

October 27, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

Gary Anderson entered Knoxville, Tennessee as a stranger and left as a dear friend.

I first contacted Gary during my search for a script about *Lovers and Patriots: The Love Story of John and Abigail Adams* for a modest Constitution Day program, one of my responsibilities as the chair of political science at Pellissippi State. Next thing I knew, we were on our way to not only the best Constitution Day program ever, but possibly one of our best, most well-received, most well-attended programs ever at the college—not to mention his incredible gift to our community afterwards.

As a community college, we have a difficult time convincing students to remain on or come back to campus after classes. And as a suburban campus, we have a hard time persuading the general public that our offerings are worth the drive. We had incredible attendance at both our evening performance and our matinee. The buzz on campus after the evening performance helped swell the crowd at the matinee the next day. In addition, the video of the performance has been in much demand by those who were unable to attend. The video of his program will be a teaching tool for faculty for semesters to come.

Gary was incredibly helpful in promoting the performance. He sent press kits and programs and agreed to do local interviews; he also participated in a live local TV show filmed on campus shortly before the performance. He was willing to do whatever we needed him to do to help promote the show.

For our production, I hired a local actress to play Abigail. Incredibly, with a few phone rehearsals and a couple of face-to-face rehearsals just prior to performance, Gary and Elizabeth had unbelievable rapport. Much of this was due not only to Gary's talent but his sensitivity and support of our very talented, but not terribly seasoned, local actress. The passion and rapport—so necessary in a play about John and Abigail Adams—was evident and exciting. The performance was incredible. The audience, which consisted of everyone from seniors to young children, was spellbound—both performances.

As a professor and sometimes-performer, I have to say that I appreciated the way Gary handled annoyances such as microphone issues and—we were at a college, after all—periodic exits and entrances from students. He was most entertaining and engaging—and, frankly, had the audience (not to mention the production staff) eating out of his hand. Things will happen—and the way one chooses to react to those things is very revealing of character. Gary handled all glitches with aplomb and humor—and was often able to connect them to the text of the play.

Gary endeared himself to our community in ways that stretched far beyond his contract with the college. During his several days here, it was a joy to introduce him to our small city. As his hosts, we took pleasure in his enjoyment. He clearly enjoys getting to know people and savoring the uniqueness of the many places he visits. This is no touring star who wants to hide in a hotel. It was a pleasure to have him with us.

As if all of this weren't enough, after hearing of a tragedy in our city, which he had never visited and knew only through his contact with me, Gary offered to do his **Clarence Darrow** show as a fundraiser for the Tennessee Unitarian Universalist Church, which had just experienced a horrific shooting in the church during a children's performance. Everyone in Knoxville will be eternally grateful for his generosity and support.

I wholeheartedly recommend Gary Anderson's performances. If he just comes to town, does a show, and leaves, you and the audience will be richer for it and will experience great theatre. But I recommend leaving your heart open to something more.

Gay Lyons

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