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His Senior Thesis Won A Curtain Call

Joe Cockrell

Garrett Zuercher, Comm '03, wrote a play for his senior thesis. Although it was not his first attempt as a playwright, he had never written anything as personal-- or as successful. His play is about being deaf, and it won a place in a national competition that theatre fans compare to college basketball's Final Four.

Quid Pro Quo chronicles the relationship between college students Lucas (who is deaf) and Lindsey (who is not). The actors on stage sign as two off-stage actors speak their lines. Zuercher, who has been deaf since birth, wrote the play to express his observations of the hearing world and directed a cast of fellow students.

"Audiences find it to be a new experience, a sort of reverse interpreting, that gives them an idea of what deaf people experience in theatre," Zuercher says of the play. "I wanted to combine my training in theatre with my background as a deaf man."

His work caught the attention of Marquette performing arts faculty, who entered it in the prestigious John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts American College Theatre Festival. This national contest begins with regional competitions. To win a chance to stage a production at the Kennedy Center, Zuercher's play had to beat what other colleges offered.

The competition began in October when a judge from the national festival came to Marquette for a first look. Zuercher's play was picked to advance to the Great Lakes Region Festival. His cast next performed in January for judges at Illinois State University. Again, it won the judges' votes. One wrote: "Garrett Zuercher has written a very imaginative and endearing play. subtle use of exposition, a riveting series of dramatic questions and obstacles, very natural dialogue and very appealing characters. a very high quality production."

Quid Pro Quo was one of only six plays selected for the Kennedy Festival in Washington, D.C. It was an honor that Marquette Artistic Director Phylis Ravel is still savoring. "Someone who is not in the arts asked me what it meant for Garrett to win this honor," she recalls. "I knew he was a sports fan so I told him it's like winning the Final Four."

It has been more than two decades since a Marquette show has advanced to this national forum. "I never thought my show would come this far when we performed it for my senior thesis," Zuercher says, and credits his cast. "Were it not for the boundless determination and talent of this cast, this show would not have gone this far." Many people told me that as a deaf man I would be much less successful in theatre," Zuercher adds. "As long as I can

remember I have wanted to be in theatre. It wasn't until I came to Marquette that anyone told me I could actually do it."

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