



All Hail Hurricane Gordo

by Carly Mensch

Begins March 13

“Am I my brother’s keeper?”

— Cain, Genesis 4:9

Okay, so Cain said this *after* he’d already killed Abel, but that doesn’t make it any less of an important question—one asked through the ages. In Carly Mensch’s new play, *All Hail Hurricane Gordo*, there’s no killing, but the question reverberates. For over a decade, brothers Chaz and Gordo have been living on their own, their only adult supervision coming from themselves as they’ve gotten older. Chaz has been looking out for Gordo, at first to keep Family Services from taking them both to foster care, and now because Gordo seems more and more incapable of functioning in the world outside the house. How long can or should Chaz dedicate his life to his whack-job brother? And when Chaz rents out a room in the home where it’s just been him

and Gordo for so long, well, everyone’s bound to have some trouble adjusting.

From Cain and Abel to Michael and Fredo, brothers seem to have some pretty big problems with each other. And yet, while Cain and Michael arguably went too far, for the most part siblings tend to look out for each other. The “I can pick on my brother anytime I want—but if you pick on my brother, watch out!” mentality seems pretty pervasive. Our siblings are the only ones who can understand the specific kind of crazy in which our families suffered or thrived. They are our link to childhood, our comrades. We’re put together by the accident of family, and tied together for the rest of our time on Earth—and maybe even after, really. As Gordo sees his situation with Chaz, “We’re like one of those famous

teams. Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. Beethoven and Beethoven’s brother.” Now, granted, we don’t know much about Beethoven and his brother, but Butch and Sundance went off a cliff, didn’t they? Yes. And they went off together.

Thelma and Louise did the same thing, but really, boys are weirder. Perhaps Cain and Abel set the tone, or the prodigal son and his grumpy brother, but it seems like the relationship between brothers is a bit intense. Maybe it’s the dynamic of the twosome that creates an inherent sense of competition for parental attention and affection, and it all gets very black and white with no gray—the good kid and the bad kid. Although large families don’t always seem to fare well—Joseph’s brothers couldn’t stand him long before the coat of many colors. If there had been a sister, might things have been different? Just look at the Brady boys—maybe those very lovely girls have what-to-do with them growing up so nice, despite what you might have read on the internet. Joanie and Richie got along just fine, but something awful must have happened that made Chuck completely disappear...

But we were talking about the play. Chaz and Gordo are all each other have in their increasingly small world, despite the extra room now that most of the furniture has been sold off. While they approach the responsibility of family and brotherhood quite differently, they are certainly both keenly aware of it. When they open their home to a new resident, India (a girl!), the delicate balance that gave some semblance of order to their lives is rocked, and maybe shattered. “I’ve been on a family kick of sorts,” says Mensch. “With my plays I tend to take two different worlds and then just smash them into each other. I was playing around with the idea of how people are torn between the things they are given and the things they choose—the family you’re born into and your second family, the one that you create with a stranger.”

The impact when India, her father and a surprise guest collide with this fragile construction of a family is profound. India is nothing like anyone these boys have ever met before—she’s certainly no sister. Chaz can’t understand why India has chosen to separate herself from her seemingly perfect family, and yet the two forge a bond. “The whole set-up—let’s just both admit—a little on the creepy side,” their new roommate says. “Two guys working at home. Alone. Asking for someone to come live with them in their weirdo home office slash bachelor pad in bumblefuck, New York. But I’m fine with that. In fact, I kind of like



Carly Mensch

Carly Mensch openly admits, “Carly Mensch would love to write a musical.” It is with this candid exuberance that Mensch has created *All Hail Hurricane Gordo*. With a smattering of spontaneity she was inspired by “an image of a guy with a football helmet ramming into another guy. It started with this sort of dramatic impulse or explosion, and then the two guys became two brothers and a story of family and responsibility grew out of that,” she says. Given her relatively short background in theatre and her meteoric rise, she might as well be describing what it’s like to be a Humana Festival Playwright at the age of 24.

As a child Mensch’s theatrical exposure was limited to yearly excursions into New York. She fondly recalls her family tradition. “We came into the city to see Broadway musicals for my birthday, so I guess that is the only theatre I knew, musicals. I was pretty into *Tommy* when I saw it, and *Les Mis*. Big, beautiful, punchy theatre—that’s where I started.”

Mensch wrote her first play when she was at Dartmouth as part of a 24-hour playwriting event. “They chose writers who were outside of the theatre department because they thought it might produce funnier, more unconventional results,” she says. In those few short hours Mensch became so excited by her newfound form of expression that she decided to take a playwriting class. “My first real play was written in that class. It’s called *Bradshaw*,” Mensch recalls, “and it’s all about structure, railways and *Alice in Wonderland*.”

