

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great pleasure that I write to offer my highest recommendation for Jim Donak. I met Jim in 1998 while touring with the Pickle Circus and training at the San Francisco School of Circus Arts.

I was immediately impressed and inspired by Jim's expertise with acrobatic movement and his knowledge of the body in general. At that time, he was providing training as well as Massage Therapy, and body health and well-being work for the members of the cast. The rehearsal period for the show that year was truncated, and the cast was only 10 people so we had a lot to do in a very short amount of time. Jim's presence and expertise were so helpful and grounding. After finishing my work with the Pickles, I continued training at the school and would seek out Jim's masterful teaching whenever possible.

I was early in my career, having graduated from the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theater in 1996. I was a physical performer, and dancer with acrobatic skills. I also loved studying anatomy and was an enthusiast of all sorts of movement and body modalities. In Jim I found a teacher and, ultimately, a friend and colleague who both shared my enthusiasm for the body, and had more knowledge and experience than I did. Jim always made himself available for conversations about the body, and was willing to offer his teachings and perspectives generously.

I started teaching physical training, acrobatics, and clown at Dell'Arte International in 1999. I remained a guest teacher at Dell'Arte through 2003 at which point I took a job as an Assistant Professor of Mask Acting and Physical Theater at the University of Missouri Kansas City. In 2006 I was asked back to Dell'Arte to help launch their MFA in Ensemble Based Physical Theater. I developed and implemented a three-year physical training curriculum for Dell'Arte, and eventually was named Associate School Director. The work I did with Jim as a student was always present in my teaching. In addition, I talked regularly with Jim about acrobatic movement training strategies, injury prevention and treatment, and pedagogy. Those conversations benefited literally hundreds of students from all over the world that Jim has never met.

In 2012 I fell-off a boulder and broke my back in two places while teaching an outdoor training class. The day after the fall, I was laying in my bed spinning about whether my career was over. The one person in the world I felt I needed to reach out to was Jim. I sent him an email, he responded shortly thereafter, I sent him my CT scans, and he called me on the phone. It was that conversation that gave me hope and got my mind shifted toward the idea that I was going to make a full recovery. Which I did. I will be forever grateful for Jim.

I recently met with Jim in San Francisco. My family and I moved from California to Minneapolis in 2014 and I was back on the West Coast to teach a master class at Dell'Arte. Jim and I had another great conversation about anatomy, movement, training, and pedagogy. The thing that struck me most about this conversation with Jim was that his first response to every question I had for him was, "It depends." To me that is the answer of a master teacher. A beginning teacher has his teacher's teachings. A teacher has made some of their own teachings. A Master teacher takes in the whole student (body, mind, and spirit) and answers that person's question in exactly the way that person needs to hear it in that moment. So when I ask a teacher a hypothetical question, and they say, "It depends," I know I'm talking to a master.

I give Jim Donak my highest recommendation. I am glad to elaborate more on Jim's many fine qualities as a teacher and human being. If you would like to talk, I can be reached at the number below.

All the best,



Joe Krienke

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