CHRISTINE NOLAN ESSIG '03

EXPLORING THE MANY PARALLELS BETWEEN ART AND SCIENCE

Perhaps it's not surprising to those who know Christine Nolan '03 that she pursued a career in performing arts; the 2003 edition of *Roll Call*'s "In 20 Years" column even predicted that she would be on Broadway. Not only is she an accomplished theater actress—having performed on Broadway and other prestigious venues—but she also works at NASA in public relations, educating people about the mission of the James Webb Space Telescope. This blend is ideal for Christine, a self-described "avid space enthusiast, passionate about the innovation which occurs at the intersection of the arts and sciences."

Christine has performed in many productions, but insists that playing Kim in *Bye Bye Birdie* in 8th grade on the Bullis Dining Hall stage is among her favorites. "I remember such great energy—everyone had fun," she recalls. During Christine's six years at Bullis she grew as an artist while the fine arts department evolved as well, with the construction of The Blair Family Center for the Arts in her senior year. As a singer in the Counterpoints group, a member of band and an actress in theater performances, Christine was exposed to different facets of performing arts. She says Bullis truly prepared her to pursue them. Among the first graduates to attend a music conservatory, she credits her teachers as "incredible—encouraging, constructive and particularly helpful in navigating the college audition and application process."

Christine attended the prestigious Boston Conservatory at Berklee, graduating in 2007 with a bachelor of fine arts degree and dreams to perform on Broadway. Her unwavering tenacity and focus helped her dream come true when she landed an ensemble part in New York City Center's production of *Fanny*, which she described as an "intense opportunity to perform on stage with actors I greatly admired." Over the next seven years, Christine honed her craft, performing in revue concerts at Carnegie Hall and The Kennedy Center and shows in regional theaters nationwide.

A professional and personal highlight was landing a role in the first national tour of the musical *Hair*, which opened

at The Kennedy Center and ended with a run on Broadway. "Working with some of the show's original writers on the research process was really special for me," she recalls. Reflecting on her time performing in *Hair*, she fondly remembers the wonderful spirit and camaraderie among her cast mates—who later joined together to perform "Let the Sun Shine In" at New York City's 9/11 Memorial.

When the *Hair* tour concluded, Christine returned to the Washington, D.C. area and married husband Richard Essig in July 2015. Since that time, she has immersed herself in the D.C. theater scene; in early 2016, she landed the lead role of Penelope Pennywise in Constellation Theatre's production of *Urinetown*, which ran from August to October 2016. *The Washington Post* says Christine "stands out as one of the few apparent song-and-dance-bred creatures in view, bringing belting force and a ripple of wit to the… role of Penelope Pennywise."

While Christine has not officially closed the door on performing, she sought a career with more stability in the field of science, a particular passion of hers. Knowing that NASA has a music and drama club, Christine submitted her resume, offering to help develop their program of connecting the parallels between science and the arts.

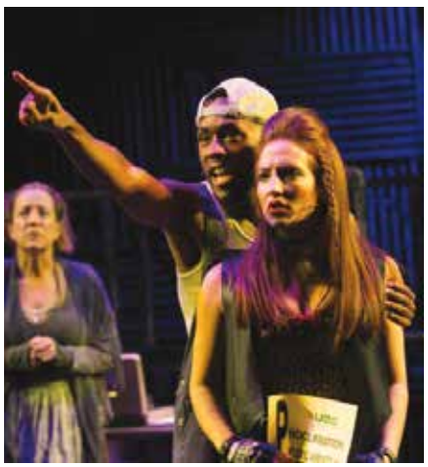
Her tenacity paid off when she was invited to speak at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center about that very topic. "I believe the arts and sciences work in tandem," she says. "The arts are a wonderful tool that NASA uses more than people realize, in both a functional sense and to communicate NASA stories to the public."

During her *Urinetown* run, Christine began a job at NASA in public relations, educating people about the James Webb Space Telescope, which is currently being assembled and will be launched in 2018 from French Guiana. "The telescope will allow us to see the first stars and galaxies that formed billions of years ago and will tell us more about exoplanets and perhaps even find building blocks of life elsewhere in the universe."

"I wanted to use my creativity to help solve problems," states Christine. "Working at NASA and performing on stage gives me an irresistible blend of creative and data-driven worlds. The confidence I gained through my experiences in life and particularly at Bullis has been incredibly influential over the years and really allowed me to achieve my dreams. I am proud of the School and the further development of the arts department since I have graduated. I know Bullis will continue inspiring students to pursue their dreams too," Christine says.

"THE ARTS ARE A WONDERFUL TOOL THAT NASA USES MORE THAN PEOPLE REALIZE, IN BOTH A FUNCTIONAL SENSE AND TO COMMUNICATE NASA STORIES TO THE PUBLIC."

—CHRISTINE ESSIG



Opposite page, left: Christine at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center; at right, recent head shot

Top left: Christine's senior portrait in the 2003 edition of *Roll Call*

Top right: Portraying Penelope Pennywise in Constellation Theatre's production of *Urinetown* in 2016.

Above: Singing at the Finishing the Foundation groundbreaking ceremony for The Blair Family Center for the Arts in fall 2000, with Rajiv Weliwitigoda '03 (left) and Timur Tugberk '03.