Colby

COLBY COLLEGE
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DEPARTMENT OF THEATER AND DANCE

September 24, 2017

Dear Search Committee:

Andrew Cao served as the Associate Director, Choreographer, and New York City Liaison as part of the professional team hired by the Colby College Department of Music and Department of Theater and Dance in the fall of 2016 to develop a new student-driven musical titled *Lost With You*. Andrew worked on this project, and helped develop the intensive arts incubator that shaped it, from October 24, 2016 through February 9, 2017. In all areas Andrew was exemplary. His professionalism, knowledge of the field, professional contacts, organizational ability, attention to detail, and most of all, his ability to create an engaging, challenging learning environment for students, made him a valued member of the creative team. In fact, Andrew's contributions to the success of the *Lost With You* arts incubator are still vivid in the minds of the student creators and student ensemble—his work clearly inspired our students and gave them the courage to fully embrace this project.

I collaborated closely with Andrew in the fall of 2016 to plan and implement the infrastructure, budget, and professional staff needed for the *Lost With You* arts incubator. Though much of the rehearsal for this project would take place at Colby, the centerpiece of the educational experience was a weeklong intensive developmental residency for the company in New York City. The goal was to have students experience what it is like to work in a prominent studio under pressure with Broadway professionals to further develop the book, score, acting, choreography, and directing for several numbers in the work. Andrew took the lead booking Ripley-Grier Studios, contacted guest professionals for master classes, and worked with director Ken Urso and guest music director Kimberly Grigsby to set daily goals and then worked intently with the students to achieve these goals.

In the studio Andrew was rigorous, demonstrating phrasing and technique while at the same time presenting an overview of how individual character movement and detail fit into the larger story and conceptual framework. He had high expectations for all in the room and taught with a seriousness of purpose. At the same time, Andrew infused his work with a sense of humor and his uncanny sense of knowing when a student needed just the right amount of support and encouragement to achieve a breakthrough. Today, when students reflect on how much they learned and how much they grew as artists and as people during *Lost With You*, they often comment on Andrew's teaching style—a delightful blend of exactitude, charisma, encouragement, and sharing of his deep knowledge of the field.

Andrew is a very generous collaborator. The *Lost With You* arts incubator was the most expansive, risky, and rewarding project I have worked on professionally to date. There were over 55 students, professional staff, and Colby staff and faculty involved in this project. The project was in development for 18 months, with October 2016 through February 2017 as the most intensive part of the process. Since the incubator was largely experimental, there were many unknowns. To this environment and process Andrew brought a stability, a wealth of knowledge about the profession and development of new work, and a can do attitude that made all the difference. To Andrew, problems are an opportunity, something to embrace and integrate while moving the larger work forward. This involves, at times, making difficult choices under pressure—quick thinking on your feet in the studio for example—and maintaining the trust of the ensemble while asking them to do something, a new phrase/routine, that wasn't planned and might be out of their comfort zone. Andrew has a unique ability to serve as a trusted guide in such moments, thinking ahead of the group, and then leading them to this new place with confidence and sense of accomplishment. Andrew is equally adept around the production table when larger artistic production challenges need to be defined and solved.

Without hesitation I would hire Andrew again as a teacher, colleague, artist, choreographer, director, and/or project team leader. His passion for the performing arts is always evident as is his generosity. During the formal post-production review of *Lost With You*, students cited Andrew and his colleagues Ken Urso and Kimberly Grigsby with high praise for creating one of the most impactful educational experiences of their lives. Indeed, *Lost With You* was a unique, life changing educationally immersive performance process primarily driven by professionals in the field that have a keen sense of how to engage and inspire emerging artists. Andrew deserves much credit for his role in this success.

Should you need more information about Andrew and his work with Colby College, please do not hesitate to contact me at jcthurst@colby.edu or at 207-859-4525.

Sincerely,

James C. Thurston
Chair and Associate Professor
Department of Theater and Dance

TCU

COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

Dear Search Committee,

It is with the greatest pleasure that I recommend **ANDREW CAO** to you for your position of Assistant Professor of Musical Theatre. I have known Andrew since he was a freshman in the musical theatre program at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and served as his advisor, performance instructor, director, and voice teacher there. Since that time, I have kept in close contact with him. Our relationship evolved from student/teacher to theatre professionals and close friends. Our association now spans seventeen years.

