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TO: Personnel Steering Committee, Department of Performing Arts
DATE: October 3, 2000
RE: Observation of Scene Preparation Class

On Monday, October 2, I attended Kevin Halpin's Scene Preparation class that met in the Lab Theater at 3:00 p.m. There were seven students in attendance.

Because I arrived a moment or two after the class had begun, I did not hear the title of the play from which two students were reading a scene, though I believe that it was a Tennessee Williams play. Two students were seated on the "stage" in front of the "bleachers" on which the teacher, the rest of the class, and I sat. There was no action of any sort; the actors merely sat and read their parts.

After they concluded, Mr. Halpin asked a series of questions regarding the background of the play, the events that had happened prior to the scene just performed, the actors' impressions of the motivations behind each of their characters' actions and statements, etc. One could see from the nature of Mr. Halpin's questions that he was intimately familiar with the play and the author. One could see also that he was trying to have the students arrive at an understanding of their characters by having them find the answers to his questions themselves, rather than by telling what he thought the characters were all about. When one or both of the actors asked questions, he freely and authoritatively answered them; otherwise he guided them to their own discoveries.

This part of the class was very impressive. Mr. Halpin clearly understood that students who lead themselves to awareness learn more quickly and with more permanence than through any other method. It also showed me that he has mastered the literature of this period—or at least by this author—and that he is thoroughly prepared to teach it to his students.

The rest of the class consisted of having 5 of the remaining students (one had to leave class early) stand around the sixth in what was called the "Hassle Circle." Each person on the perimeter was expected, in his turn, to "hassle" the person in the middle with an improvised scenario. The person in the center had only to react in character. Mr. Halpin slowly circulated around the outside of the perimeter, occasionally touching someone lightly as her/his cue to take over the scene. The pace of the substitution of "hasslers" was gradually increased until at the end there was a "mob scene" in the center with everyone shouting at the "poor" reacting person.

I found this part of the class intriguing, occasionally humorous, sometimes frustrating, but not particularly illustrative of good teaching except for the fact of Mr. Halpin's having chosen it as an activity. It clearly helped the actors "think on their feet" and prepared them for emergency situations on stage. Mr. Halpin offered very little summary or evaluation for the students after the first "circle," in part, perhaps, because he was out of breath after having circumnavigated the circle so many times.

In all, I found this to be a masterful class, one that I'm certain that the students enjoyed and benefited from. Mr. Halpin's relationship with the students is warm, if a bit casual, and he clearly has their respect. Had I been in the class, it would probably have "made my day."

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Stephen D. Wilson". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

XC: Kevin Halpin

■ *Department of Performing Arts*
Ruth E. Dowd Fine Arts Center

TO: Tom Hischak, Chair, Department Personnel Committee

FROM: Edward Moore *Edward Moore*

DATE: October 9, 2000

RE: Classroom Observation of Professor Kevin Halpin

I attended Professor Kevin Halpin's rehearsal of "Cabaret" on Thursday October 5th. The rehearsal, scheduled to begin at 7:00pm, began at approximately 7:10pm. Professor and students set the stage for rehearsal of the scene. Halpin briefly discussed The scene with the two student actors and then proceeded to run the scene.

Halpin stopped the students several times in order to offer suggestions and give notes. Professor Halpin often questioned the students about the characters that they were playing in attempts to get desired responses. The students seemed slow to produce these responses. Halpin's question and discussion approach seemed to be ineffective in getting immediate results. I felt at times that Halpin was not giving enough direction to the actors.

There was a brief interruption in the rehearsal when Professor Halpin was called away to attend to other matters. Halpin left the rehearsal without giving any instructions to the students. The students took it upon themselves to make good use of the time by running their lines.

As rehearsal of the scene resumed, Halpin offered good direction regarding the way to execute a face slap. Halpin also provided helpful direction to one of the principal actors regarding stuttering of lines due to memorization problems.

Professor Halpin demonstrated a relaxed and confident style of instruction. Halpin also has a good rapport with his students.


