



To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to provide an external evaluation peer review of Saffron Henke's directorial work. It was my pleasure to be in audience on October 20, 2018 for the "Echoes of Miami" production at Miami University. From the moment I entered the first performance space, I knew that I would be in for an innovative and exciting night of theatre.

The first performance space for this processional production took place on the mainstage of the proscenium theatre, and made dynamic use of the stage for seating an audience, as well as the action of the first scenes. It was an interesting perspective and orientation for the audience, to be looking out into the theatre. The use of the lighting instruments was spare, but added to the overall "eerie" quality of the piece, achieving the kind of spirit world that was being conjured in the performance. The use of the led practical lighting was interesting in the first scene as well, adding a bit of wonder and joy to the production.

The second scene was a tonal departure and the tone was set in that moment that each scene would be a stand-alone piece, with its own aesthetic sensibility and artistic approach. The entrance of the Three Helens felt like a blast of fresh air, with three very different Helens delivering characters quite diverse from one another. It was clear that each of these actors had received critical attention from Henke to their choices in the depiction of their different aspects of the same historical woman. The physicality, vocal delivery, and overall demeanor of each Helen was distinct and clear. It was a directing victory to set up these three aspects of Helen in such a compelling and convincing way, the crucial character that becomes the tour guides for the rest of the performance.

I was led by "Man-Hating Helen," and I can speak to how well the actor embodied her character. During a processional performance, there are many times when improvisational acting and interacting with the audience is required, and the actor was a joy to watch in her fantastic spontaneous choices. It was evident that she had been made to feel safe and take big risks in her characterization and in her improvisational exchanges with audience members. I credit Henke's work with this actor for empowering her to make bold choices in multiple high stakes environments while never losing sight of her characterization along the way. It was delightful to witness, and to feel this "taken care of" as an audience member.

The "Delirium" scene, which took place in a prop room, was quite powerful. The direction of the actors in this space was compelling. The use of the prop room was, of course, non-traditional, but somehow it conveyed the dank and dark asylum quite well, with the use of practical light design and soundscape, costumes, make up, and key props, such as a bathtub and handcuffs. The arrangement of the action was surprising and revelatory at each turn, and achieved the kind of spooky feeling of being in a strange place with abused and unwell women. The audience felt vulnerable, but our curiosity about these women was palpable. The acting was very accomplished in this scene, with young actors taking on difficult material about gendered violence and oppression through convincing characterizations. It was clear to me that Henke worked diligently with these actors on the realization of these characters, and the necessity of portraying them with accuracy and respect, as these characters were based on ample historical research.

There were numerous other moments from this production that demonstrated Henke's skill and expertise as a director; namely, "An Evening with the Snyders" made use of the exciting alternative endings scenario in an audience "choose your own adventure" experience. Additionally, the charming and spooky "Haunting in Peabody 237," took place in the black box theatre, with an impressively accurate dorm room set. The haunting of these



disrespectful young men was achieved with technical theatre prowess, and humor, and served as the climax of the production with the entire audience assembled together after being separated during our smaller group “tours.” Overall, the direction of *Echoes of Miami* was on point, executed with great care and with attention to the innovative presentation of the material. To pull off the technical demands and organization of the production with so many moving parts, with such success and aplomb, was a great triumph for Henke and it was a wonderful night in the theatre.

In addition to enjoying this production, I must also comment on the production of “*Avenue Q*” that Henke directed a few years ago at Miami University. I was in attendance at the production on April 25 2015, and was very impressed with Henke’s direction of this difficult production. Taking on a musical with puppets and dynamic and difficult staging requirements is very ambitious. The direction of the show was superb, and made excellent use of the proscenium theatre, with every aspect of the production thoughtfully executed. The subject matter of the musical can be difficult to perform with the right tone to suggest the satire as intended, and Henke did an excellent job with her actors to walk this line quite well. The actors were endearing and convincing in their characterizations and I know this was due to Henke’s excellent direction.

I have seen Henke’s directorial work in two very different productions, and can say with confidence that I have the utmost respect for her as a talented and visionary director. I don’t think two productions could be more diverse in nature than “*Avenue Q*” and “*Echoes of Miami*,” and to know that Henke directed both and fully realized the potential of each says volumes about her versatility, skill, leadership, and vision as a director. Miami University has a wonderful asset in Saffron Henke, and I support her tenure and promotion with the strongest recommendation.

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