the absurdity of everyday situations," says Callahan. "Tina Fey's *30 Rock* is a perfect example of that. While the show is very grounded, each character's oddities are so extreme that we can't help but laugh."

During improv performances, Callahan synthesizes his major in music theory with his minor in film studies. His subtle piano playing gives a 1950s polish and lift to skits like "The Audition" that spoof "The Voice."

"Everyone who goes into music composition has a desire to do something with film scoring. I really admire scores by John Williams and Phillip Glass," says Callahan. "Epic films like *Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* have scores that really drew me in. My all-time favorite though has to be Ennio Morricone's score for *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. He really knows how to create suspense."

While many creative people are introverts, Callahan is an extrovert and likes to engage with broad community endeavors. For two years he worked as a resident assistant and now, in his senior year, he is the assistant hall director for one of campus's largest residence halls, Stoke.

After graduation, Callahan will head to Chicago, the new destination for young performers these days. He's lined up an internship with a nonprofit service organization and, of course, plans to check out the improv scene.

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