Forewords
An Introduction to the World of the Play

Grief is a funny thing. Gil’s boyfriend has left him, his acting career isn’t exactly taking off, and his mother just passed away. He’s not taking it all very well...

AUNT GLO. You’re in GRIEF! GRIEF! I saw that on that Dr. Medical something. That woman wrote about it. Elizabeth... Cuba... Gooding! The stages of grief! You got, stage one and two! Denial mixed in with a little anger.

In her 1969 book On Death and Dying, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced the theory of the five stages of grief. Often applied not just to the dying, but to anyone going through a life-threatening or life-altering event, these stages are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

In Wild with Happy, Gil faces the recent loss of his mother at a time when he already feels alone and rejected—both by work and by his former lover. To top it all off, he must also deal with the presence of his Aunt Glo, who copes with her own grief by clinging to the funeral rites of their community.

But Glo isn’t far off in her assessment of Gil’s state. Despite all evidence to the contrary—and his insistence that he’s fine—Gil has detached himself in a phase of denial and isolation, from family and the traditions that Aunt Glo wants for his mother.

Resisting the consoling efforts of a sensitive funeral director and his outrageous best friend, Gil can’t repress the memory of the times he should have been there for his mother as she faced her fate. In an attempt at avoidance, and denying his need to grieve, he rushes back to his familiar—albeit floundering—life in New York.

In his haste to deal with his loss and move on, Gil lashes out in anger. He refuses to see what good religion ever did for his mother. He fights against Glo’s demand for a big memorial. He blames his mother for what he considers her naïvely childlike belief in magic, wonder, and hope.

Gil may think he’s had the last word, but as Kübler-Ross warns, there are still more stages left on the road to acceptance.

AUNT GLO. Strange you laughing like that.

GIL. I feel like I am having an out-of-body experience.

AUNT GLO. Mmm. I don’t know what stage that is.

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Wild with Happy
By Colman Domingo
Directed by Jeremy B. Cohen

THE CAST
(In order of appearance)

Forrest McClendon*  Gil
James James*  Terry, Church Nurse
Chivas Michael*  Mo, Elder Bovane
Stephanie Berry*  Adelaide, Aunt Glo

Laura Smith*  Stage Manager
Caitlin Powers*  Assistant Stage Manager
* Member of Actors’ Equity Association

THE ARTISTIC TEAM

Jeremy B. Cohen  Director
Tony Cisek  Scenic Designer
Alejo Vietti  Costume Designer
Robert Wierzel  Lighting Designer
Robert Kaplowitz  Sound Designer and Additional Music
Jeff Sugg  Projection Designer
Catherine María Rodríguez  Production Dramaturg
Pat McCorkle  Casting Director

Theatre:

May 28–Jun 29, 2014
2  The Setting
3  Meet the Playwright
4  Leaning into Grief
6  Cinderella as Inspiration
9  Bios: The Cast
10  Bios: The Artistic Team
12  Bios: The Staff
13  Q&A with Kwame and Stephen
15  Audience Services
19  Supporting the Annual Fund
25  Preview: 2014/15 Season
26  Center Stage Celebrates
28  Staff

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There will be no intermission.

Please turn off all electronic devices.

In case of emergency 410.986.4080 (during performances).

World Premiere production by
The Public Theater (Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director; Patrick Willingham, Executive Director)
Wild with Happy was developed, in part, with the assistance of The Sundance Institute Theatre Laboratory
Wild with Happy was also developed at TheatreWorks, Palo Alto, CA
as part of their New Works Festival (Robert Eck, Artistic Director, Phil Santora, Managing Director).

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Playwright

Colman Domingo is an award-winning actor, playwright, and director known for his work on stage, television, and film. The proud son of Clarence and Edith Bowles, Domingo was born and raised in Philadelphia, where he completed a degree in journalism at Temple University and where the journey of Wild with Happy begins.

To pen Wild with Happy, Domingo drew inspiration from a trip to Disney World, from his mother’s passing, and from the experiences of close friends. The play is a celebratory satire about love, loss, and faith. Reflecting on Wild and his work as a playwright, Domingo shared, “I’m trying to take you to a place in your dreams. Other playwrights can write about the troubles in the world and the politics of the world. I want to focus on magic and taking your breath away.”

As a playwright, Domingo showcases a range of influences, from magical realism to Shakespeare and Ionesco. His plays, in which he frequently acts, have enjoyed productions and critical success across the United States and internationally. Domingo is currently under commission from American Conservatory Theater, Berkeley Repertory Theater Underground, the Off-Broadway Inner Voices series, and People’s Light and Theater Company. He has been awarded residencies at Sundance Theater Lab, Yaddo, and Banff Playwrights Colony (Canada).