Pc: Professor Kevin Halpin



■ Department of Performing Arts
Ruth E. Dowd Fine Arts Center

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. Thomas Hischak, Chair
Performing Arts Personnel Steering Committee

FROM: Dr. Karen Bals, Chair 
Performing Arts Department

DATE: October 9, 2000

RE: Kevin Halpin Observation Report #3

I attended the *Cabaret* rehearsal on October 4. During the two hours I was there, I sat in on rehearsals of pairs of performers: the Emcee and a member of the Hitler Youth, the Emcee and Victor, and Fraulein Schneider and Cliff.

Halpin worked on many different aspects of the performance. During the scene with the Emcee and the Hitler Youth, he worked on the singers' projection, staging, and manner of presentation. In the scenes with the Emcee and Victor, and with Fraulein Schneider and Cliff, he first worked on the choreography, and then combined it with the singing.

I enjoyed being "up close and personal" during this rehearsal. Halpin had an easy, informal manner with the students, which clearly was appreciated. Halpin's mastery of dance was evident in these scenes; the rehearsal process in the early stages is always an evolutionary one, and when choreography didn't work out as originally planned (which happens frequently in all levels of performance) he was able to modify the blocking and steps. Halpin also has a very thorough knowledge of this musical and how he wants the characters portrayed. He showed the depth of this knowledge--and his own versatility as a director--on the one hand through his work with the member of the Hitler Youth organization who is portrayed very purely and innocently by his daughter, Ainsley, and on the other by showing the student who plays the role of Fraulein Schneider how to portray her as earthy and lusty, yet also timeworn, in "So What!"

I have spent more than my share of time on the rehearsal pianist's bench, and can say unequivocally that I would have thoroughly enjoyed being a part of this production. Yes, Halpin is demanding, but there would be something wrong if he weren't. The students like, trust and respect him, and are willing to put in the demanding work that is necessary. I am confident that he will continue this trend of excellence that has already been established.


Cc: Kevin Halpin



■ *Department of Performing Arts*
Ruth E. Dowd Fine Arts Center

MEMORANDUM

TO: Thomas Hischak, Chair
Performing Arts Personnel Steering Committee

FROM: Dr. Karen Bals, Chair 
Performing Arts Department

DATE: October 9, 2000

RE: Observation Report #1 for Kevin Halpin

I attended Kevin Halpin's Acting I (THT 120) course on October 2. Halpin opened the class by bringing all of the students to the center to do breathing and relaxation exercises, stretches, and then a more physical warmup by sending various physical gestures around the circle. The purpose of this, in addition to warming up muscles, was to lower inhibitions, challenge each student to be creative in his/her gestures, and to inspire trust in each other.

Halpin then spent thirty-five minutes on prepared mimed skits from each of the students. Each student had chosen a central theme for his/her skit which illustrated a problem, which was then to be solved by the student. The class was expected to figure out what the problem and the solution were. Halpin then gave a critique of each skit, with constructive criticisms and suggestions on how to make the exercises better.

Halpin spent the remainder of the class by asking pairs of students to improvise a scenario given by him—two superheroes are assigned to keep a building from falling down. Students were expected to incorporate concepts from reading assignments concerning raising and lowering the status of the characters. (Please forgive if I haven't gotten this completely straight; I've never had any acting training!)

What was impressive to me was how Halpin not only has the complete trust of his students, but that he has inspired them to trust each other. This is the essence of the actor's craft. The students are comfortable with Halpin, and obviously respect his judgement and training.

Cc: Kevin Halpin



■ Department of Performing Arts
Ruth E. Dowd Fine Arts Center

MEMORANDUM

TO: Thomas Hischak, Chair
Performing Arts Personnel Steering Committee
FROM: Dr. Karen Bals, Chair
Performing Arts Department
DATE: October 9, 2000
RE: Kevin Halpin Observation Report #2

I attended Kevin Halpin's Scene Preparation (THT429) class on October 3. The scene being presented was a dialogue between two characters in Tennessee Williams' *Orpheus Descending*. Halpin started the class by explaining the background to the scene, at which point the students read the assigned portion.

Halpin asked questions of the students about how the scene was set up by prior actions, and helped Christa Johnson to clarify her emotional responses. He asked leading questions of the actors which showed his intimate knowledge of not only the play, but also of Williams' techniques in general. He illustrated that a successful performance is rooted in the complete understanding of the play by asking searching questions—the essence to understanding Williams is understanding and empathizing with human nature. He also offered technical advice on how this scene would be presented on stage.

