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July 23, 2010

Re: Seth Panitch

To whom it may concern:

This past summer I had the enormous pleasure of directing Seth Panitch in a production of The Fantasticks for the Colorado Shakespeare Festival.

Seth was not simply an actor in the production but a deeply appreciated collaborator. We had an extremely short rehearsal period—less than three weeks—in which to mount the musical. Seth played the lead, El Gallo, a character with quite a line load and quite a number of songs. The first day of rehearsal Seth not only arrived with his lines memorized, he was also in full command of his songs, including tempo, phrasing, and even necessary key changes. In addition, he had actively thought through all kinds of blocking. Any number of times it occurred to me that working with Seth was like getting to play with the most inventive and delightful of co-directors.

Seth is a director, of course, and it shows in his vast understanding of such things as spacing and tempo. Yet at no point did he ever make me feel as if he had better ideas or would do things differently. He was utterly respectful while offering terrific suggestions and solving the occasional blocking problem (the production included onstage seating, which offered quite a challenge).

Every now and then I got the sense that El Gallo is the sort of character that Seth is not given the opportunity to play very often. This would never have occurred to me. Seth utterly occupied the dark, sensual air of the role, while also contributing marvelous comic timing. He was arch where appropriate but also provided a beautiful and appropriate melancholy to moments that required such a shift—it was a pleasure to watch him find and unfold these nuances. He was also a terrific company member, providing a professional example to the younger actors in the cast (while never being nerdy about it; it is easy to see that he must be a cherished teacher); and was always willing to work a song, a scene, a moment as many times as necessary to make the show the best it could possibly be.

If you have an opportunity to work with Seth in any capacity you will find a hugely talented, focused, and energetic partner. I'd work with him again in a minute. It would be a pleasure and an honor.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Sands Hall