

March 20, 2021

Letter of Recommendation for Shane Lutz

I enthusiastically recommend to you Shane Lutz. His tenure at University of Montana's School of Theatre & Dance as an MFA candidate in Directing evinces his exemplary ability to synthesize and conceptualize artistic text/practice, while working with actors to bring such text/practice to imaginative and creative life on stage. I have had the opportunity to observe Lutz as an instructor, acting coach and director on numerous occasions. Specifically, I have not only served as his professor for several directing seminars but also as his directing mentor for our most recent mainstage production of Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Shane is a holistic, conceptual, and technologically savvy director/instructor who combines the "smarts" of training/technique with the "nuts, guts and vision" of artistry.

Shane's past MFA directing seminars with me comprised contemporary and conceptual work in Directing II and also included immersion in historic styles such as Restoration comedy, comedy of manners, and Moliere. All courses require collaboration between the directing seminar students and the advanced BFA acting students and/or MFA Acting candidates. It is a space in which Shane, as the MFA directing candidate, not only works as a directing student but also serves as a cohort in the teaching, coaching and scene conceptualization for the acting students. In all areas, Lutz is an engaging, exacting and knowledgeable instructor. He has a strong instinct for conceptualization/devising, theory and ensemble/actor coaching. He often brings out the best in his students; and they feel strong and safe in his coaching, directorial, instructional presence. Shane is also highly imaginative in the studio, working from his strong theory and devising background to integrate a discipline of fearless experimental and technical work (e.g., Brecht) with the stripped-down honesty of the Stanislavsky System (or variations thereof) and Meisner work (he was also a student in my Graduate Acting II seminar which trained heavily in Meisner technique). These talents also served him well as he tackled historic styles, increasing the breadth of his stylistic knowledge to include works and aesthetic practices that were previously foreign to him.

These days, I often think of Shane as more of a teaching colleague than a student, given his adeptness with lecture courses and in the studio. To this end, he has proved successful as an independent instructor of record for various lecture and online courses (e.g., Dramatic Literature). This semester he is my GTA (but, actually, more of a co-instructor) for Theatre History II. He has been an invaluable partner in this endeavor as I trust him to handle a great deal of the grading and online content, as well as provide several lectures throughout the semester; for he is also a very engaging and energetic lecturer.

As a director, Shane brings a collaborative spirit and inspired vision to his productions. I observed his work on the UM studio production of *Woyzek* (for which he also provided his own adaptation of the German text!). He built a very strong ensemble and created a piece that was

experimental in its gender-bending, starkly stripped-down aesthetic, and incorporation of movement. I have most recently had a seat at the table (as his faculty mentor) during design/production meetings for his mainstage video-streamed production of *Mother Courage*. I could probably write another page in this letter regarding his approach to this work, given its COVID protocols and unique aesthetic for the camera. Actors worked in masks and with social distancing. A small ensemble handled multiple roles with genders bent constantly (given the limited number of actors we could have in the space at one time). He collaborated with a composer to write original music for the piece, resulting in musical numbers which he also staged and choreographed. And then he filmed and edited the entire thing himself for its streamed delivery. In short, he steered the conceptual process with a focused and visionary hand. He proved to be a strong collaborator with his large team of designers, technicians and support staff; for all members enthusiastically, imaginatively and adeptly responded to his guidance. Given his skill with actors, the ensemble worked as a tight unit and delivered energetic performances, realizing a production that was a creative highlight for the University, especially given these COVID times.

On the service and academic side, I have also witnessed Shane in action as a productive contributor to the School of Theatre & Dance. I am currently the faculty advisor for UM...ARTS, our UM student theatre arts organization; and Shane brought this organization “back from the ashes” as President and organized numerous production opportunities for student-driven and devised works. He also won the top honor for GradCon (UM’s campus-wide graduate research competition) for his original epistolary script and research that focuses on archival letters between historical homosexual figures.

Shane is an artist who knows how to create productive events and realize results – onstage, in the classroom, and in the trenches. If you have any questions regarding this letter of recommendation, please do not hesitate to contact me. I wholeheartedly celebrate this accomplished student and colleague.

Sincerely,

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