

## NEWS

# The art of being Artie Isaac

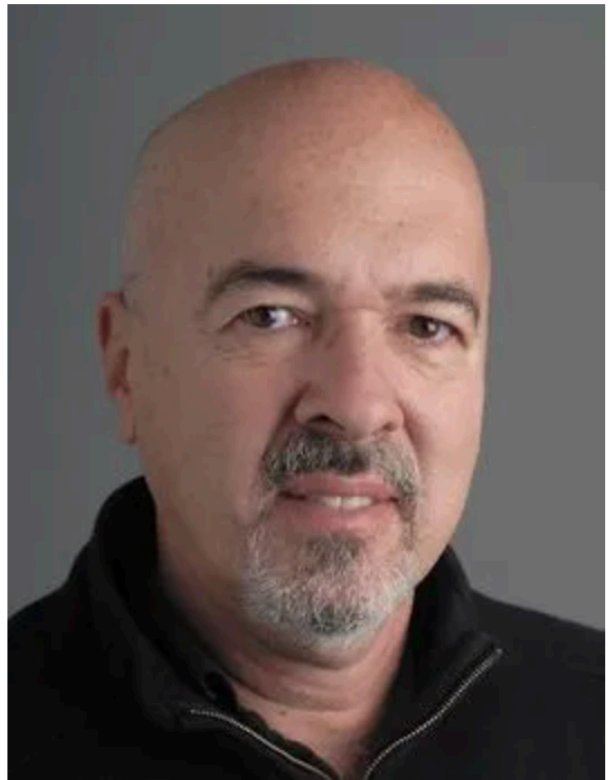
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Artie Isaac, like Woody Allen's fictional Zelig, seemed to be everywhere at once in December.

He spoke at the Columbus Metropolitan Club's forum on "The Demise of Polite Conversation: Is Communication on the Brink?," turning this dull-sounding topic into a carefully considered, often humorous meditation on the power of language. Isaac's talk encompassed everything from advice (don't give any because it's often not effective) to the brute force of words ("I think we are what we say . . . we are speaking ourselves into existence.")



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A few days later, I caught Isaac teaching his creativity seminar to some 135 CCAD students, asking them to ponder a life without fear, suggesting they search for a meaningful death and-maybe most daring of all-recommending they consider a world without TV. At the end of this unabashedly positive PowerPoint lecture, Isaac told his students that he loved them, and then he added that if any of them were in an abusive relationship, they could come to him for help.

Three days later, Isaac appeared in his third Columbus play in the last two years, Available Light Theatre's production of ConAm's Annual Xmas Spectacular, kind of a send-up of Dickens's A Christmas Carol. The show was thoughtful, occasionally autobiographical (Isaac, who grew up in Bexley, is Jewish and had fun with the juxtapositions) and sometimes awkward.

But then Isaac, who co-wrote the script with Sean Christopher Lewis and AVLT's Matt Slaybaugh, isn't a playwright or a hardcore thespian; his next stop isn't reinterpreting Richard III. He simply knows that theater is a way for people to share stories and build community. Two other productions he's appeared in locally, also produced by AVLT-Our Town and The Odd Couple-gave Isaac and the ideas he champions greater visibility. In Our Town, for instance, those ideas included the notion of living mindfully with the knowledge that, as Isaac says, "Life is short, death is long."

Isaac's teaching centers around creativity, ethics, courage and compassion, but also takes in rationalism, humor, love and death. A teacher, a seeker, a relentless proponent of public service and a businessman (he co-founded the advertising agency Young Isaac and sold it a year and a half ago), Isaac, 49, believes that life must be examined carefully lest we sink in the fast-moving rapids of popular culture.

Visit his website and you'll see blog entries-"On Ethics" or "Living an Engaged Life"-that sound like titles of dreary

school essays. But Isaac is never preachy and he embraces multiple schools of thought. He's drawn to short bursts of clarity-an observation from Gandhi, a saying from the Talmud-that illuminate a path that might carry risks but promises a truer destiny. That destiny could include sorrow. Of that, Isaac says, "The sorrow and the beauty of being human is that we are the sum of our wounds and blessings, letting them inform our lives, making us who we are." It's all part of an effort to help us find an authentic way of living.

"The real challenge is not to become some hero, but rather to become myself," Isaac says. "I love people who are a rare combination: mature enough to want to be authentic and motivated enough to do it. It takes courage, desire and hard work."

Isaac's humor-sly and contagious-is his secret weapon. He says he's "not above being preposterous and presumptive." And when he reached an intense place in some ethical dilemma at the Columbus Metropolitan Club talk, he sheepishly asked the lunch crowd "Is this too Jewish," provoking gales of laughter.

Jonathan Petuchowski, the president of Yenkin-Majestic, a Columbus manufacturing company, has known Isaac for many years. "Artie doesn't believe in the unexamined life," he says. "And as he gets an idea, he does what it takes to

make it a reality. The conventional wisdom of whether or not it will succeed doesn't concern him."

Yet Isaac is succeeding. By carefully thinking about and imaginatively presenting old ideas, he's slowed down the roaring rush of modernity and deepened the field of knowing around him.

"I believe in the theory of abundance. The more all of us share these crucial messages with each other, the better off we all are," Isaac says. "I'm the beneficiary when those around me are enlightened because I'm then in the middle of enlightened people."