



CREATIVE WORKS

NOTABLE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE BOALT COMMUNITY

DOCUMENTARY: CÁITRÍN MCKIERNAN '11

Student Shares King's Dream in China

In *Bringing King to China*, a feature-length documentary about Cáitrín McKiernan '11 and her quest to stage a groundbreaking play in China about Martin Luther King, director Kevin McKiernan—Cáitrín's father—interviews a venerable Chinese scholar. “There are so many obstacles here,” the scholar says. “The only way your daughter succeeded is she didn't know how tall the mountain was.”

Few would accuse Cáitrín, a bilingual graduate of Stanford and Boalt and a Fulbright recipient, of ignorance. But youthful naiveté? “Guilty!” she admits.

Bringing King to China premiered January 30 at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival. Oscar-winning cinematographer Haskell Wexler worked on the film with Kevin, a network news photojournalist who has made feature-length films for PBS and whose photos have appeared in *TIME*, *Newsweek*, and *The New York Times*.

Cáitrín first went to China for a study-abroad program as a 16-year-old student from Santa Barbara. At Stanford, she worked with King scholar Clay Carson, majored in Chinese history—then got a Fulbright to gather oral histories in China.

“Clay had written a compelling play about Dr. King's life and philosophy that I wanted to adapt for audiences in China,” Cáitrín says. “I thought it could help open dialogue both within China and between Americans and the Chinese.”

Bringing King to China chronicles her two-year struggle to adapt the script for a Chinese audience and stage the play. Challenges included persuading the National Theatre of China to accept the production, recruiting professional actors and production staff, and countless hours of nearly futile fundraising. During those two years, Cáitrín led discus-



SHOOTING STARS: Cáitrín McKiernan '11 and her father, Kevin McKiernan, at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival.

sions, among American and Chinese students and scholars, about the relevance of King's beliefs in the 21st century.

The play, *Passages of Martin Luther King*, finally opened in 2007, when the National Theatre presented five performances in Beijing. Five American gospel singers were recruited to join the all-Chinese cast, which Cáitrín says marked the first time in the history of modern Chinese theater that African-American and Chinese actors shared a stage. Tickets were distributed to government officials, embassy staffers, country migrants, and students.

“Visuals help people speak across borders,” Cáitrín says, “especially when you're dealing with themes like King's non-violent resistance and anti-war platforms.”

At age nine, Cáitrín joined Kevin as he covered the 1990 Nicaraguan elections. “She saw poverty, war, and refugee camps—a lot that most kids don't see,” Kevin recalls. “Ever since, she's had a passion for human rights and bringing cultures together.” —Andrew Cohen

Learn more at www.bringingkingtochina.com.