

PEER CREATIVE REVIEWS

Click on any review title to automatically scroll to that review.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Angelo Fraboni, <i>Dancing Through the Decades</i> (10/29/21)	2
Chris Vaughn, <i>Samantha Single Handed</i> (1/3/22)	3
CJ Greer, <i>The H.O.P.E. Project</i> (8/13/21)	4
Patrick Garrigan <i>The H.O.P.E. Project</i> (1/3/22)	6
Laura Jones, <i>The Rocky Horror Show</i> (11/26/22)	9
Linda Goodrich, <i>Professional Recommendation</i> (9/25/21)	12



MADISON THEATRE

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October 29, 2021

Dear Members of the Colorado State University Tenure Committee:

I am writing in support of Professor Noah Racey's application for tenure at the Colorado State University. As the Artistic Director of the Madison Theatre at Molloy College, I have worked with Professor Racey as a performer and a Playwright. In both capacities, he has gone to great lengths to provide our students with professional workshops and performance opportunities. He brings diverse groups together for educational and cultural programs through his work, encouraging essential conversations among students and community members.

The Madison Theatre recently started an active partnership with Professor Racey to develop original concerts and musical theatre projects. I was happy to expand our role and use our facility to help promote opportunities for participation among our community members and students to encourage the development of this work and performance opportunities with Professor Racey.

We successfully relaunched our theatre on September 11, 2021, after 18 months of being shuttered. Professor Racey's contribution of new material for our Theatre Arts students was a significant factor in its success. His ability to connect the material to each student was remarkable. His gentle manner of direction and coaching of this material was engaging and educational for the students as he brought us through various decades of cultural references and material. He cares deeply for the success of each student.

Along with the success of the reopening concert, I engaged Professor Racey to start development on his new musical with our students. What seemed like a simple table read turned into an exciting opportunity for the students to take part in the development process of new work. The opportunities that Noah affords our students are invaluable to their development as performers and artists.

I look forward to the next stage in the development of his work.

Professor Racey is a consummate professional and dynamic educator. His students have a strong advocate, as he helps guide their education and development as well-rounded performers and human beings. Colorado State University is fortunate to have Professor Noah Racey as a faculty member, and I strongly support his application for tenure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Angelo Fraboni".

Angelo Fraboni, Executive Artistic Director
Madison Theatre, Molloy College

To Whom it May Concern:

I have known Noah Racey for several years, having first been introduced to him by my good friend and musical theater colleague Aaron Gandy. When Noah and Aaron started collaborating on *Samantha, Single Handed*, I was lucky to be in the room on several occasions, as both a singer and as a sounding board for their work. I've witnessed Noah's ideas born at lightning speed, and then slowly molded and reshaped into witty and exciting musical conversations. It's an exciting feeling sharing a space with him; his love of musical theater is infectious; I find myself more energized, more committed and focused, and importantly, more included with him in the room.

It was a joy to then be in the room for the first book readthrough of *Samantha, Single Handed*. In my position at Manhattan School of Music, I try to empower students to not only hone their entrepreneurial skills, but to understand at an emotional level that *they are already part of our artistic community*. To watch a table full of students performing Noah, Aaron, and the book writer's work, truly unfettered in what they brought to the table, and obviously empowered to let loose, was incredibly reaffirming to me.

Too many story tellers are inevitably stymied by their reluctance to change, well, anything. They see their work as gospel and aren't able to allow anyone in to offer a differing opinion. Noah, however, approaches his work with wide-open arms. He is protective of his work, and confident in its value, as well he should be. Yet, his eyes ignite when presented with an interpretation he hadn't considered. His grin widens when a student delivers a line differently than initially intended, or wonders aloud if instead a different word or phrase could be used, and this is exactly why I think this piece will be allowed room to find itself.

He has my full endorsement, and I cannot wait to see what happens next.

Very Sincerely,



Chris Vaughn

Associate Director of Career Readiness and Community Impact
(he/him/his)

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“Let’s sing songs of HOPE.”

Art is the Antidote.

