

Caught in the Act: Wanderkook

UNH alumni, faculty and musicians bring original production to Portsmouth

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JONNY PEIFFER '05 IN A WANDERKOOK'S FIELD NOTES SERIES PERFORMANCE AT THE WORD BARN IN EXETER EARLIER THIS SPRING. (PHOTO: MATT LAVIGNE)

When the New Hampshire Theatre Project presents the Circulus production of "The Adventures of Oliver Z. Wanderkook" this month, it will be a UNH reunion of sorts.

After all, Wanderkook was born from the imagination of a UNH alumnus, taking his first breaths two years after Jonny Peiffer '05 graduated.

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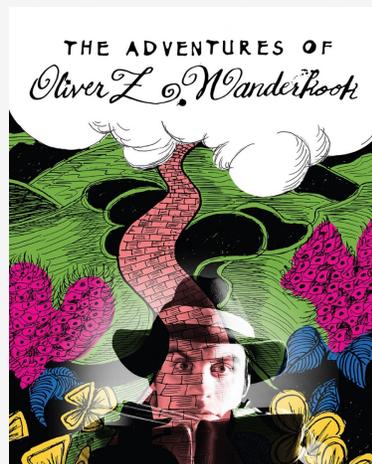
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This live theatrical experience has grown since then to now combine words, art, music, dance and animation to retell Wanderkook's fateful journey to meet the nine tribes of the Land of Two Suns.

Discussing the project in the days before it opens in Portsmouth on June 16, Peiffer described the show as only he can: "I like to say it's like 'Alice in Wonderland,' 'The Wizard of Oz' and 'The Little Prince' meets 'Gulliver's Travels' and 'Swiss Family Robinson,' if those were all written by E. E. Cummings and Walt Whitman, illustrated by Edward Gorey, with music by Charles Mingus, Gil Evans, Henry Mancini and Vince Guaraldi and dance by Gus Giordano," he explains.

Each show features a different performer reading from Wanderkook's journal, exploring the wisdom he left behind from his journey. And amidst the readers, musicians and performers is a who's who of UNH graduates. In addition to Peiffer, who came up with the story and wrote the music, there's Dan Beaulieu '06, who wrote all of Wanderkook's journal entries. Eric Klaxton '11, Nick Mainella '07 and UNH music student Josh Gagnon '18 are part of the band Sojoy, which will be performing live during the run. Klaxton also



When: Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays at 2 p.m. from June 16-25

Where: West End Studio Theatre and Portsmouth Music and Arts Center

Tickets: \$25 and available at

engineered, mixed and mastered the official soundtrack album Sojoy plans to release during the show's run. Sarah Duclos '05 has choreographed the show, and Stuart Dias '09 of popular area band the Soggy Po' Boys will be one

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From Jonny Peiffer: "I hope you get to meet the Kook on his visit to the Seacoast. It's not clear if and when he'll be back this way again."

of the featured readers. Meanwhile, Genevieve Aichele '75 is the artistic director of New Hampshire Theatre Project.

UNH faculty are also part of the production: [CJ Lewis](#) '07 of the [department of theatre and dance](#) is directing the show, while [Deborah Kinghorn](#), professor of acting/voice, will be one of the readers of Wanderkook's journal.

What is it like for Peiffer to be working with so many fellow Wildcats?

"Wildcatacular," he responds. "I've known some of these collaborators since the early to mid-Aughts when we met as undergrads, so there is a familiarity and ease there that can't be denied or manufactured. Also, it's striking to notice that every single UNH graduate on this project is extremely hardworking and talented; it almost makes one wonder if there's a correlation."

Peiffer explains he started the project in 2007 for an RPM (Record Per Month) Challenge album and enlisted artist Dean Diggins to create a series of pen-and-ink drawings depicting Wanderkook's journey. In 2012, Beaulieu joined the team and began writing Wanderkook's journal. In 2016, Peiffer orchestrated the piano score for Sojoy, and Circulus was born later that year as collaborators Peiffer, Lewis, Sara Peiffer and Catherine Stewart set out to turn The Wanderkook Project into a full performance.

Circulus has been preparing audiences for the production through the Wanderkook's Field Notes Series, offering audiences a "peek behind the curtain" to see the collaboration in progress. The upcoming performances will also include Portsmouth Poet Laureate Mike Nelson and New Hampshire Youth Poet Laureate Ella McGrail among the journal readers and Amanda Whitworth, dance director at Plymouth State University, performing the choreography.

"The most exciting thing has been to see that the material resonates with so many people that I respect and love to work with," Peiffer says. "It's really fulfilling to see that the other 20-plus people working on this project believe in this world as much as I do. That's a fantastic feeling."

*Are you a UNH student, alum or faculty member involved in the New Hampshire theatre scene this summer? **Let us know what you're working on.***

WRITTEN [Jennifer Saunders](#) | Communications and Public

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