

October 2, 2023

This is Jerry Zaks, actor and director for stage, film, and television, and a recipient of multiple Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle, and Obie Awards, as well as induction into the American Theatre Hall of Fame.

It is my understanding that an actor with whom I recently worked, Bob Hess, is being considered for tenure at the University of North Texas, and I am delighted to offer my enthusiastic recommendation for his promotion.

I collaborated with Bob after he received the renowned Lunt Fontanne Fellowship from the Ten Chimneys Foundation, named for American theatre icons Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. The award is presented annually to ten exemplary stage actors selected from the American regional theatre for the body of work they have amassed. Less than 150 actors have been given this prestigious distinction since the Fellowship's inception in 2009. I had the privilege to serve as the Guest Artist Master Teacher for a week-long acting intensive with these Fellows at the Wisconsin estate of Lunt and Fontanne in July of 2023.

From the very first day, it was clear that Bob belonged there. He was the epitome of a dedicated, focused professional. I had made a number of suggestions to the actors, in advance of the Fellowship, as far as materials they could bring with them, including a scene from a play, an assortment of monologues, and a song. On day one, Bob arrived ready to explore any of the suggested materials. I had asked students to get very familiar with a specific scene from a Christopher Durang play; Bob was completely off book for it. I asked them to find a monologue from a play I had directed: Bob had researched my body of work and was off book for that piece, as well. No one else in the intensive had put as much effort into the preparation.

As we explored the creative work for the week, I was struck not only by Bob's intuitive strong skills and aesthetics as an actor (which made it very clear why he is currently playing lead roles in the resident acting company at a Tony-winning regional theatre), but also his openness and flexibility when given direction to explore and research completely new possibilities and perspectives. His monologue from the classic comedy *Light Up the Sky* by Moss Hart was one of the highlights of the week--witty, stylish, and crisp, as it must be--and I made sure it was included in our final showcase for the public.

I must also speak to Bob's skills when interacting with his peers. He constantly supported and encouraged his colleagues throughout the entirety of our time together both personally and professionally, so I was not the least bit surprised to find out that he is a very highly rated professor in his department at UNT. As a director, I encourage a room that is rooted in kindness and collegiality. Bob shared with me that he aspires to this very same standard in his classroom and was thrilled to take valuable lessons from our intensive as far as how to create a welcoming, supportive, kind artistic environment. I imagine Bob's classroom is all of that and then some.

UNT is so fortunate to have on their faculty someone who operates as an artist at the top of his field in the national and (with his broadcast work and theatre festival appearances) international theatre scenes, as well as a skilled, informed, passionate advocate for your students. This seems like the perfect combination necessary for a professor in practice mentoring others with the goal of a career as a professional actor. I am pleased to highly recommend Bob for this promotion.

Sincerely,

Jerry Zaks