In Spring of 2021, I had the pleasure of watching CSU’s virtually streamed musical theatre production “The H.O.P.E. Project,” – conceived, constructed, and directed by Noah Racey. During the pandemic, musical theatre programs around the country brainstormed and struggled to find ways to provide opportunities for student growth while abiding by mask mandates, social distancing, aerosol expulsion, quarantine, and many other challenges. In support and solidarity, I watched many productions where teams presented a pastiche version of the musical theatre canon. Most of these productions fell flat – lacking experienced film crews, performing spaces, and required masks that obscure human expression – to name a few of the variables. Very few universities thought further outside of the proverbial box and took the road less traveled.

“The H.O.P.E. Project” (Health. Overcoming Oppression. Perseverance. Empathy) was one of those road-less-traveled productions. In its most comprehensive version, Musical Theatre is the collaboration and cooperation of Music, Theatre, Dance, and Visual Arts. In response to the Covid protocols of 2020, that now also includes Film. Often in higher education these programs do not work or ‘play well’ together. “The H.O.P.E. Project” is a beautiful example of bringing departments together to accomplish a project that insists faculty egos and standard curriculums be set aside in order to give students permission to create something truly their own; a chance to express themselves as they are inspired to – hear what is on their hearts and minds. These rare opportunities bolster students (and faculty) to awaken the artist inside and invite them to become more than just musical theatre performers, but rather artists with their own, unique voice.

“The H.O.P.E. Project,” invited students from the School of Music, Theatre & Dance to submit pieces of their own choosing that focused on one or more of the topics in the acronym H.O.P.E. An activity of this magnitude is no small feat. Not only does it take an immense amount of time, organization, and ingenuity, it takes someone with Noah’s creativity to envision a project outside of the standard, his leadership to initiate the departmental dialogue, and his tenacity to see it through to completion. Noah is clearly an ‘outside-the-box thinker;’ an artist willing to follow a less-traveled path. Furthermore, projects such as these also require faculty to trust in their leader. Noah’s ability to bring CSU’s faculty and staff to the discussion table, to motivate while facing uncertainty, and to engender open, collaborative conversation takes the kind of leadership that will raise a program to new, innovative heights.

Music theatre has been gradually returning to film. Once Hollywood musical movies were created for the screen and then re-envisioned for the stage. Watching this production reminded me of old movie musicals whose plots centered around bringing a community together. When things are going wrong, what did people do to lift themselves up? They got their friends together and put on a show! They sang songs, they danced, they made up ridiculous comic routines and skits, and audiences would come to feel

better – to have their hearts lifted and be permitted to escape from the trials of their lives. “The H.O.P.E. Project” brought this same sense of camaraderie and - dare I say the obvious, hope - to its audiences, particularly during a time of world crisis when the collective human spirit was experiencing such defeat. More importantly, it offered students the opportunity to continue their education and growth while gaining awareness and experience in the film industry which will undoubtedly continue to be a part of their journeys moving forward. These are all important steps in a curriculum that will set musical theatre majors up for success.

The ingenuity and audacity of a director of a musical theatre program to toss away the ‘normal’ production expectations and create something new – to not give the students a prescribed script or song or dance piece, but instead invite them to express themselves viscerally and vulnerably – reveals a director whose vision of the future of musical theatre will carry any program through the unprecedented change the performing industry is moving through right now. Noah Racey is one of a handful of program directors able to envision, embrace and encourage a more collaboration and innovative future of the musical theatre industry.

Sincerely,

CJ Greer

MFA/MM in Musical Theatre and Classical Pedagogy and Performance

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Patrick Garrigan

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Review of The H.O.P.E Project

Monday, January 3, 2022
Fort Collins, CO

“Love will find a way.” We hear that often when hard times find us. By my measure, however, it’s less about putting our faith in love and more about investing in the power of hope — knowing that despite experiencing hardship or isolation or depression or *the absence of love*, there is possibility, and the potential that on the horizon, a better tomorrow.

