



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY

West Point, New York 10996

July 22, 2015

Department of English and Philosophy

Letter of Endorsement: “Into Sunlight” – Robin Becker Dance Company

To Whom It May Concern:

I write to convey my strongest possible endorsement for an extraordinary artistic achievement that we had the great pleasure of hosting at West Point on November 7, 2014: An “Informance” presentation of “Into Sunlight” supported by the remarkably talented dancers of the Robin Becker Dance Company; Robin Becker herself; and David Maraniss, author of *They Marched Into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967*—the book that inspired the creation of “Into Sunlight.” The performance was attended by cadets, faculty members (a combination of military officers and civilians), military family members (mainly spouses of those stationed at West Point), and guests from the local community.

There are two identities that inform my impressions and understanding of the importance and value of this moving and memorable event. First, I represent a career soldier (over 30 years) who has experienced combat during two deployments—Operation Just Cause and Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm—and who has lost friends and former students in the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. I’ve served the full range of Army assignments—from the 75th Ranger Regiment as a staff officer and company commander to the Pentagon as a speechwriter for the Chief of Staff of the Army. My other identity is that of faculty member at the United States Military Academy. As Head of the Department of English and Philosophy and Founding Director of the Creative Arts Project at West Point, I have spearheaded the effort to bring artists, authors, filmmakers, actors, and dancers to West Point in order to highlight the ways in which artistic expression can shed light on and, in a sense, translate the experience of war. A key objective of the Project is to bridge the civil-military divide by engendering healthy dialogue around the difficult themes found in artistic work focused on the experiences and costs of armed conflict.

I am also very much aware of the range of artistic and theatrical programs seeking to give voice to the veteran experience. Indeed, I’ve spent most of the last several years experiencing first-hand some of those programs. For our own part, over the past three years we have hosted award-winning fiction writers, poets, filmmakers, and dancers—all processing their experiences and/or perspectives of war through their art. And all of those engagements were wonderful. But none came close to the power and beauty of “Into Sunlight.” From my vantage point in the audience, I could sense that everyone was gripped by the performance itself. Its depiction of the pangs of separation between a soldier and spouse was a particularly affective scene, one commented on by spouses and soldiers alike during the “talk-back” after the show. Likewise, the wonderfully choreographed scene known as “Holleder’s Run” was brilliantly executed and captivated the audience. I had the benefit of speaking to cadets and other audience members days after the event, and each person expressed not only great appreciation for the show as a whole but also some deeper connection to a specific moment or scene. I taught a couple of the cadets who were there, and they told me it was the best event they’d been exposed to at West Point. But the appeal of this show, I should emphasize, is not simply for a cadet at an undergraduate institution like West Point. It has universal appeal, and the civilians in the audience were just as impressed and emotionally affected as others. The testimony of one soldier in particular who had returned from Afghanistan less than a month before the performance stood out to me as perhaps the most raw and honest. He talked about that scene of separation and how it recalled to his mind the feeling of knowing

that he might not return. It was an emotional night for him, but because I know him personally, I also know that it was important in terms of his own emotional transition back into life with his family. He'd been dealing with some emotional difficulties—precisely the kind that redeployed soldiers face—and the performance enabled him to take a step in the direction of reestablishing his balance in life.

The performance itself was uplifting in terms of its grace and beauty, but it was also sobering for its unyielding exploration of social discord and the effects of violence. It was honest and unflinching—yet respectful and full of a kind of artistic humility that is a rarity in an age of overblown personalities. Robin Becker bares her feelings openly, unashamed of being so deeply moved by David Maraniss's book: moved by the brotherhood of war, the solidarity of protest—the entire sweep of war's manipulation of humanity.

Whether military or civilian, "Into Sunlight" is not just worth one's time. It's a necessary experience in today's society, for it reflects with rare sincerity on the echoes of Vietnam as they reverberate in American life right now. At its best, art has the potential to heal. This is art at its best.

I cannot recommend "Into Sunlight" in strong enough terms. If I can be of any further assistance, please contact me. I can be reached at 845-938-3659, 917-275-5471, or scott.krawczyk@usma.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Krawczyk". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Scott" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Krawczyk".

Scott T. Krawczyk, Ph.D.
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