

Nomination for Seth Panitch

There's an old adage that goes something like "you don't know how much you'll miss something until it's gone." This statement is validated in my life right now, as I am not currently in one of Seth Panitch's plays or classes. I have had the privilege of acting in a play under Seth's direction and learning from him in two acting classes, but now that I am in a play with a different director and taking class from a different acting professor, I can clearly see what distinguishes Seth from other directors and professors: his determination to encourage and elicit excellence from each actor and his desire to inspire the highest level of achievement from each of them.

In the UA Department of Theatre and Dance, all of the acting students fight for seats in Seth's movement and acting classes each semester. I was fortunate enough to enroll in his Acting II class as a freshman, and on the first day of class, I realized what all the hype was about. Like many other teachers, Seth used the first day of class to overview his expectations and syllabus, but embedded within his routine speech was a unique sincerity. He told us that his job as a professor was not to tell us whether we would "make it" or not, but rather to treat each one of us as if we were all destined for the highest level of success. Each student in his class feels his genuine concern for his or her career goals, and he makes it clear that he will not let preconceived notions or outside opinions. From the first day, he also emphasized the value of our class time because sometimes we students forget that classes are a privilege that we pay for, not a chore that we should idly endure. Seth convinces students to always be prepared to present their monologues, scenes, or other assignments in class by giving the most feedback (and minutes of class time) to students who present their work earliest before the final scene deadline, and the time allotted for feedback tapers down as the final deadline gets closer. As a result, students line up outside his office door before class begins so that they can ask to present their scenes first, second, etc. I have never been in a class environment where students are so consistently prepared

to work on their pieces, and it is because his teaching style inspires students to diligently work on their assignments and constantly hone their craft. He creates a professional atmosphere where students must drive themselves to do their assigned work, or else pay the consequences of less in class feedback, because in the real world we will have to prompt ourselves to always be prepared. He teaches students how to be self-motivated in order to have an advantage against the immense competition that we will inevitably face when we seek employment after college. In my current acting class, which is taught by a different professor, I am always amazed to see that students who have had Seth as a professor are always prepared far in advance of students who have not taken a class with Seth. He inspires, and expects, his students to work on a higher level, and they continue to follow those patterns even after completing his classes.

The second class that I took with Seth was his Acting IV period styles class where we focused on Shakespearean text. I was continually amazed by Seth's knowledge of every Shakespeare play and sonnet that students would perform in class. Whenever actors felt blocked in a piece, he could assist them in their knowledge of the text, reminding them of various references, plot twists, etc. that would inevitably unlock the answers that the actors needed in order to find a breakthrough in their work. And he could consistently produce all of this knowledge about the text without ever having to crack open a book. His in-depth knowledge of all of these texts set a precedent for us students to follow: we have to know the text in order to act it. His consistent ability to lead by example inspired me and my classmates, to read the texts more closely so that we could have those same breakthroughs armed with our own closer knowledge of the text.

Taking Seth's Shakespeare class prepared me to audition for the Shakespeare play he directed, *Henry V*. I was so fortunate to be cast as "Montjoy" in the play, and even more fortunate to follow Seth's guidance throughout the rehearsal process. The environment of

rehearsals indicated the professionalism that he wanted to achieve with the end result of the production. He had high expectations for each actor and because the bar was set so high, each actor had to work diligently to meet those expectations of excellence. Shakespearean text is not easy, and neither is sword fighting, but Seth provided us with the tools we needed to create the best possible show. He would always help us with scansion of text if we could not find the driving idea of a line. He also recorded our fighting lessons so that we could watch them on DVDs to see what moves we needed to work on and how we were improving. Because Seth gave us these resources, we were able to achieve greatest potential in areas like sword-fighting and Shakespearean text in which some of the actors had little or no experience. Also, some directors will not take the time after rehearsal to tell actors what went “right,” they will merely focus on what needs to be changed; Seth, however, created a positive working climate that encouraged students to achieve their best by congratulating them for excellent work while also improving the quality of the production by addressing specific moments that needed to be improved. Working with Seth was inspiring. He had a clear concept of his idea for the play, but was always open to the actors’ ideas for their own characters. His continued enthusiasm and excitement for the show brought an enthusiasm to the entire cast and crew. He always taught the actors to treat everyone involved in the production with respect, not just the actors and director, because ultimately the final product depends on a positive collaboration between all parties involved with the show. But with Seth, it was clear that he wanted to teach that principle as a lesson in life—don’t become so self-consumed that you run over people around you—because actors have an inclination to get a “diva” reputation. Through his supreme knowledge and insights of text, professional conduct in rehearsals, dedication to helping the students with difficult material, and constant encouragement, constructive criticism, and inspiration, Seth introduced Shakespeare to many students in a new way and allowed us to achieve our highest potential in the show.

As illustrated in the body of this letter, I, Regan Stevens, am honored to nominate Seth Panitch for this award. I have personally benefited greatly from his guidance as he has helped me to build the work ethic, skills, and inspiration I need in order to achieve my professional goals. I am so thankful that I have had the opportunity to study under his instruction as it has brought my acting to a new level that I would not have otherwise reached.

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