

Hey COVID: The Show Went On

Theatre major adapted to virtual performing

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The lights went out on Broadway in March, around the same time that theatre students at UNH learned their own live performances and in-person classes were being canceled. For some, like Sophie Calderwood '22, it offered a living example of the show business adage that for decades has kept actors and actresses holding their ground on stage despite any number of sudden calamities.

“The old saying ‘the show must go on’ absolutely applies to being a theatre major in the times of COVID,” Calderwood says. “As theatre artists, we are all used to having things thrown at us at the last second and having to adapt quickly and effectively but it was a whirlwind. My professors were amazing in turning the class to be remote-based on the dime.”

Last semester, Calderwood was taking Theatre Dance II and Acting II, making her coursework heavily performance-based. “What was so challenging about the timing of when UNH went remote is that these classes up to the midpoint had been preparing us to do live performances and scenes, which of course couldn't happen in the same way once we were home.”

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But go on they did. Final projects were presented via Zoom as was a live performance for families and friends, something that wouldn't have been possible in person, Calderwood says. “In some ways this was more beneficial because it's quite easy to connect with your scene partner's eyes when they are blown up on the big screen via zoom.”

And her dance class was able to complete the semester in person by dividing into teams, wearing masks and being separated by 8-foot squares. Students in another studio practiced the same safety precautions and zoomed into the class taking place in the larger studio.

“It was challenging sometimes because of the lack of sight but proved to be helpful in dancers learning and understanding movement based on only the description of choreography. My professor did a fantastic job of teaching the class while still keeping everyone safe,” Calderwood says.

This semester, the Brunswick, Maine, resident is back taking classes on campus. Social distancing has been hard but achievable, she says, wearing masks with a clear panel during voice lessons and acting classes. A 6-foot distance is maintained in dance classes.

Calderwood grew up performing in both community and professional theatre and worked at the community theatre where her parents had met. She had auditioned across New England and was accepted in musical theatre programs but opted to attend UNH, drawn not only to the theatre department but “the school as a whole's warm and inviting atmosphere.”

A member of the executive board for the student-run theatre group "Mask and Dagger," Calderwood has been involved with producing shows, staging workshops and trying to engage students from all majors in theatre. Her goal is to become an actress.

“My loose plan is to save up some money while working as a dance instructor, and then move to New York,” Calderwood says. “I hope to audition for regional and professional theatre to eventually find a residency or stable job with a theatre or entertainment company. In the far future I would love to own my own dance/arts studio or work on the administration side of a theatre company — but after I’m decrepit and my performing days are far behind me.”

Which, in the world of theatre, are often days that never come.

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