

RE: Application for Full Professor  
Seth Panitch, The University of Alabama

May 1, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my privilege to write in full enthusiastic support of Seth Panitch's application for Full Professor at the University of Alabama. Through my position as the Director of the Dance Program at the University of Alabama, I have witnessed Seth's unique balance of cutting edge teaching and ambitious student performance projects, which are directly responsible for a stunning emergence of our Theatre program on the national scene, and for the remarkable success of our acting students in the professional world.

When I initially met Seth in his first semester here, he was already planning an enormously ambitious Off Broadway project for himself and his graduating MFA students. That summer, he directed them in his play *Dammit, Shakespeare!* at the Urban Stages Theatre, injecting his students directly into the thick of the New York Theatre scene. As I sat in the theater opening night, surrounded by a seasoned New York audience palpably thrilled by our students' work, it was clear to see his vision for teaching reached far beyond the classroom. For those two weeks in New York, he gave those students a priceless gift: the knowledge that they truly belonged on that national stage. Seth immediately parlayed that triumph into grander, more ambitious projects. He co-produced his play *Hell: Paradise Found* with the prestigious 59E59 Theatres in NYC, hiring professional actors to work shoulder to shoulder with his students. The production was a smashing success, selling out the majority of its run and receiving positive reviews from scores of national media, including *The New York Times*- an astonishing accomplishment for a production predominantly filled with graduating UA students. This past summer, Seth directed his students Off Broadway once again in *Alceste Ascending*, collaborating with Cuban Actors in the first combined Cuban U.S. Production since the 1950's.

Seth is a practicing professional himself: he acts, writes, and directs in theatres across the country, but in every case, he simultaneously creates exciting opportunities for his students as well. He was invited to direct in Havana by the Cuban Ministry of Culture- a truly amazing accomplishment- but within the year, he had brought his students down with him to perform on Havana's biggest stages. Through his work at the Colorado, Utah, and Texas Shakespeare Festivals he has built relationships that allow him to either directly cast his students into those prestigious companies, or place them in positions to be cast themselves. This tireless advocacy ensures that his students, many of whom have never been out of the state, have every possible advantage when they compete in the world beyond.

This passionate advocacy is clearly appreciated by our students, and his classes are consistently filled beyond their capacity. I can always tell when students are walking into one of Seth's classes by their demeanor: serious, driven, and totally focused. They emerge energized and excited; visibly changed as artists and as individuals. I have often slipped into the rear of the theatre when he is directing, continually amazed with just how far a student

the rear of the theatre when he is directing, continually amazed with just how far a student can travel under his instruction. What sets Seth apart is that his teaching does not end at the limits of his discipline: I have repeatedly brought him in to work with my dancers, due to his ability to communicate so effectively to students of any study. I am never surprised to hear students from the African Drumming Collective in his classes, or Jazz musicians from the School of Music, or even engineering students, developing battle effects with his actors.

His commitment to personal and professional growth is reflected in the unprecedented success of his students, many of whom are performing on Broadway, in theatres across the country, and in major motion pictures and hit television series. In Alabama, many of our students' life experiences are circumscribed by powerful economic and cultural limitations. Through his teaching and the opportunities he creates, Seth has given these students the confidence to not only dream beyond those boundaries, but to pursue a life beyond them as well, breaking cycles of behavior that have, in some cases, been entrenched for generations.

At the University of Alabama, we remain in continual dialogue about our past. I admire Seth's ability to be sensitive to these issues, but also to be an advocate for real change as well. Last year, as part of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the integration of the university, he directed a rich and powerful production of August Wilson's *Seven Guitars* that not only provided our African American students a platform to make a statement they could take pride in, it also served as a tremendous outreach opportunity in the surrounding communities. This was not the first instance of Seth's active role in our cultural metamorphosis, as he has developed a longstanding partnership with the First Generation Scholars Program. In fact, the most accomplished of his students, Sonequa Martin- Green, who currently stars on AMC's *The Walking Dead*, is a product of the combination of that program and Seth's mentorship.

Seth Panitch is a rare blend of teacher, mentor, and career advocate. He has expanded his classroom to broaden the art he teaches, and in doing so, broadens the humanity of the students he inspires. I have seen first-hand there is no barrier to what he thinks is possible for his students, and therefore, no barrier to what can be achieved by them. This supreme dedication to the inner life and future career of his students compels me to enthusiastically support his candidacy for Full Professor at the University of Alabama.

Very Sincerely,

Cornelius Carter  
Director- Dance Program and Professor of Dance

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