



Fellow characters help Christopher, played by graduate student Connor Graham, realize his dream of space travel with his pet rat, Toby. On stage for the entire production, which clocks in at just over two-and-a-half hours, Graham mastered hundreds of lines and a range of physical feats.

Fantastic voyage: A theatre production in the making

PHOTOS BY JO MCCULTY | STORIES BY HAILEY STANGEBYE AND MARY ALICE CASEY

Share this story



See how students and faculty at Ohio State put on “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time,” a play loaded with multimedia effects.

A tight-knit cast and crew toil to bring Christopher to their audience — to reveal his joy, his heartbreak, his

triumphs and challenges, his humanity. They deliver. They are a collective of 77 people from Ohio State's Department of Theatre who bring to a 22-by-24-foot stage and 22-by-14-foot backdrop "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time." In a nine-day run in April at the Roy Bowen Theatre, the play opened a window to the experiences of a teenager with autism spectrum disorder and the people — parents, teacher, neighbors, strangers — who intersect his world. Join us as we follow the production from the first reading on a brisk January evening through the creation of stunning lighting, sound and media design to, finally, an intimate conversation with audience members about the lives autism touches and how a talented, caring ensemble represents the journey.

Informing a broader dialogue

As head of Ohio State's renowned Shakespeare and Autism Project, Associate Professor Kevin McClatchy '12 MFA was a natural choice for director of this play. The research project involving the Department of Theatre and the university's Nisonger Center, which serves individuals with developmental disabilities, has demonstrated how interacting with Shakespeare's text can help children with autism break through communication blocks. "It dovetailed with our commitment to the Shakespeare and Autism Project — there was an organic fit there," McClatchy says of the play's selection. "It also had great possibilities for our cast because it's an incredibly physical piece of theatre with one gigantic role at the center of it: the role of Christopher." A cohort of undergraduate and graduate students — from a freshman new to campus through third-year MFA students with professional acting experience — brought the production to the stage.



Director Kevin McClatchy works through a scene with the 12-member cast, seven working toward bachelor's degrees and five pursuing master's.



(/alumni/assets/uploads/001_DSC_763.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/002_DSC_1060.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/003_DSC_1061.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/004_DSC_5038.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/005_DSC_6679.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/006_DSC_1062.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/007_DSC_5804.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/008_DSC_8061.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/009_DSC_1063.jpg)

Building trust and comfort

The physical demands of this production are immense: a huge fall, an assisted flip, an enchanted flight, people portraying furniture, machines, turnstiles and more. These are the endeavors of a cast and its choreographers in

sync. Jeanine Thompson '91, '93 MFA was involved from the start. A professor of theatre and affiliated faculty in the Department of Dance, Thompson served as the play's movement director and co-choreographer (with McClatchy). "This piece is highly physicalized acting ... some of the most challenging lifts I've ever had to stage," Thompson says. "We did it slowly, surely, building skill, trust and capability." In Graham, she says, the production had a lead actor "who could not only figure out how to do the mechanics of this, but who could transform these moments into artistic expressions of life that move those watching to a richer depth of understanding of humanity."



Connor Graham, a graduate student and the play's lead, stands 5-foot-9 and isn't wild about heights. His trust is evident when, for the first time in rehearsal, he falls from a ledge as tall as he into fellow actors' arms.



(/alumni/assets/uploads/001_DSC_3150(4).jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/002_DSC_3811(4).jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/003_DSC_3811(4).jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/004_DSC_8706(4).jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/005_DSC_3427(4).jpg)



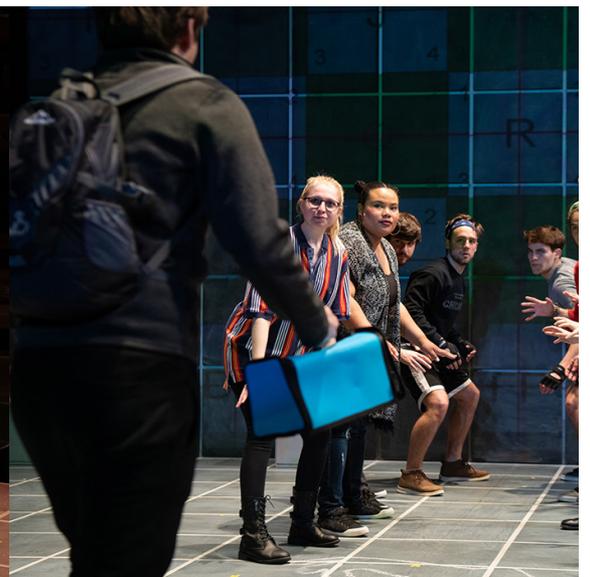
(/alumni/assets/uploads/006_DSC_3811(4).jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/007_DSC_7827(4).jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/008_DSC_4597(4).jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/009_DSC_3811(4).jpg)

Leveraging insights, technology

The space this play inhabits follows a grid, with the upstage wall consisting of more than 70 floating chalkboard panels that shift, open and change to create elements of the environment. The chalkboards provide a genuine blank slate where projected patterns can shine. In this multimedia-rich play — the intentional aspect of one department production each season — lighting and media designs are created with game-changing technology supplied by Cirque du Soleil and BlackTrax. “This play presented fascinating challenges and opportunities for research on lighting and media projection, media technology, sound and scenic design,” says Associate Professor Alex Oliszewski, the production’s media designer. Media, lighting and sound add mood, flavor and a juxtaposition of chaos and comfort, and they are meticulously curated and timed to provide a meaningful layer to the complex plot.



