

To Whom It May Concern:

An actor's job is to step into the skin of another human. Such a task is difficult, to say the least. And actors have choices. An actor can learn what they are good at and always seek that role. Or, they can push themselves, like athletes, to build their empathic muscles. They can seek to excavate themselves, to build their capacity to tell another human's story without judgment, with compassion and with unflinching honesty while simultaneously practicing humility and generosity towards and with their collaborators, facing fear of failure square in the eyes every night in a search for truth and for sharing truth with an audience. Such brave actors, especially young actors just learning their craft and just figuring out who they are in the world as humans themselves, are rare. Rarer *still* is the actor who is also interested in using theatre to change the world.

This rarest kind of actor is exemplified by Bri Ana Wagner.

I could write much about Bri's skill as an actor, her unparalleled professionalism, her whole hearted leaps into any character, whether a supporting role or lead. I could write about how she is sought after for ensembles, argued over by directors, respected and enjoyed by her peers. I could write about her generosity as an artist. I have witnessed her generosity and consistency as an actor, whether she is the more experienced in the scene or the least, taking the lead and supporting another's growth with grace and patience or stepping up her game to play a lead opposite a professional actor, all observed by her faculty and peers. Bri's professional promise is outstanding as a performer. She has an acute nimbleness as a performer, excelling at physical comedy, contemporary drama, classical text and musical theatre leads with equal aplomb. And you want Bri in the room, as a collaborator, on any project. I could also talk about Bri's solid academic performance, maturity, communication skills, drive.

But I want to talk to about the role she played (Chloe) in the UP Stages production of GOOD KIDS in November 2015, which I directed. Naomi Iizuka's GOOD KIDS takes the events of Steubenville *Good Kids* is inspired by the events of Steubenville, Ohio, when a young, unconscious woman was sexually assaulted by four high school football players who tweeted videos of the assault. There are 8 women and 4 men in the cast. All four men play assailants. One woman plays the woman who was assaulted: Chloe. Reviews of the show speak to Bri's skill. I want to explain what her character must endure: she must watch the video of herself attacked, not knowing it is her, until she does know. The audience watches her, the only time a single person is alone on stage, as the realization dawns and then she speaks about her experience. Chloe is attacked by the other women of the play. Chloe tries to make sense of the events—she defies that she was “asking for it” while condemning her own decisions, while simultaneously trying to apprehend that she did nothing wrong, despite the messages society gives her.

Bri took on the role of Chloe with a completely open heart, inhabiting every moment, from the video moment to the simulated assault to the final moments of the play and the fact that the night will be with her for the rest of her life. All her professionalism and skill, as noted above, hold here, but—and this is the essential piece—Bri understood that by inhabiting this role, by apprehending and committing to the inherent activism of the piece, she was not only raising awareness but ending silence, creating community, enabling action towards safer campuses and safer communities. She participated in every post show discussion and vigil at Pitt. She interviewed with NPR. She then participated with the whole cast in talkbacks in New Paltz, and performed a scene from the show at the Board of Trustees report on the Year of the Humanities in February.

Bri's selflessness as an artist and human has inspired and humbled me.

With love,  
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