I have the greatest respect for Andrew. I am so pleased that he is choosing to enter the academic arena to share his wealth and breadth of experience and knowledge with aspiring performers. Let me address one thing immediately: I know Andrew Cao has not yet worked in a university environment. Please do not let this dissuade you from considering his application seriously. I have taken a similar route to *academe,* having been a theatre professional for twenty years before becoming a theatre educator. Having served and chaired many search committees, I know how easy it is to simply look for a terminal degree. However, if I had a job to offer Andrew at TCU, I'd do it in a heartbeat. He is exceptional and his credentials are impeccable. He is a gifted performer and a quadruple threat: actor, singer, dancer, and director/choreographer. Let me quote my friend, the late James Moore, Former Ballet Master at American Ballet Theatre and Artistic Director of The Royal Swedish Ballet: "If you don't put your faith in Andrew, someone else will and they will reap the benefits." I could not more fully agree with Jim's assessment of Andrew.

He is a natural teacher. An examination of his materials will prove the range of environments in which he as taught. I never found this surprising. Even as an undergraduate, Andrew possessed a maturity beyond his age; our conversations went far beyond what one would expect from someone so young at the time. His understanding of theatre and performance were balanced with a voracious appetite for the internal workings of the university environment. I had no doubt that after a successful career Andrew would (and should) join the ranks of those who are called to educate future theatre professionals.

His experience in the profession will be invaluable to students: three long-running Broadway shows and twelve additional high-profile New York credits, just for starters. Regional credits like the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, The Old Globe, Goodspeed Musicals, and The Shakespeare Festival of New Jersey demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the theatre profession. He also has substantial experience in television and commercial work. He has shared his experience and insight in numerous workshops.

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE

Texas Christian University • TCU Box 297510 • Fort Worth, Texas 76129 • o (817) 257-7625 • f (817) 257-4911

Andrew Cao has, in addition, an incredible mind and stellar work ethic. He is also one of the best collaborators I know. Believe me, I know how important "fit" is when looking for a faculty member. Andrew is one of the nicest people I know. I cannot urge you strongly enough to seriously consider his application for your position. He will easily make your short list and, most likely, end up at the top of the pile of applicants.

If you have any questions about Andrew Cao, feel free to contact me. I'll gladly speak with you about this remarkable man.

Sincerely,



Alan Shorter
Professor & Associate Chair
Texas Christian University
817-257-6684
a.shorter@tcu.edu

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REPERTORY THEATRE

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To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure to write this letter of recommendation for Andrew Cao. I have known Andrew since 2000, when we first hired him as an actor with our summer theatre company. In the seventeen years since I first met him, I have been consistently impressed with every aspect of his professional life. As I singer, actor, dancer, choreographer, colleague, and friend, Andrew has my highest esteem and respect. I can confidently offer my highest recommendation.

When I consider how I have known Andrew, I reflect on the phases of our professional relationship. In the summer of 2000, I was employed by this theatre as the Music Director, and we hired Andrew when he was still in college. I got to know him as a friend that summer, while observing his performances every night as I played in the pit. I remember being impressed with his ability and consistency. Even though I was not the final authority in hiring back then, I was happy to see his return to the company for another summer after that first one.

In 2005 I took over as Artistic Director, becoming the ultimate voice in hiring directors and designers. I was delighted to ask Andrew to join the Company as our choreographer. I was new to choosing and hiring the artistic staff, but I was confident that Andrew would serve us well. He had built an impressive resume in the intervening years, and I was excited to welcome him to the artistic group I was establishing. As I hoped, he did an outstanding job and I was glad to welcome him back for another season before his performing career prevented him from returning. In every instance I observed him working with our company of actor/singer/dancers, I was consistently impressed with his preparation, his artistry, his dedication, and--most importantly--his communication skills. He was able to clearly and effectively communicate his ideas, plans, and expectations. He set an extremely high bar for our performers, and positively worked with them to reach his level of expectation—always demanding, always professional, always positive, always urging the performers to give and achieve their very best.

After many intervening years, as Andrew established himself as a regular Broadway performer, we were able to align our schedules so he could return to Rocky Mountain Rep for our 2016 season. He came back to choreograph our production of *Rock Of Ages* that I was directing. He arranged to take a vacation from his Broadway performing job so he could come work with us for two weeks to mount this production. It had been years since I had worked with him, and—exactly as I remembered—Andrew came to the rehearsal period ready to teach, ready to work with our young performers, and ready to engage with the production team. He was absolutely the best colleague I could have hoped for. Now that I am the Executive Artistic Director, and fully in charge of the hiring of all of our employees, I now dream of the date that our schedules will align again, so I can entice him to return to our company to serve as Director/Choreographer for one of our summer productions. Even though I have not observed him work in this capacity, I am completely confident and certain that he would be great in this role. I am confident that he would serve the script and the score, that he would interact well with the designers and performers, and that he would give Rocky Mountain Rep a production to be proud of.