Sophomore Braden Held works with lighting designer and Professor Mary Tarantino to focus lights. "The Curious Incident" was Tarantino's final production after 28 years on the faculty.



(/alumni/assets/uploads/001_DSC_2515(a.jpg))



(/alumni/assets/uploads/002_DSC_5701(a.jpg))



(/alumni/assets/uploads/003_DSC_...



(/alumni/assets/uploads/004_DSC_6194(a.jpg))



(/alumni/assets/uploads/005_DSC_4431(a.jpg))



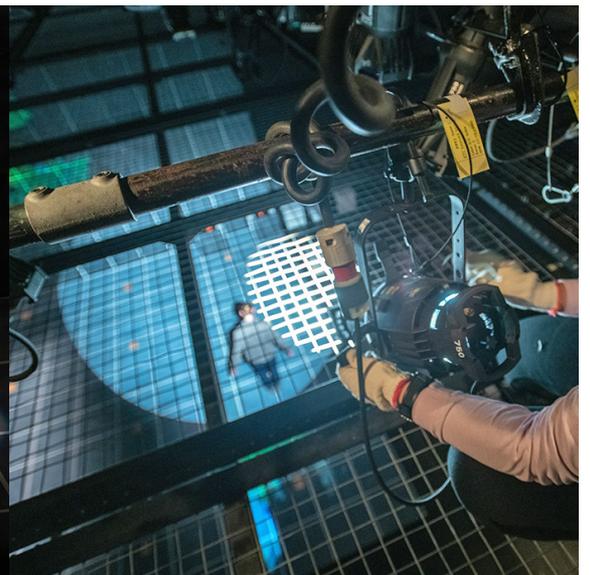
(/alumni/assets/uploads/006_DSC_...



(/alumni/assets/uploads/007_DSC_6302(a.jpg))



(/alumni/assets/uploads/008_DSC_0940(a.jpg))



(/alumni/assets/uploads/009_DSC_...

Seeing it all come together

After 11 weeks of rehearsing at least four hours a day, six days a week, the cast and crew of “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time” are ready to share this poignant story with 10 different audiences. Every word, movement, costume, light and media projection approaches perfection. The Department of Theatre creates mainstage productions such as this six times a year, often in collaboration with colleagues across the university. On this evening, the audience is invited to linger to talk with the actors, production team and Marc Tassé, who directs the university’s Nisonger Center. “This is the strength and richness of Ohio State,” Tassé notes. “We have so many good, strong programs in many areas, across the colleges, and we reach across disciplines to help improve the lives of people with complex conditions such as autism.”



Acting, movement, media, lighting, sound and neutral costumes all play a role in conveying the intensity of a chaotic train station scene.



(/alumni/assets/uploads/001_DSC_6568_a1.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/002_DSC_3934_a1.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/003_DSC_4111_a1.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/004_DSC_7869_a1.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/005_DSC_4018_a1.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/006_DSC_4111_a1.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/007_DSC_5090_a1.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/008_DSC_8205_a1.jpg)



(/alumni/assets/uploads/009_DSC_4111_a1.jpg)

About the authors

Hailey Stangebye

Hailey Stangebye '18 is a freelance writer and the content manger at Columbus creative agency Warhol & WALL ST.

Mary Alice Casey

Mary Alice Casey is editor of *Ohio State Alumni Magazine*.

How would you rate this story?

(news/ohio-
state-
alumni-
magazine/
issues/
summer-
2019/
curious-
incident-
dog.html)

Share this story

(https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.osu.edu%2Falumni%2Fnews%2Fohio-state-alun-9377%26utm_campaign%3DUMAR%252BALU%26utm_source=twitter&text=Fantastic%20voyage%3A%20A%20

(https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.osu.edu%2Falumni%2Fnews%2Fohio-state-alun-9377%26utm_medium%3DUGC%26utm_term%3DArts%252BExper%26utm_content%3Dosam-9377%26utr

(http://www.linkedin.com/shareArticle?mini=true&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.osu.edu%2Falumni%2Fnews%2Fohio-state-alun-9377%26utm_medium%3DUGC%26utm_term%3DArts%252BExper%26utm_content%3Dosam-9377%26utm_campaign%3DUMAR%252BALU&title=Fantastic%20voyage%3A%20A%20theatre%20production%20in%20the%3A%20ohio%20state-alumni-magazine%2Fissues%2Fsummer-2019%2Fcurious-incident-dog.html%3Futm_medium%3DUGC%26

✉ (mailto:?)
subject=From%20Ohio%20State:%20Fantastic%20voyage%3A%20A%20theatre%20production%20in%20the%3A%20ohio%20state-alumni-magazine%2Fissues%2Fsummer-2019%2Fcurious-incident-dog.html%3Futm_medium%3DUGC%26

You Also Might Like

[VIEW ALL \(NEWS/OHIO-STATE-ALUMNI-MAGAZINE/ISSUES/SUMMER-2019/\)](#)



Healing with a beat

Learn how researchers at Ohio State investigate potential benefits of rhythmic dance and drumming for people managing symptoms of Parkinson's disease.



James Thurber at 125

Rediscover James Thurber, one of America's favorite humor writers, who revolutionized cartoons like the ones you see in The New Yorker.