Domingo has starred on Broadway (including The Scottsboro Boys with Forrest McClendon, seen in this production as Gil), television, and in film. In addition to his artistic credits, Domingo also serves as an educator. He is on the faculty of The National Theater Institute at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center and has taught, guest lectured, and mentored at various institutions, including the Savannah College of Art and Design, The New York Writers Institute, Temple University, The Art Institute of San Francisco, and Community College of Philadelphia (The Center for Male Engagement).

When asked what fairy tale character he would be if given the choice, Domingo laughed, “This sounds so silly, but I would be Dopey from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. He’s marching to his own drum. I don’t know if he’s really aware of the story in many ways. But I think he’s an innocent. He may be a little off—but very sweet and earnest.”
Grief, Healing, and Cinderella Stories

Playwright Colman Domingo on
mother’s gone...and I know a sound came out of me didn’t know who I was anymore. All of a sudden I’m an orphan. A dear friend said to me “Let it wash over you. Remember when we were at the funeral home, one of minute she’s your mother, the next someone is calling her “the body.” No one prepares you for any of this. I remember when we were at the funeral home, one of my dearest friends shows up late. He has a baby in his arms—no one still knows who the baby was. He runs up, puts the baby down with someone, and comes up. For my brothers and sisters and me, it’s this precious moment, the last time we’re gonna see mom’s face. And all of a sudden, my friend sticks his face in. I’m like “What the—what are you doing?!” So not everyone is really equipped to handle grief. But they love you, and they’re doing their best. And that’s the thing, I think especially around death: everyone is doing their best with what they can. This is a new play woven from personal stories, but it also borrows from—and winks at—a very old and universal tale: it’s a Cinderella story. Wild with Happy is a lot of gathered stories. For me, honestly, this story is not about me: this is your story. It’s all of our story. It started to become that fairy tale. I already had this protagonist, and I already knew that he lost his mother, so it’s kind of a happy accident that these two thematically and structurally make sense. With all the research I was doing, I was looking at deconstructing these characters, to heighten everything a bit. We’re able to examine human conflict and very deep things like grief if there’s a little satire attached to it. Satire is, I think, very honest. Maybe it’s my point of view as a playwright. I’m not the child of August Wilson. I think I’m more of the child of Nicky Silver, of Ionesco. There’s something about lifting our experience up so that it doesn’t just live in realism; I think that we live in magical realism as well. Also, this state of grief, for me, is odd. Just like a fairy tale, it’s surreal. I think it’s fun that the audience puts it together that they’ve been living in a fairy tale the whole time. There’s always that moment [in fairy tales] where they’re like “Oh… I already had the power, I had it inside of me all along.” But no matter what, you can’t deny it—if you are a princess, you’re going to be a princess, you know? This is the first production in which you’re not playing the character of Gil. What’s changed for you in that time? And how is it to just watch? It’s great. I think I’m able to clarify the thoughts even more. I see even more objectively how tough a play this is—it’s really hard to do. Where I am with [the play] now, I am very proud that it’s cut into the world and that it’s for another actor to experience. I get to just watch and be delighted by the way I’m hearing lines. I’m a playwright who will change something based on what the actor is doing. I can actually help give you words, or just change something because I think it makes more sense coming out of your mouth this way I’m all for it.

What sparked you to write Wild with Happy? Two events. One, I was inspired by the loss of my own mother, and the losses of many of my friends and their mothers. I was interested in what people do when they’re grieving to cover things up, to fill a void. Two, I was also inspired by faith and belief. Anika, my best friend, took me to Disney World. (She gave me the title of the play, because she actually said, “Look at these people! Everybody’s just wild with happiness.”) That place really takes everyone back to their childhood to believe in magic again. I wanted to take a character and take everything away from him and then challenge him to believe again. Because my own personal belief is that you’ve got to believe in something in order to live. You gotta have some faith, some hope, if you don’t, you’re walking corpse. Who is Wild for? And what are you looking to leave your audiences with? I honestly think that Wild is for everyone, but especially for the cynics in the world. For those people who have seen everything, but somewhere in their most private moments they want to believe again. I want to be breathless in the theater. I do. I want everyone shoulder to shoulder, laughing together, crying together, saying, “Oh my God, that’s my story, too.” I want to come and be taken away somewhere with everyone else. I really hope that young people come to see this show, as well as people who’ve seen everything, maybe a bit more jaded. That’s my audience. The more jaded, the better. I believe they have a challenge for you: I’d like for you to just relax your arms, open up your heart again. That’s the power of theater and what we can do. To just lift us, maybe to lift us to possibility again, and to hope.
In search of my mother’s garden, I found my own.

–Alice Walker

A dream is a wish your heart makes
When you’re fast asleep.
In dreams you lose your heartaches:
Whatever you wish for, you keep.

–Walt Disney’s Cinderella

Sometimes crying or laughing are the only options left, and laughing feels better right now.

–Veronica Roth, Divergent

The display of grief makes more demands than grief itself.
How few men are sad in their own company.

–Seneca

It’s all right to cry
Crying gets the sad out of you
It’s all right to cry
It might make you feel better.