Ultimately, and now for seventeen years, Andrew is a colleague that I hold in the highest regard. There isn't a choreographer that I would rather have work with me on a production. As I contemplate all of my future hiring choices, I wonder "will she/he do as well as Andrew did?" It's a reliable comparison.

I hope it is clear. I think the world of Andrew Cao. I can confidently recommend him to you with my highest emphasis. If you have the opportunity to hire Andrew Cao, you'll be making a solid choice to hire him. I would be happy to discuss these points, and any other issues or questions you may have.

Sincerely yours,

Michael Querio
Executive Artistic Director

Email: michael@rockymountainrep.com
PO Box 1682 Grand Lake, CO 80447
Phone: (970) 627-5087
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VITERBO
UNIVERSITY

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Nancy Allen and I am member of the Music and Musical Theatre faculty here at Viterbo University. I am eagerly writing a letter of recommendation for Andrew Cao to be considered for a position teaching dance, music, and theatre. I have known Andrew for over 18 years. I was blessed to have him as a student at Viterbo University in La Crosse, Wisconsin. I have had the honor to work with Andrew as he served brilliantly as dance captain, choreographer and actor in many of our musical productions while a student at Viterbo. He has returned to Viterbo numerous times to choreograph for our collegiate show choir and provide workshops for our students. I have observed Andrew's work with some of the best show choirs in the nation. He is creative and passionate about his choreography and show design. I have had the privilege of seeing him perform in all of his Broadway musicals. Andrew is a true triple threat, he has a beautiful singing voice, he dances effortlessly and his acting is genuine. His strong work ethic and drive for excellence makes him an outstanding performer but his care for people makes him an excellent teacher. He is an intelligent, loving and compassionate man. He always takes the time to make people feel welcome and important.

Andrew is a born leader and a natural teacher. This was obvious the first week I met Andrew and observed him in rehearsals. He was the first student to help another, to ask for clarification on a confusing direction and he always gave 100% at each rehearsal. He gained the respect of his peers immediately due to his caring and positive attitude. Andrew led by example and inspired students to give their best effort at every rehearsal and performance. He has the ability to expand students' minds and impart a sense of confidence in them that they didn't know was there. The juxtaposition of the two allowed students to feel safe in his classroom and studio as well as challenged and pushed to achieve things never before dreamed of.

As a choreographer Andrew possesses an array of gifts and talents. He has the ability to gain students' respect instantaneously. Whether it be a group of professionals, college, high school or elementary students he has the ability to foster confidence and self-worth within them. This is due to his natural ability to be open, kind, encouraging, and generous.

If you haven't guessed by now, I am a huge fan of Andrew Cao. Students will be incredibly fortunate to have such a knowledgeable, dedicated, and caring person as their professor. I strongly recommend Andrew Cao for a teaching position. He will be an asset to your school and program. The University as a whole would benefit greatly!

Sincerely,

Nancy L Allen
Professor of Music
Viterbo University
nlallen@viterbo.edu

NEBRASKA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

To Whom It May Concern:

Andrew Cao has asked that I write a letter of support for both his artistic skills and his teaching. I can do so without qualification.

Nebraska Wesleyan University Theatre is a BFA program with 100 majors coming from 17 states. We do 10-14 major productions in an academic year plus 35 student directed productions. We do 4 musicals and 4 cabaret styled shows per year. As part of our program, we utilize guest artists on a very frequent basis. This is where I came into contact with Andrew.

In the production's I have worked on with Andrew, I found him exceptionally artistic and very easy to work with. His communication skills are excellent. He is able to understand both the artistic side and the educational side of his responsibilities. Andrew is a "doer" not a "talker". He gets right to work and gets the students involved. While working on a show, he teaches. He is a natural educator.

As college students often do, when there was a break, or after rehearsal, they would ask Andrew all kinds of questions. He has always been more than giving of his time to visit with them. Morning breakfast, lunch and dinner breaks and breaks during rehearsal were all times Andrew was able to help students understand the business.