As isolation and fraying trust in our institutions insidiously makes its way into our daily lives, submitting to the power of hope has never been more essential. To enable hope it becomes ever-more important to nurture sparks of positivity, creativity and empathy.

Against this backdrop the Colorado State University Center for the Arts production of The H.O.P.E Project finds its context. Before diving into the elements of the production, it’s important first to look at the raw materials afforded H.O.P.E Project director Noah Racey: A world still in the midst of a global pandemic that made the simple act of being in a room together nearly impossible, profound rigors of testing and social distancing necessary to keep his artist safe, and the task of knitting these elements together for an audience that would never make it into a theater to see this project in person.

H.O.P.E will find a way.

In tackling the production, Racey looked to these challenges as opportunities to rethink how song, dance and narratives were delivered. With each challenge becoming a new opportunity to interrogate and realize. *Audiences can’t come to the theater?* No problem. Let this be the moment to democratize and demystify the theater, meeting global audiences wherever they are.

How do we keep the artists safe? Explore music video-style performances in isolation that when smartly edited promote consideration of theatrical cannon for new generations by presenting it in a way that feels both urgent and relevant (and safe).

Beyond this rethinking of formats, it is my understanding that this moment enabled Racey and his creative team the opportunity to work with the University health teams to ensure all necessary testing and mitigation efforts were in place to keep these colleagues together. This provided an opportunity to collaborate not just with fellow artists, but the scientists and health care professionals who’s contributions are themselves a part of our shared story.

How does Racey bring this all together? Leverage technology to bring otherwise disparate performers together, creating a mosaic of sorts that allows us to rethink songs we think we know by deconstructing them and delivering them back to us in fresh ways.

Each performance was hyper individualized based on the performers' reflections on what the themes associated with H.O.P.E mean, the guiding principles were inspired by the following acronym:

- Health
- Oppression/Overcoming Oppression
- Perseverance/Persistence
- Empathy

While this construct has the potential of lending itself to something of a grab bag of narrative threads, Noah Racey and his creative team did an admirable job of working to provide consistency and rhetorical arc throughout the program.

Across the evening I couldn't help but find myself gravitating to the pieces that seemed to tackle this prompt from a much more lifted up perspective. "Brother Can You Spare a Dime" performed by Will Hazel and "Sun, Sun, Sun" performed by Jocelyn Madsen, Jacquelyn Olivera and Adeline Sutherland connected with me most deeply.

In Hazel's performance of "Brother Can You Spare a Dime," I couldn't help but reflect on the weight of the past year. The killing of George Floyd, the fraying of democratic norms, the gratuitous use of the word "unprecedented" and the painful deficit of empathy, especially during times of shared suffering. It was hard medicine, but necessary to receive the larger message of hope. The only way out is through.

The arrival to the otherside of this weighty vignette was delivered in the form of Madsen, Olivera and Sutherland's performance of "Sun, Sun, Sun." While I wager this sort of emotional arrival was meant to be delivered by the full company performance of "Imagine," the overly knowing lyrics of the Lennon hit couldn't match the earnest joy of these three singers simply delighted to see another day arrive and the possibilities it provided.

While we may want to *imagine* a more perfect world, these performers were ready to appreciate the blessing of being able to greet another day that was never promised to us, and setting about the essential thankless work of trying to make the world 0.999% better than it was the day before.

Another moment that truly stuck with me was the closing number and segway into the credits, during this moment Racey and his video gurus take a somewhat Brechtian approach giving us a peek behind the curtain of exactly what rigors went into shooting the performance, and Racey's infectious enthusiasm for the project was on full display as he leapt to the stage to congratulate his cast.

Having this deeper understanding of what went into the making of the performance and what the cast and crew had to undergo, I think would only make me enjoy the performance more, and further personalize the deeper challenges the H.O.P.E. project successfully overcame.

The past 16 months have changed us. What gives *me* hope is the way in which Noah Racey and the cast of the H.O.P.E. Project used these many challenges to lift up the artists of tomorrow, experiment with new platforms to deliver these stories and bring them to audiences all around the world. Yes, the pandemic changed us all, but with all

the creativity that has emerged from this period of incredible disruption, maybe that's not such a bad thing. Hope will find a way.

