



# ODE TO JOY

BY CRAIG LUCAS



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Ode to Joy *is for Nico Muhly*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ODE TO JOY was commissioned by the Greenfield Prize at the Hermitage Artist Retreat in Englewood, Florida.

The Hermitage Artist Retreat invites artists and writers in every discipline to work at its historic site on Florida's Gulf of Mexico. The Hermitage commissions the Greenfield Prize to bring into the world works of art that will have a significant impact on the broad as well as the artistic culture of our society.

The play was completed under a commission from Playwrights Horizons.

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ODE TO JOY was presented by Rattlestick Playwrights Theater (David Van Asselt, Artistic Director; Brian Long, Managing Director) at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York City, opening on February 27, 2014. It was directed by Craig Lucas; the set design was by Andrew Boyce; the costume design was by Catherine Zuber; the lighting design was by Paul Whitaker; the sound design was by Daniel Kluger; the special effects were by James Hunting; the fight direction was by UnkleDave’s Fight-House; the stage manager was Michael Denis; and the production manager was Eugenia Furneaux. The cast was as follows:

ADELE .....Kathryn Erbe  
BILL .....Arliss Howard  
MALA..... Roxanna Hope

## CHARACTERS

ADELE is a painter, anywhere from late 30s to mid 50s; determined, playful, intimidatingly bright, alert, deeply kind, sometimes combative; an alcoholic.

BILL is a cardiac surgeon, anywhere from late 30s to mid 50s; born into wealth, classically educated, erudite, hard-working, passionate, somewhat solitary, widely traveled and experienced in a variety of milieus; an alcoholic.

MALA is a pharmaceutical executive, anywhere from 30 to 50; fiercely ambitious, private, wounded somehow, refuses to speak of past trauma; a non-drinker.

The actor playing MALA also plays BARTENDER. The actor playing BILL also plays TV VOICE and DR. WONG.

## PLACE & TIME

Scene 1 — Adele's building. Day, 2014.

Scene 2 — Bar. Night, 2007.

Scene 3 — Adele's former studio. Day, 1999.

Scene 4 — Restaurant. That evening, 1999.

Scene 5 — Bill's loft. Night, 2007.

### *Interval*

Scene 6 — Hospital. Nights, 1999.

Scene 7 — Bill's loft. Night, 2008.

Scene 8 — Mala's apartment. Midnight, Y2K.

Scene 9 — Park. Day, 2009.

Scene 10 — Adele's building. Late afternoon, 2014.

New York City.

## NOTES

Pauses can be brief.

Words in brackets are not pronounced.

Slashes indicate possible points of overlap for the subsequent speaker.

An ungrammatical comma is a hitch in the thinking or rhythm.

# ODE TO JOY

## Scene 1

*Adele's building. Day, 2014.*

*Adele alone. She holds a paintbrush and is working on a large canvas — unseen — between herself and the audience. Soon she is overcome with physical pain.*

ADELE. This is the story of how the pain goes away. Or: How I got out of the way ... of me and everyone else ... Once upon a time, seven years ago, a Thursday afternoon ...

*She closes her eyes and a bar begins to glow with warmth. She walks into it.*



## Scene 2

*Bar. Night, 2007.*

*Bill is seated at the bar. Adele approaches the bar, receives a text, types, tries to get the bartender's attention. The bar is not officially open and the bartender has headphones on.*

ADELE. May I...?

*Adele types. A very sad song is playing. Bill sobs. Beat.*

*(To the bartender.)* Yes, could I have a double vodka on the rocks and could you put on something ... a little — less — something *joyful*, thank you. *(To Bill.)* Would — ? I'm Adele. Would you like to talk about it? ... I understand. Would you like me to leave you be? *(Receives text.)* Oh, please. *(Types.)* I'll just tell you what I would tell myself. Whatever it is — Things have a way of changing. They look impossibly scary at the time and then ... at some point ... through the whatever you may be ... I'm not saying life isn't tragic ... You also realize there are wonderful things that would never, could never have happened if the first thing ... Right?

BILL. I'm Bill.

ADELE. Hi, Bill. Would it ... help to tell me what happened? *(Text.)* Oh my God. *(Typing.)* Some people make the simplest thing into a, paragraph of tax code. Sometimes it helps to just say it; it doesn't seem so terrible.

BILL. My wife committed suicide; she was six months pregnant with our first child. We tried and tried.

ADELE. Oh God. / That's —

BILL. But that doesn't vitiate your point.

*Short pause.*

That song, that's all.

ADELE. Oh my —

BILL. And I think ... Well, I may have cancer. Yeah.

ADELE. What kind?

BILL. Prostate.

ADELE. Oh, isn't that the kind now, don't they have very good results if they catch it early?

BILL. Yes.

ADELE. Did they...?

BILL. No.

ADELE. Oh.

BILL. I mean they haven't even gotten to the point of saying it *is* cancer, it / might be.

ADELE. I see, good.

