



AMPHIBIAN STAGE

120 S. Main Street
Fort Worth, TX 76104
amphibianstage.com
817-923-3012

Kathleen Culebro
Artistic Director

Jay Duffer
Co-Artistic Director

Ayesha Ganguly
Development & Community
Outreach Manager

Evan Michael Woods
Marketing Manager

Alyssa Peters
Patron Experience Manager

Jeff Stanfield
Technical Director

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Dr. Anne Healy, Department Chair
Promotion and Tenure Committee
Department of Theatre Arts
University of Texas Arlington

Dear Dr. Healy and Members of the Committee,

On Wednesday, November 9, 2022, I had the pleasure of attending *Cabaret*, produced by the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Texas Arlington. The production was directed and choreographed by J. Austin Eyer, Assistant Professor of Theatre. I am pleased to note that, in my professional opinion, the work of Mr. Eyer was of high quality and meets all standards in both the educational and professional areas of the industry. Based upon my observations of the production and my post show conversation with Mr. Eyer, it is my recommendation that the Department Chair and Tenure/Promotion committee grant Mr. Eyer for continued promotion at the appropriate time.

I would like to point out several areas of the production that deeply impressed me.

The artistic vision was cohesive and strong. From the creative entrance into the theatre to the highly entertaining pre-show to the gender fluid inclusivity in the casting and costumes to the highly creative use of space, every detail was thoughtfully executed. It was apparent that the Director had a singular and anchoring vision for the production. Elements worked in tandem to achieve cohesion. I realize that budgets were constrained, as with most theatre productions, but I feel that the resources used were smartly delivered and strategically impactful. Mr. Eyer's attention to detail, specifically in the design areas of set and costumes enhanced the overall aesthetic for me. I deeply appreciated the nod to the art deco flare of the 1920's-1930's as well as the choice to configure the space in a ¾ thrust, surrounding the audience by playing space both house right and left, allowing for a more immersive audience experience.

Mr. Eyer clearly has a big heart and deep compassion for the students and for the educational experience of these young artists in training. This was most evident to me in both production and our follow up conversation. His approach to process was highly creative and enlightening to a generation of students perhaps encountering this masterpiece for the first time. His sensitivity to the subject matter as well as the



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contextual significance of the work thoughtfully guided his approach to achieving his learning objectives. He provided students with field trips and dramaturgical insight and perhaps most importantly, allowed for consistent moments of mental health check-ins throughout the rehearsal process knowing that these experiences would enlighten the student's intellectual abilities, inform and challenge the differing levels of craft represented throughout the company, and provide the actors a safe environment to explore, discover and risk. I have come across many directors in my past who seem to approach the artform through trial and error, hoping that solely focusing on blocking and "in the moment" inspiration will eventually lead to strong product. Mr. Eyer is not of this ilk thankfully. The success of *Cabaret* was not random, but instead uniquely and specifically intentional due to the detailed planning of Mr. Eyer, for both artistic and educational objectives. This is paramount for a theatre educator. I am sure these students not only walked away with experiences of improving their craft, but also a deeper understanding of our world, our shared and collective history and an empathetic approach to such challenging and complex material. I'm sure this experience will leave an indelible impression upon the students.

Lastly, I would like to comment on Mr. Eyer's ability to reveal story through clear, concise and creative blocking. Through both stage action and choreography, the choice for movement always seemed intentional and based upon the need to move, not necessarily upon the desire to create a new picture. The blocking was a smart use of the space and it was clear that the director knew where to place actors and action for impactful aesthetics. Yes, not all students understood full objective commitment yet as their skill levels are across the spectrum of learning at this point, but it was apparent that each individual on the stage was inspired and committed by strong direction and clearly understood their part in the world and could effectively contribute to it.

I'm sure the department appreciates that Mr. Eyer is a strong asset. I know his contributions will continue to prove most valuable to the future productions and to the educational needs of the institution. I look forward to seeing more of his work! I am happy to discuss in further detail my thoughts on the work if needed.

Sincerely,

Jay Duffer
Co-Artistic Director
jay@amphibianstage.com