— Patrick Garrigan; SVP, Global Head of Events, Condé Nast
New York, NY

November 26, 2022

Laura J. Jones, Ph.D.
CSU Theatre Professor Emerita

A Reflection Paper on Noah Racey's Stage Direction and Choreography During the 2022 Calendar Year

Background

It has been my distinct pleasure to watch Professor Noah Racey's work as an artist and as a teacher defy the learning curve inherent in transitioning from a professional Broadway career to a full-time gig as a university professor. Not that he has not faced daunting challenges, but Sisyphus would be envious of him.

This year I have attended four different fully mounted productions directed by Noah Racey. It had been my intent to respond as an external reviewer by writing up a brief and separate blurb on each, succinct and serviceable. However, after witnessing the range of his creative artistry I believe that I have acquired a more over-arching perspective on Noah's work, worth sharing in the hope that my observations may positively impress those tasked with assessing his performance.

Context

In a current television ad for CSU Global a key selling point is "faculty with industry experience." Enter Noah Racey. Throughout his professional career he has directed, choreographed, and performed in Broadway and regional theatre productions representing the full spectrum of the American musical theatre canon. CSU Theatre is fortunate that he has chosen to share his years of training and experience with the next up-and-coming generation.

During his years spent alternately in the trenches and on the boards, Professor Racey rode the ground swell of a significant shift in practice and philosophy regarding popular music. To provide context, I refer to a statement once made by the iconic American composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim, who died one year ago today (11/26/21) at the age of 91. In a March 2000 New York Times interview, he discussed with drama critic Frank Rich whether he had outlived the genre of musical theatre. Explaining his fear that his well had run dry in its appeal, Sondheim offered the following insight.

*With every generation, popular music goes through a change.
To me, music is about harmony, and in most popular music, the
harmony is not interesting because that's not what it's about.
It's about rhythm. And performance and visceral reaction and
participation and dancing.*

Noah Racey's four 2022 productions clearly demonstrated his well-honed and time-tested ability to realize Sondheim's perceived requisites of popular music in the 21st century. Page 1 of 3

Observations

The Rocky Horror Show – University Theatre (CSU)

Richard O'Brien's camp tribute to 1930s B movies is a cult classic of counterculture and sexual liberation. Racey's direction exemplified elements of *performance*, *participation*, and *dancing*.

His student *performance* majors strutted their "stuff" – flaunting the near-fatal attraction of two newlyweds, the sexual transgression of a mad transvestite, and the unveiling of an artificially made, physically perfect muscle man complete "with blond hair and a tan."

The Rocky Horror Show offers unique opportunities for *participation*, and Racey capitalized on the *rhythm* of the shout-out, call-back audience responses to the performers' lines and lyrics.

To facilitate audience participation, the props needed to fully immerse attendees in the interactive experience were provided via goody bags and a good time was had by all on both sides of the footlights. Favorite moments were singing and *dancing* the "Time Warp" again.

Sense and Sensibility – Lincoln Center (OpenStage Theatre)

Kate Hamill's light-hearted adaptation of the novel by Jane Austen examines the characters' reactions, both reasonable and ridiculous, to societal pressures. A play with music.

In this contemporized period piece (England, 1790s) Director Racey was particularly challenged by choreographing the constant shifts in time, place, and *performance* styles enacted by ten community actors, eight playing multiple characters including a comedic chorus of generic Gossips. Men played women, women played men, requiring quick costume, makeup, and wig changes and complicating the crisscrossing traffic patterns of entrances and exits.

Most impressive in Racey's staging were the fast-paced *rhythms* of the set changes all performed au vista by the actors! With furniture and scenery on casters, the non-stop movement was a marvel of shifting stage pictures.

A Walk in the Woods – Mainstage (Bas Bleu Theatre)

Lee Blessing provides a case study of two superpower arms negotiators, a Russian and an American, who meet informally in a wooded area on the outskirts of Geneva after long, frustrating hours at the bargaining table.

