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STAFF EDITORIAL: Havel's Wisdom

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Václav Havel's residency in many ways epitomizes the purpose of Columbia University's Arts Initiative. Though there have been some complaints, on the whole his presence on campus has kindled new dialogues, broadened student perspectives, and brought the unique insight of one the 20th century's most remarkable leaders into Columbia's daily life.

Havel's work emerged from a society in which resistance and free expression were met with brutal suppression. Standing strong through imprisonment for voicing his civic views and through the suppression of his writings, Havel peacefully struggled against the former Czechoslovakia's communist government and led his nation into democracy. Throughout his life, he has voiced lessons from his experiences through his drama and literary compositions.

There have been some legitimate student complaints during his residency, mostly concerning his inaccessibility to ordinary students and his appropriateness as the speaker for the Contemporary Civilization Coursewide Lecture. But overall, the series of events CUArts has organized for Havel's residency has successfully conveyed his lessons to the University community. Conversations, performances, concerts, and lectures have brought Havel's experiences to life, while students have had the opportunity to interact with Havel's ideas and had a chance to learn through Havel about the complexities of the real world outside our University walls. Commendably, at the officially RSVP-only Havel-Clinton event last Wednesday, CUArts let in every student waiting outside, with or without a ticket.

As Havel's residency comes to a close, instructors and professors would do well to encourage students to attend the final Havel-related events. CUArts should be commended for its efforts to use these seven weeks to showcase Havel in his dual role as an artist and leader. Indeed, bringing figures like Havel to campus is a good step by the administration to increase global awareness at Columbia and to acquaint its students with a man who has not only thought about, but also participated in, reshaping a society.

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