Following the presentation, other students asked questions of Halpin about the rationale, background information, and suggestions for different ways of approaching their upcoming presentations. Halpin's suggestions and comments were informative, clear, and gentle.

The remainder of the class was spent doing an exercise called the "hassle circle." One student was "it," and was supposed to instantaneously change gears to respond to the other students in improvised, emotionally charged situations. The students interrupted each other in an increasingly short amount of time, and ended with all trying at once to get his/her attention. While this could seem to be a chaotic situation, the object was to elicit *emotional*, not rational responses. After the exercise concluded, Halpin "debriefed" the class, talking about what were the most effective situations and why they were successful.

Again, I was impressed by Halpin's rapport with the students. He is clearly very knowledgeable and skilled in not only his craft, but also in eliciting from his students ways of improving their acting techniques.

Cc: Kevin Halpin



Proposal for Academic Requirements For Participation In Department Of Performing Arts Productions.

These standards are recommended to be phased in Beginning with the Fall 2002 semester:

For any student to be eligible for participation in a Department of Performing arts Production, they must Meet the Following GPA requirements:

For the First year of implementation an overall GPA of 2.5 is required

For the second Year of Implementation The Over all GPA remains 2.5, but the GPA in courses in the students' Major Must be 2.75

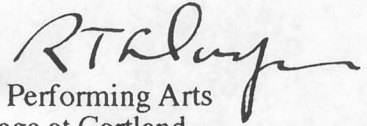
In the Third Year of implementation the Over all GPA raises to 2.75

In the Fourth Year of Implementation (and from then on) the Overall GPA remains 2.75, But the GPA in the MAJOR raises to 3. This is the

If a student fails to meet the minimum GPA, they have one semester of Probation in which they are still eligible to participate, if they do not raise their average by the end of that semester, they are not eligible again until they meet the GPA requirements .

Ralph T. Dudgeon. Ph.D.

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Memorandum

9 October 2000

To: Personnel Steering Committee
Re: Teaching observations of Kevin Halpin

I observed K. Halpin on 2 October (Scene Study) and 5 October (rehearsal). The scene study session began with a reading of a Tennessee Williams scene. Two students gave their reading and Halpin followed up with a series of questions that probed the motivation of the characters and referred to issues that the readers should have picked up from the text itself. The questioning was good and certainly would have led to a refined understanding of the character's actions and attitudes if there would have been time to tackle a second time through the scene. Unfortunately, one of the readers had to get to a doctor's appointment and scene partners for other projects were absent. All the students who were present did make comments or added questions of their own (often directed to Halpin rather than the reader/actors). Overall, there was an admirable degree of participation and, as one might expect from actors, a lively verbal exchange of ideas. The class concluded with an improvisational exercise known as a "hassle circle". This was obviously a favorite student activity and there was enthusiastic participation by everyone.

The second occasion for observation was an actual rehearsal for the department's production of *Cabaret*. Halpin worked with the principals on scene six of the second act. The scene is a complex love/break-up which ends with the character of Sally affirming her dedication to the cabaret life style after telling her lover that she has just aborted their child. The actors, still uncertain of their lines, began working through the scene with Halpin using a similar, but more focused line of questioning technique than I saw in the scene study session. I stayed for over an hour as the work developed and gained shape and some dramatic power.

After these two sessions and many other encounters with Halpin's directing over the last year, I am confident in stating that I believe him to be a gifted and skillful director who knows his texts and is grounded in basic acting techniques and that he is capable of helping students to acquire these skills. I look forward to seeing him work with students who have been recruited and auditioned specifically for the new musical theatre major. The students I observed in these two sessions were among the best that we have, but the pool is shallow. It is my opinion that the type of students we have now require greater care and feeding and that they represent the ultimate challenge to us as teachers. In other words, Halpin has to take his current crop of students further and faster than most other college directors in similar environments. This demand for harder, faster, longer work by our students and staff has resulted in some fine performances, but has also taken its human toll in sickness, fatigue and problems in academic performance of some of our most promising and committed students. I urge Halpin and the rest of the department to continually work in concert to strike a *balance* between the training of our musical theatre students and our holistic mission as a department of performing arts and as a college committed to the benefits of a broad liberal arts education.

cc. K. Halpin