Total 180-degree turn for Director Racey. Single setting. Non-musical. Two Equity actors. 99-seat intimate house. And the *rhythm* was solely to be found in the lyricism and musicality of the language.

Beautifully executed, Racey's ability to adjust to minimalism and selective realism was evidenced in his orchestration of an engaging exchange of ideas articulated via subtle inflections in sound and movement.

Spring Awakening – University Theatre (CSU)

In Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater's punk-rock musical adaptation of Frank Wedekind's coming-of-age classic set in 19th century Germany, teenagers wrestle with their awakening sexuality and inevitable loss of innocence.

Staged in-the-round, metatheatrical examples of *performance*, *participation*, and exceptionally synchronized *dancing* were all vividly alive and well. In addition... Page 2 of 3

It was this production of the four in which Racey most effectively realized Sondheim's criterion of *visceral reaction*. Traditionally referred to as a "pin drop" moment, there is the rare occasion during a live theatre performance when the audience collectively holds their breath in silence (when one might be able to hear a pin drop).

This phenomenon occurred late in the second act when Melchior escapes from the reformatory and hides in a cemetery. He searches and finds the old grave of his friend Moritz who committed suicide. But what Melchior does not expect to find is the new grave of Wendla, who he/we learn did not survive an abortion of his child. The night I attended there was an audible gasp throughout the house as we shared a *visceral reaction* to this plot reveal. And I sensed the synchronization of the audience's heartbeat, the quintessential *rhythm* of human life.

Indeed, I had recently read that scientists have discovered that people's heartbeats unconsciously synchronize when they are attentively listening to a story or watching a performance. Amazing! What broke the tension in our row was the response of the college student sitting next to me who in her dismay and disbelief whispered: "Shut up!"

Conclusions

Noah Racey is an invaluable resource to the School of Music, Theatre and Dance. He possesses a uniquely experiential understanding of the multi-disciplinary layering of the mediums of expression that define live performance as an art form. As a result, Noah instinctively knows how to nurture the kind of collaboration that allows a range of contributions and expertise to meld into one harmonious *and rhythmic* whole.

Thus, I conclude that he is prepared to meet the demands of an expanding CSU Theatre curriculum and I recognize that he is genuinely committed to responding with energy and enthusiasm to the needs of his students, his colleagues, and the arts community-at-large.

I have appreciated this opportunity to share my perceptions of his performance-to-date. I can attest to his solid progress toward tenure, and it is with pleasure and without hesitation that I endorse his imminent promotion.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura J. Jones, Ph.D.
CSU Theatre Professor Emerita



RECOMMENDATION FOR NOAH RACEY

9-25-2021

It is with great enthusiasm that I write in support of Noah Racey. I have had the privilege of knowing and watching him develop as an artist and educator for close to 30 years now. He is a man of irrevocable integrity, as well as being thoughtful, compassionate, and a dynamic individual. Noah's contributions, as actor, dancer, singer, writer, director, choreographer and teacher to the Musical Theatre community have been wide ranging and of the highest quality imaginable. Beyond that, he is a true "team Player" who vigorously brings people together for the the common good. We have worked together professionally at regional theatres throughout the country. In additional, Noah has taught master classes for the University of Michigan Musical Theatre Department, where I have been on faculty for several years.

Noah has a strong national reputation and is widely respected by his peers and is lauded by the Broadway community. When Noah decided to leave NYC in the prime of his career, and commit his energies primarily to teaching, I was surprised, but also excited for the young lives that he would surely influence. The wealth of information and artistry that Noah has to impart to his students is great. His classes are both inspiring and brilliantly constructed. Noah's intellect and innovation are indeed an asset to the institution in which he is engaged. As a creative stage director and versatile choreographer, no one is more skilled than Noah, and his lengthy professional resume gives testament to this.

I cannot possibly speak too highly of this terrific artist. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can provide any more information or insight.

Respectfully Submitted,

Linda Goodrich

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