

To whom it may concern,

My name is Audrey Spinazola and I am writing to advocate for Jim Donak as a Master Teacher at San Francisco's Circus Center. While attending the Clown Conservatory 2008/9, I met Jim Donak. In the years since, our relationship has grown from "that guy who does the 'how to train and not get hurt' workshops" to coach, respected colleague, and friend.

I have been a circus educator and practitioner for the past ten years. In order to grow my circus understanding as a practitioner and educator, it has been important to me to train at different institutions and experience a variety of coaches. I have taken classes and trained at Circus Warehouse in NY, Esh Circus in Boston, SANCA Seattle, NECCA, ACE/AYCO festivals, and this year a two week intensive at Ecole de Cirque de Quebec. I have taken classes with recreational teachers, coaches who have a cult following, and retired professional performers. This experience with a wide variety of programs and teachers allows me to say with confidence that Jim Donak far exceeds the standard coach; he is exceptional.

The way Jim teaches is both simple and complicated. He has the rare ability to clearly and concisely explain each skill and break them down into a variety of exercises and prerequisite skills so that students are able to fully understand the more complicated, advanced movements that they execute. This allows him to work with beginners, elite athletes, and everyone in between. In his classes, he holds each student accountable for their own progress, moving students forward when they are confident and comfortable with their foundational skills. Due to his background in anatomy and bodywork, if students are interested in a more technical understanding of the movements they are working on, Jim can walk them through exactly how their body moves with each exercise.

Jim is curious and inventive. When I was training consistently with him five years ago, he was able to provide multiple drills to isolate problem areas in my technique and would come to handstand class with a variety of tools and exercises to specifically hone balance in the handstand. In trampoline classes, he asks the student to think about what they're doing, where their body is in space, and why they think they did or didn't land the trick. He guides students through the learning process so that they are able to internalize and understand the tricks and movements they are performing. Jim's adaptive techniques and ability to help me understand my own movement pathways are responsible for my techniques as a circus artist today, and have informed how I teach handstands, tumbling, and acrobatics to my students.

Jim is a teacher of teachers. At a workshop of his I attended at the 2018 Circus Educators conference, there was a line of participants - coaches from across the States - who all wanted more information from him about mobility for circus artists. In a recent conversation with Adam Woolley (*Circus Now*, *Circadium Head Coach*), who should come up but Jim Donak. Jim is widely known and respected among circus educators as someone with a huge depth of knowledge and the ability to communicate and translate that information to his students and other teachers.

Jim Donak is a master at his craft, and one who will continue to grow and adapt his methods as he continues to observe and refine his teaching. If you have any questions or would like further examples, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Onwards and upwards,

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