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UA Promotion Committee

Dear Promotion Committee:

The metropolis of American theatre, New York City, is located an astonishing 1026 miles from the University of Alabama campus. However, graduates of the University of Alabama theatre program annually herd to the Big Apple in pursuit of their theatrical aspirations assured that the education they received at UA has adequately prepared them for immense competition among myriad talented New York actors. So, what gives these young actors the confidence they need to make the biggest move of their lives? As a 2010 graduate of UA's theatre program and a current resident of Manhattan, I am certain that professor Seth Panitch should be attributed with the credit of equipping his students with the technique, skills, and motivation we need to seek and attain the highest success.

During my tenure as a student at the University of Alabama, Seth mentored me as my professor, my director, and my advisor in the Department of Theatre and Dance. Through each of these roles, he epitomized the quality of being passionate in one's work. From the first day of my first class with Seth, and in each of his subsequent courses that I took, he explained that acting is not a rudimentary career that offers the stability of a paycheck and benefits, so it is crucial that those in pursuit of this demanding art form must have a keen passion for it. Though many professors in various colleges at UA may give similar speeches, what singles out Seth is that as a professor, he does more than lecture about the career's demands for passion; he exhibits that quality throughout every moment of his teaching, directing and advising by his own shrewd preparation, his demands of excellence, and his visionary mindset.

One crucial component of success in acting—or any profession—is preparation. As a professor and director, Seth is exceptional in his own detailed preparation, thereby inspiring his students to be equally as prepared. The classes Seth teaches and the shows he directs are quite varied in the expertise that they require him to possess: from brandishing broadswords to dissecting dialogue. But one thing is consistent: Seth always commands great respect from his students through his ability to use his immense base of knowledge to provide us with a complete understanding of whatever topic he is teaching: whether it is the technical skill of stage combat or the interpersonal skill of truly relating to a scene partner through a playwright's text. The ultimate effect of Seth's preparation is in itself a lesson to his students: we have to prepare an equally rich well of knowledge on each topic we study in order to excel in the vast and competitive career of acting. He not only helps us learn from his knowledge, but he instills in us a desire to always yearn to learn more. To me, that is the hallmark of a great professor. I have benefited from Seth's demonstration of preparation both as a student, and now as a graduate. In one of my advising sessions with Seth, he reminded me that once I graduated I still needed to devote a minimum of two hours daily to developing my acting skills. This was a tall demand because I work ten-hour days at my non-acting, bill-paying job in NYC. But I know that in order to attain the success I desire, I must follow his advice. At first, I used his two hours a day requisite as a benchmark, a goal. Now, I far exceed putting two hours a day into the development of my skills as an actor. I am certain that without Seth's motivation to prepare for acting success outside of the classroom, I already would have floundered amongst the intense competition of Broadway. Instead, I have received great feedback from casting directors and my current acting coach. I am so grateful for Seth's exemplary preparation, and his encouragement to me to match his arduous career-advancing practices.

One of Seth's qualities as a professor that always amazed me as his student is his ability to elicit

excellence from each one of his students—even if those students are not inclined to strive for excellence in other courses. In acting classes with other professors, it is rare that students are eager to present their work before a professor. However, in Seth's classes all of the students are conscientious in their preparation and eager to get the most advice and feedback from Seth. Therefore, class time is maximized and students learn not only from the advice he offers directly to them, but from the feedback that he offers to other students. Seth reinforces his demands for excellence among his students by encouraging them to define what they view as excellent, unique, and compelling in the work of other artists and actors. In the business of acting, criticism is rampant; however, Seth enlightens his students by explaining that deciphering what is excellent in art will yield far more benefit for us than ruthlessly seeking flaws in another's craft. By encouraging us to seek out excellence, he not only improves us as actors, but also fosters a nurturing, supportive environment in what could otherwise be a cut-throat, negative, and viciously competitive department. As I have collaborated with other UA graduates in NYC, I have seen how this spirit of community that Seth has created enables alumni to have a support system beyond the UA campus. We assist each other in finding auditions, we offer feedback to one another as we rehearse for auditions, and we provide support for one another through the victories of being cast in productions. Because of Seth's approach to encouraging excellence and high standards without the burn of negative criticism within the UA theatre community, he has fostered a supportive network of alumni in NYC. I am grateful to be a part of this network, a family of UA grads in which we continue to support one another in our endeavor for excellence and success in acting due to Seth's influence on us.

Aside from demonstrating that we should seek excellence through the strengths of one another, Seth fervently seeks opportunities and, more importantly, creates them. Our department hit international acclaim due solely to Seth Panitch's visionary efforts to seek out a relationship with a theatre in Cuba. Through his efforts, UA actors had the opportunity to go to Cuba to produce the first American-directed show in Cuba since Castro's rise. In addition, he even masterminded a way to bring Cuban actors to the United States to involve more UA undergraduates in the opportunity to work with the Cuban actors. He overcame governmental and linguistic barriers in order to direct shows both in Cuba and here at the Allen Bales theatre on UA's campus. This was not an opportunity that fell into his lap, but a desire he had to create a truly unique experience to benefit his students, and bring even more credibility and renown to the UA's theatre program. Although I was not personally involved in the Cuban projects, Seth's pursuit of extraordinary opportunities has inspired me in my journey as an actor. I have realized that even when the casting breakdowns do not call for an actor of my type, that does not preclude me from making strides in my acting career. I am currently working with a friend I met who is an intern at Comedy Central's *Colbert Report* to write our own comedic sketches for a web series and a stand-up duet. The only reason that I am embarking on this new journey is because of Seth's insistence and example that I need to create opportunities for myself in order to reach my goals.

I am forever grateful to Seth Panitch for devoting his time and energy into embodying the traits that his students must have in order to achieve our highest goals. His passion for acting has manifested itself through his exemplary preparation, quest for excellence, and creating opportunities; and through his efforts he has inspired me to follow his path. I am eager to see what doors will open for me as a result of what I have taken away from his tremendous efforts as a professor, director, and advisor. Seth Panitch is a truly unique Professor, and I could not be more emphatic in my recommendation for him to be promoted to Full Professor.

Many thanks for your consideration,

Regan Stevens
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