Her achievements in the classroom led to opportunities elsewhere. Combining her major in French and Linguistics with her penchant for playwriting, Mensch found herself with the chance to explore another facet of theatre—dramaturgy. That particular summer, The Civilians were artists-in-residence at Dartmouth, working on their play *Paris Commune*. “I was doing French research,” says Mensch. “It was a total coincidence that I was asked to work with them. I scoured hundreds of old newspapers, hoping to impress them with the nerdy expanse of my library skills, but I’m pretty sure most of it was unusable.” This year’s Humana Festival reunites Carly Mensch and The Civilians as both *All Hail Hurricane Gordo* and *This Beautiful City* will be staged in the Pamela Brown Auditorium.

When she graduated from Dartmouth in 2005, Mensch returned home to New York to intern at Playwrights Horizons’ literary office, where she worked with Resident Dramaturg Christie Evangelisto, on whom

Mensch made an indelible impression. “Carly’s thoughtful intelligence and signature snarky wit are matched only by her boundless geek love for the theatre—so she’s a natural-born playwright. Seeing and reading and thinking about plays energizes Carly in this way that energizes everyone in our offices at Playwrights. She’s one of the funniest people I know, on top of being humble and brainy and big-hearted,” Evangelisto says.

When she wasn’t working as an intern, Mensch was studying in the Lila Acheson Wallace Playwrights program at Juilliard and hanging with the cool cats of Ars Nova, a developing and producing venue for eclectic, comedic and musical new works. “I have two artistic homes in New York,” declares Mensch. “One is Juilliard and one is Ars Nova, which is one of the best-kept secrets in New York. It offers a fun, young aesthetic and at the same time such support for young artists.” It was at Ars Nova that she was offered her first reading of *All Hail Hurricane Gordo* as part of the OUT LOUD reading series in March of 2007.

But the gale of *Gordo* had yet to subside. Mensch was invited to the Kennedy Center’s University Playwrights Workshop and to participate in Marin Theatre Company’s NuWerks Festival where *All Hail Hurricane Gordo* received staged readings. It was at the Kennedy Center she met Sean Daniels, associate artistic director of Actors Theatre of Louisville, who would ultimately direct *All Hail Hurricane Gordo* at the Humana Festival. “I reached out to him as a fellow Indie Rock enthusiast in the theatre world and we talked very vaguely about the play and about new kinds of theatre—I don’t think I even noticed that he was interested in the play,” she says.

Looking at Carly Mensch’s career up to this point, the usual “this kid is going places” attitude does not apply—rather, “this kid is at places” seems more apt. This spring Mensch will be taking time off from her Juilliard Fellowship, where she studies under Marsha Norman and Christopher Durang, to attend rehearsals here in Louisville. “It’s really exciting to be working alongside the very people I’ve admired in secret for so long,” Mensch says about the Humana Festival. “I have all the anthologies on my bookshelf at home and have read them multiple times over. My goal is not to embarrass myself. To put on a good play and not embarrass myself. And maybe get a Pulitzer. A Pulitzer or one of those homemade Derby-Pies. Either one.”

it.” Gordo finds the idea of change hard to accommodate. He might not be quite-right-in-the-head, but he’s smart enough to sense danger. It is terrifying, and unacceptable, to think that Chaz might get some crazy ideas about separating himself from his family.

Most of us can never quite completely separate, though. Even Joseph and the prodigal son came home. Nathan and Peter Petrelli seem to be on the same side again. Bobby and J.R.? In a situation when one sibling is forced to be the caretaker of a not-quite-right-in-the-head person, we all know that the not-quite-right-in-the-head person will hold onto that caretaker person for as long as possible. But, in the end, it’s not all that different for the caretaker sibling. You get used to taking care of people, to looking out for your little brother. It becomes who you are. Chaz’s identity is that he is Gordo’s brother. And vice versa. We are each other’s keepers, even in a normal family—whatever that is. Other than in biblical cases of jealousy that lead to murder or attempted murder, for the most part we know all about our responsibility to and the expectations of our families—basically, we keep our families together, and we keep each other alive.

And yet, Gordo might be totally capable of keeping himself alive on his own. There might be nothing wrong with him that wouldn’t be solved by forcing him to function in the world. But would that let Chaz off the hook at all? After knowing him for a day, maybe India has Gordo pegged when she tells Chaz, “Gordo’s not your family. He’s a pain in the ass.”

“A pain in the ass,” says Chaz, “Who happens to be my responsibility.”

—Julie Felise Dubiner

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