

# JOHN GALLAGHER JR

You've seen John Gallagher Jr. somewhere, because he's been everywhere — film, network TV, cable TV, an HBO show about cable TV, Broadway, off Broadway and on stage at your local music club, playing original songs.

This year alone, he'll be in no fewer than five films, one of which — Desiree Akhavan's *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, based on Emily M. Danforth's book of the same name — took home the coveted U.S. Dramatic Grand Jury Prize at this year's Sundance Film Festival.

But let's back up. If you're a theater fan, you know Gallagher as one of the steadiest young actors of Broadway, beginning his stage career at 22 in *Rabbit Hole*, David Lindsay-Abaire's Pulitzer Prize-winning depiction of grief. Shortly after, he earned a Tony Award originating the role of Moritz Steifel in Duncan Sheik's 2006 rock musical *Spring Awakening*, a runaway hit.

"It really blindsided me as much as I feel it blindsided audiences," Gallagher says. "I knew it was special when I heard it. I'd never heard anything like it in a musical before, but none of us really knew if it was going to work, if audiences were going to go for it. There was a real sense of empowerment because a lot of us had been working on it in workshop form for several years. I liken it to an indie band hitting it big and getting that main stage festival gig after years of playing clubs and bars."

Stage actors know to temper their expectations. Even when the off-Broadway run sold out and eventually moved to Broadway, he still expected the show to potentially close soon, as many productions do. Instead, it closed on January 18, 2009, after 859 performances, 29 previews and eight Tony Awards.

"We never saw that level of success coming in that show. It was kind of fantastical," says Gallagher, who also starred in Green Day's musical *American Idiot*, among a handful of other Broadway hits. "Even to this day, it doesn't really feel like it actually happened. It almost feels like it happened to someone else."

If you follow the screen more than the stage, you've likely seen Gallagher there, or you likely will — 2018 will see him co-star alongside Kristen Stewart and Vincent Cassel in the sci-fi action-adventure *Underwater*, alongside Taraji P. Henson and Sam Rockwell in the true-to-life civil rights drama *The Best of Enemies*, alongside Jennifer Garner in the action-thriller *Peppermint* and alongside Chloë Grace Moretz in the Sundance standout *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*.

Gallagher got to bring a bit of his musical ability to his role in *Cameron Post*, but not in the role of a musician. Rather, he plays Reverend Rick, the pastor at a gay conversion camp for teens, something he thought couldn't possibly still exist when he first read the script.

"I was shocked and saddened to learn I was wrong. As long as it is still being practiced, stories like this one must be told," he says. Reverend Rick is said to be "ex-gay" himself, and the film takes a heartbreaking look at the effect misguided people can have on vulnerable populations when they twist religion into something designed to make you hate yourself.

While some of the adults at the camp feel sinister — one teen says it's like having your own Disney villain — others, like Rick, are more complex, driven by motivations that appear to be sincere.

"I loved the idea that you could watch this film and still be hungry to find out what it is that is going on inside Rick's head and heart. What does he really believe in?" Gallagher says. "I was drawn to the duality of the character and the fact that at the end of the day, he is just trying to be a good guy and do what he thinks is the right thing."

Gallagher admires all his co-stars freely — calling Kristen Stewart "rock 'n' roll" and Jennifer Garner "so cool and such a professional and so sweet and so game," to pick only two — but he leaves out that he has a lengthy and diverse resume of his own.

Previously, he starred in the psychological thriller *10 Cloverfield Lane* and the brilliantly affecting independent drama *Short Term 12*, in which he and Brie Larson play group home supervisors just trying to do right by the troubled teens for whom they genuinely care.

The two films have little in common apart from the fact that they're unflinching pieces of storytelling, a theme in much of Gallagher's work, whether intentional or not. That theme is also present in Gallagher's turn as the lovable, everyman news producer Jim Harper on Aaron Sorkin's HBO drama *The Newsroom*, a bold story of a different kind that championed the value of proper journalism in a click-bait world.

Until then, he'd never had a recurring role in a major series, so it could've been especially daunting for his first long-term gig to be a Sorkin project — pages and pages of witty, rapid-fire dialogue bubbling with pop-culture references that would keep Lorelai Gilmore on her toes. Gallagher's background memorizing long passages of dialogue for the stage became his best friend, curbing the intimidation of auditioning for Sorkin.

"He has this almost Keith Richards quality as a writer because it's like you're tuning in to get that sound," Gallagher says. "Saying Aaron Sorkin dialogue is like showing up to band practice and someone's like, 'Hey, you wanna play Keith Richards' guitar?' You're a conduit for something that's really special and that people revere and adore. It was really an honor to say it."

The process of preparing for plays, musicals, television or film varies depending on the medium, but Gallagher doesn't see much difference in the good that can come from each.

"I'm such a fan of the art form: I love theater, I love film, I love television. Even if I weren't doing it, I'd be a big fan and supporter," he says. "Art has probably saved my life a few times, and I recognize it has that power. For some people, it's more than just a hobby or a passion — it's lifeblood. I often view acting as a service, like being part of something bigger. I just like storytelling and I like helping people tell their story, and actors are one of the last cogs that get put into the gears to bring that to life."



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