I have offered Andrew guest artist positions each year for the last several years. Some he was able to fit into his very tight schedule and some he had to turn down. I have an open ended invitation for him to come guest artist any time he is available. If the time comes when he gives up the performing end of his life, he will certainly have a very successful teaching career. I would not hesitate to hire him.

If you would like more specific information about Andrew, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jack Parkhurst
Past Chair/Artistic Director
Nebraska Wesleyan University
jlp@nebrwesleyan.edu
402-465-2378 Office

# HASTINGS HIGH SCHOOL

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure to write a recommendation for Andrew Cao. My name is Lin Warren and I was the choral director at Hastings High School, Hastings, Minnesota for the past 33 years where I directed our varsity show choir – Riverside Company. Andrew worked as our choreographer for the show choir from 2007-2010. In addition to the choreography, Andrew also helped with show design, use of props and costuming.

A close friend and colleague, Nancy Allen from Viterbo University, recommended one of her students (Andrew) to me as I was looking for a new choreographer. Even though Riverside Company was his first group to choreograph, he came across as a seasoned professional and teacher. His teaching style is efficient and easy to follow and he has a unique ability to break down choreography so that even students that weren't comfortable with dance of any kind were able to learn difficult movement with ease. Andrew's choreography was fresh, innovative and creative which allowed the group to compete at a higher level and consequently we began making finals at every competition and ultimately winning grand champion at several of them.

Andrew is a class act in every way. Not only did he become a good friend and colleague, but also I became a better teacher by simply watching him work with kids. His very patient, kind and energetic style made him loved by all the students and he became a crucial and invaluable part of the team. It was a very sad day when he called me to explain that he was getting married and moving to New York to pursue his career in theatre and that he would no longer be able to work with Riverside Company.

As I expected, Andrew was very successful in New York. He is an incredible actor, singer and dancer, which allowed him to be immediately cast in shows.

Andrew has already proven that he can be successful as an actor/singer/dancer; I would also recommend Andrew for any type of teaching or directing position. He has great vision and creativity, and his teaching style is superb. Any theatre company or college that is lucky enough to hire him will be getting a great teacher and role model for students or other actors.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like more information.

Sincerely,

Lin Warren
651-283-8362
linwarrenrealtor@gmail.com

James S. Moore-
1249 Cty. Rd I No.
Custer, Wi 54423

To whom it may concern

I write to recommend Andrew Cao to you. But first you should know the background of this referral.

I worked with Jerome Robbins for more than fifteen years. I was a Member of his "Ballets USA" company, member of his government sponsored "American Theatre Lab", Assisted him on his ballet "Les Noces" and was hired by him as Riff in the first revival of "West Side Story" at City Center. I performed in musicals on Broadway for ten years. I was the Artistic Director of the Royal Swedish Ballet and Professor of Dance at the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point.

Andrew was my student at the university and he was, by far, the most all-around talent I came across. Choreographically his work was outstanding and appealed to every audience especially the "now" generation. His performing is excellent and definitely on the professional level. A true triple threat. Dancers were more than eager to work with him, as his personality was so engaging and full of humor. It was hard to believe that all of this came in one package.

I have written other letters of recommendation but none with as much conviction. If you don't put your faith in Andrew, someone else will and they will reap the benefits. Give him the chance to prove himself in person. You'll see!

Very Sincerely-

James S. Moore

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August 17, 2017

To Whom it May Concern

It is with great pleasure that I write this letter of recommendation for Andrew Cao. I have had the great opportunity over the last 3 years to observe the work ethic of Mr. Cao. He fosters creativity and encouragement to every student he encounters. He takes his time to answer questions, and the kids know he cares about each and every one of them.

Mr. Cao is not only our best dance teacher for our master classes, he also is fantastic at mentoring our many visiting students. He is professional and teaches the choreography with fluidity so the students can understand exactly what is needed for the dance piece. His choreography is easily interpreted by all level of dancers. The energy created in his classes is truly tangible; every student emerges with a visible glow of satisfaction. He is our most requested instructor. Our kids and their teachers come from all over the United States and they all absolutely love him!

Mr. Cao's skills and talent with our students has given our company an edge over our competitors. He successfully brings joy into every one of our groups.

Mr. Cao is an extremely motivated young man who holds high standards for himself and his work. He is reliable, responsible and dedicated to accomplishing the tasks at hand. He is a genuine person who has the biggest heart and I am thankful he takes the time out of his busy schedule to work with us year after year.

Rosemarie Russo
Director
Master Class Program

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