

October 27th, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

It is a pleasure to be able to write this letter of recommendation for Jim Donak. I have known Mr. Donak since he came to Circus Center in the mid-90s. When I visited the Moscow School for Circus and Variety Art, I noticed that along with former performers who taught specific genres of acts, there were other instructors who also helped shape the acts of the students. Under the Russian system, I began to understand that body type played a part in which students were chosen to attend the school. Americans, however, presented a new idea: an American student might not have an "ideal body" to become, say, an aerialist, for instance. But an American would also be willing to do what ever it took to make that student's dream a reality. And often notable acts are performed by people starting without ideal bodies. Mr. Donak operates in this territory. He assesses what it would take for a given student to be able to fulfill his or her professional or recreational dreams within circus arts. He sees students through injuries and provides training guidance to that student specific to his or her needs. Unless there is someone to do this analysis, the teaching will have serious gaps and will not result in a unified performer.

I have watched Mr. Donak in action and he imparts a feeling of approaching learning circus arts with relaxation, Zen like centering and concentration. His overview of the range of human movement and movement education is extensive and eclectic. Mr. Donak has explored and researched Western training methods and combined them with Eastern sensibilities to create a new way of approaching circus art. I would have loved to be able to approach my own training with this broad scope years ago.

He has taught in the UK, Brazil, Mexico and Hong Kong as well as extensively throughout the United States. Over the course of 50+ years I have changed my way of teaching juggling completely more than a dozen times. A teacher needs to be open to new insights and inspirations. I feel Mr. Donak is that kind of teacher who is constantly seeking out new ideas and training methods. Circus Center is lucky to have him. To be sure – Mr. Donak isn't "traditional" in his approach to teaching circus arts. He may very well not fit neatly into the existing categories of teaching rankings. But I feel his experience is undeniable and unique at Circus Center. Perhaps a new category might be considered. The national school in Montréal has a degree program in which they can give degrees in teaching circus acts that are taught by non-circus performers with some kind of strong movement background.

Feel free to contact me with any further questions or comments.

Many thanks,
Judy Finelli