–Free To Be You and Me

You’re in GRIEF! The stages of grief!
You got, stage one and two! Denial, mixed with a little anger. It’s something.
People must know when it’s their time.

—Aunt Glo, Wild with Happy

Don’t be ashamed to weep; ‘tis right to grieve.
Tears are only water, and flowers, trees, and fruit cannot grow without water. But there must be sunlight also. A wounded heart will heal in time, and when it does, the memory and love of our lost ones is sealed inside to comfort us.

—Brian Jacques, Taggerung

These tales were told to give people hope that you could work through sorrow, that you could work through loss, that you could work through injustice.

... The tales tend to be counter-tales to the reality in which the tellers or writers are living. We could even say that today we’re living in a really perverse world. And why do we tell tales and go to see movies that have these fairy tale motifs? There is hope; we can see that things could be different. The fairy tales offer alternatives to the perverse world. That notion in Cinderella and many other tales that you can work through sorrow, loss, and injustice is really crucial for understanding what the fairy tales are all about; they’re very serious.
Stephanie Berry—Adelaide/Avant Cito. Center Stage: Cleon, Broadway & Off Broadway credits include her one-woman show, The Shakespeare Chronicles: The Making of a Black Woman in New York (Obie Award, two Audelco Awards), Classical Theatre of Harlem: Henry V (King of France/Hostess). Woodie King’s New Federal Theatre: Cool Blues; National Black Theatre: Macbeth; National Black Theatre Festival: Iced-Out, Shackled and Chained. Regional—Denver Center Theatre: Gee’s Bend; Studio Theatre: Marcus and the Secret of Sweet, Milwaukee Rep: Trouble in Mind, Gem of the Ocean; Mark Taper Forum: Distraction, Philadelphia Theatre Company: Intimate Apparel, Delaware Theatre: Spank; Portland Center Stage: King Lear, Oberlin: Hamlet; Arden Theatre Company: Fences (Brynmore Award Nomination). Film/TV—The Delivery Man, Invasion, No Reservations, Finding Forrester, Blue Bloods, Louie, all of the Law & Order programs, among numerous others. Awards—Recognized as “Making a Difference” local hero of PS 125 in Harlem; 2010 recipient of the TCG/Fox Foundation Resident Actor Fellowship as a Distinguished Artist. Other Professional—Founding member of Blackberry Productions Theater Company, a Harlem-based organization that develops new works and brings theater to underserved populations throughout New York. Ms. Berry is a veteran actor, writer, and teaching artist and has been recognized as a pioneer in the field of Arts in Education.

James James—Terry (and others). Center Stage debut. Regional—Arden Theatre: Empty Plate at the Café du Grand Beauf, James and the Giant Peach, Romeo and Juliet, Superior Donuts (Brynmore Award, Supporting Actor), The Whipping Man, Endgame, Three Sisters; People’s Light and Theatre: One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, Gossamer, Shipwrecked, Wilma Theatre: Angels in America Part 1 and 2 (Brynmore Award, Supporting Actor), Philadelphia Theatre Company: Grey Gardens, Ruined, Mauchingbird Theatre: The Threshold Floor, The Importance of Being Earnest, IntAct Theatre. We Are Proud To Present… Education—BA in Drama Morehouse College, MFA in Acting Temple University 2011 F Otto Haas Award for an Emerging Philadelphia Artist recipient. Professional—Assistant Professor of Theatre, Villanova University. James is thrilled to be making his Center Stage debut in this production of Wild with Happy.

Forrest McClendon—Gil. Center Stage debut. Broadway/London—The Scottish Boys [Tony Award nomination]. Off Broadway—Vineyard Theatre: The Scottish Boys; New Federal Theatre: James Baldwin: A Soul on Fire. Other New York—Theater at St. Clement’s: Mandela A New Musical (Thembu). Regional—Guthrie/Philadelphia Theatre Company: The Scottish Boys (Brynmore Award), North Carolina Shakespeare Festival: Romeo and Juliet (Friar Lawrence); Philadelphia Shakespeare Theatre: Othello (title role), Lantern Theatre Company, Julius Caesar (title role), Zach Scott Theatre: The America Play (B. Iden Payne and Central Texas Critics Table Awards); Westport Playhouse: A Christmas Carol (Christmas Past), Two River Theatre: Jacques Brel Is Alive… and Living in Paris (Man #1), Walnut Street Theatre: The Maids (Claire), Wilma Theatre: The Three Penny Opera (Street Singer). 11th Hour Theatre Company: Avenue X (Brynmore Award). Education—University of Connecticut. Professional Adjunct Professor, Brind School of Theatre, University of the Arts; Artist-in-Residence, Boyer College of Music & Dance, Temple University Awards—2014 Lunt-Fontanne Fellowship, Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation Fellowship, Interdisciplinary New Performance Forms. www.forrestmclendon.com
