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Monday February 17, 2020

That's a Wrap

By Eric F. Spina

It's not every day that the red carpet gets rolled out on campus for the world premiere of a movie, but it certainly was in place inside Torch Lounge on Feb. 8 for the first public viewing of the short film *Charlie's Bridge*.

Even without the paparazzi, the audience of friends, family, and UD colleagues of the student filmmakers were as excited as if Steven Spielberg had directed and Jennifer Aniston had starred in this purely student produced, directed, written, and acted movie.

So, how was the film, you ask?

After the hilarious outtakes from *Charlie's Bridge* popped on the screen after the credits rolled, the audience gave an exuberant whoop and burst into applause.

After all, there was so much to cheer.

For openers, the film was shot on location in Prague over eight days in scorching heat with a cast and crew of 13 students. For one scene, sound technician Michael Perdomo '21 stood sweating in the shower in a small bathroom for four-and-a-half hours until director Maggie Fitzpatrick '21 and the crew felt satisfied with a scene in which actress Cecelia Smelko '21 was filmed brushing her teeth (and singing)! In another scene, Director of Photography James Dronzek '21 leaned precariously over the Charles Bridge to capture the perfect shot.

Rain or shine, the students, mostly communication majors with a concentration in media production, carried a camera and heavy equipment three miles to the iconic, historic Charles Bridge and back to their apartment every day during an unforgettable study-abroad experience. Their days ran 14-16 hours long. *That's* dedication.

But work on the 20-minute film started well before they landed in the heart of the Czech Republic for an immersive, hands-on — and ambitious — experiential learning opportunity. And it ended in the editing room just hours before the premiere.

“The students started working on the script months before the trip. At first, they thought it would be a sci-fi thriller. That thought lasted about 10 minutes. Then they settled on rom com. After writing the first draft of the script, it was missing two things — rom and com,” quipped Roy Flynn, lecturer in electronic media, a six-time Emmy winner, and their tireless mentor.

Set largely to the catchy, campy music of ABBA, *Charlie's Bridge* tells the story of two young Americans, portrayed by communication majors Brian O'Flaherty '21 and Cecelia Smelko, who rediscover love in an unexpected place. The film will be screened at the University of Dayton's first film festival in September.

We want every UD student to experience this kind of high-impact learning under the mentorship of gifted faculty and alumni who step up to offer their talents.

Alumni like Jonathan Judge '93.

A five-time Emmy nominee for his work directing children's television shows and a director of 10 television series, Jonathan flew to Prague for the shoot and to Dayton for the premiere. He's deeply committed to helping students grow in their filmmaking skills. Along with his costume designer wife Chris Field, he visited campus in 2018 to lead media production students in an intensive weekend filmmaking workshop that culminated in a horror-comedy short, *Sunday Scaries*, filmed with “Zombies” in the student neighborhood. Jonathan, who received the Alumni Association's 2017 Special Achievement Award, also participates in the annual “Flyers in Hollywood” trip to Los Angeles, where students rub shoulders with alumni working in the entertainment industry.

“Jonathan dedicates so much of his time and talent,” said Joe Valenzano, chair of the communication department. “It's invaluable for our students.”

And the effort shows in front of and behind the camera, where students are learning what it takes to write, direct, and produce a film.

“It takes a whole village. No one person can produce a film,” said Kaitlyn Baxendale ‘21 after the premiere. “I didn’t even know what an assistant director did until I got to Prague and got to help direct the film.

“It was really a team effort. We had each other’s backs.”

That’s a wrap. Bravo!