

Coproducer Aris Arakelians holds his cat, Leo, as he presents the Anus Equinus Award during *Scope and Scalpel*. That award, for the “most annoying Pitt Med experience,” went to COVID-19. The cat reached out to scratch Arakelians as he said those words. To see actual performers, go to www.pittmed.health.pitt.edu/fall-2020.



THEATRICAL DISTANCING

By late March, it seemed like *Scope and Scalpel*—the annual production put on by graduating med students—would end its 66-year streak of roasting all things Pitt Med. Would 10 months’ preparation for “The Lyme King” (a satire of “The Lion King,” of course) be for nothing?

But director Josh Zollman (MD ’20) suggested substituting cast members’ living rooms for the stage. Kristen Milleville (MD ’20), stage manager, thought it was a “crazy idea.”

During an emergency crew meeting over video chat, Zollman convinced skeptics by outlining how it might work: Throughout the course of two weekends, the cast would record themselves with smartphones. At the same time, they’d be interacting with other cast members through a Zoom call.

Milleville is now a physical medicine and rehabilitation resident at UPMC. She and a few others organized the costumes and props from the crew’s storage unit and purchased fabric to function as green screens in the cast members’ apartments. The art team fashioned hand-drawn backgrounds. Milleville says, though she was alone in her apartment, she couldn’t keep a straight face during rehearsals—particularly during

scenes featuring Jessica Cohen dressed like a shaman mandrill (Rafiki)—“I laughed every time.” Apparently, Cohen really nailed Rafiki while delivering a “perfect portrayal” of beloved Pitt Med prof Elmer Holzinger (MD ’54).

Filming proved easier than synchronizing each scene, according to Zollman, a psychiatry resident at Massachusetts General Hospital. For a month, he spent several hours a day on video edits, with lines like these from the neurology clerkship scene running through his head: “Is there a lesion somewhere giving you that gaze? Or am I ugly, and you can’t look at my face? Dance for me, dance for me, dance for me. Oh oh oh. I’ve never seen anyone move their limbs that way before.” (That earworm is to the tune of “Dance Monkey” by Tones and I.)

The final product was uploaded to YouTube in May; see pi.tt/lymeking. Opening night was atypical, but Zollman believes “The Lyme King” was worth the effort.

“During med school, we all get pushed and pulled in different directions,” he says. “[Scope and Scalpel] is a chance where we can all work together on a creative project.” Proceeds from this year’s show went to the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council’s Emergency Fund for Artists.

—John Hansen