BILL. It isn't, I'm sure it isn't.

ADELE. Oh good. No. But just the ... Did he forget my drink?

BILL. I think that's it. I think he's she.

ADELE. I think you're right. On both counts. *(To the bartender.)* Could I — ? ...

BARTENDER. Could you wait a sec? / We aren't actually open just yet.

ADELE. Yeah, I / *waited*, I think you al —

BILL. She waited already! You poured it.

ADELE. She doesn't care. I'm glad to meet you.

BILL. I'll know in a few days, it's just the cumulative ... the ... seeing you ...

ADELE. Me?

BILL. ... so obviously in love.

ADELE. Oh, I'm not in love.

BILL. Well, in something ... with ...

ADELE. No, no, I'm in — *(Receives text.)* Habit. That's what I —

*Music has disappeared.*

Oh, thank God. They say you can't love a depressed person, because they're too in love with their crappy narrative.

BILL. Uh-huh.

ADELE. Don't worry, she will bring it. The same way you can't really have a relationship with a corporate lawyer. They're too busy fucking everybody else to give it to you with any —

BILL. Uh-huh.

ADELE. — real verve. I'm lucky enough to have both. What do you do? Sorry.

BILL. I'm a / doctor.

*Overlapping, obliterating the word "doctor," Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" plays loudly.*

ADELE. Ow.

*The music stops, is then replaced by something appropriate.*

That was ... (*To the bartender.*) Very funny! She'll get it, don't ...

*Bill offers a sip of his drink.*

Thank you. Mm, what is that?

BILL. Scotch.

ADELE. I never drink scotch.

BILL. Well now you have a new vice.

ADELE. You don't have prostate cancer, Bill.

BILL. How can you tell?

ADELE. I can just tell. You are a winner. You don't. I — Well, I don't want to — Let's just say I have powers.

BILL. You do? What kind of powers do you have?

ADELE. Oh, all kinds. She'll bring it, she's not going to forget.

BILL. She *has* forgotten.

ADELE. No, my powers tell me that any second she is going to remember that drink and bring it.

BILL. ... I'm gonna get you your fucking drink.

*Bill climbs over the bar.*

ADELE. No no no. / Bill. *Bill.*

BARTENDER. You're not allowed behind / the bar.

BILL. I *am* allowed here because you left her drink to languish in sorrow and she is thirsty — It's okay, forgiveness is / the key to everything.

ADELE. Thank you! Thanks!

BILL. I have powers too.

ADELE. Yes you do.

BILL. To winners.

ADELE. Winners.

BILL. Consistent winners. To those who hit the bull's-eye every time. It is inconsistency that drives us truly mad —

ADELE. Yes.

BILL. If you reward a rat for performing a certain task, its brain shows an increased level of dopamine.

ADELE. I love dopamine.

BILL. The next time it's required to perform the task, the dopamine goes up in anticipation of the reward.

ADELE. Oh. That makes sense.

BILL. But if you don't — say thirty percent of the time — then when it's asked to perform the task, it rewards *itself* even more.

ADELE. It does?

BILL. It's the uncertainty it's palliating.

ADELE. Ohhh.

BILL. Yeah.

ADELE. Wow.

BILL. Gambling. Any addiction. Superstition, religion ... all tied to the same bullshit.

ADELE. How — ? Explain that, I get the gambling.

BILL. Take a couple of rats —

ADELE. Oh, I dated 'em. Go on.

BILL. — put 'em in separate cages, reward them at arbitrary moments. Whatever each is doing before being rewarded, the rat assumes that's the thing that caused the reward; it will go on doing it from then on out. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

ADELE. You don't believe in God.

BILL. No. You?

ADELE. No, I ... Yeeeah, I don't know, yeah, I think, I — Yeah, I do.

BILL. Are you sure?

ADELE. No. But I think we're supposed to wrestle with it. No?

BILL. Kierkegaard.

ADELE. Is that who it is?

BILL. Did you know people who believe in God are less apt to be depressed or commit suicide.

ADELE. They are?

BILL. What do you do?

ADELE. I'm interested. I'm a painter, but — No, I am.

BILL. I believe you.

ADELE. Interested, go on.

BILL. You have a gallery?

ADELE. No. I have a minuscule coterie of insane fans who love my work but who might just be saying that to keep me from hurling myself off a building; I barely eke by; but I've never heard —

BILL. Where's your studio?

ADELE. I'm oh I'm in transition right now. I'm moving.

BILL. In or out?

ADELE. Well, it's always both, isn't it?

BILL. Very good. How can I see them?

# ODE TO JOY

by Craig Lucas

1M, 2W

Adele, hard at work on a large triptych, looks back on the two major loves of her life, which somehow managed to provide her with everything she needed to know about the art of living. Through these two tumultuous loves, Adele discovered both the limits of her powers and the true depths of her gifts. The road to redemption remains before her with the return of both loves to her side.

*“Craig Lucas, the author of great toxic fairy tales for grown-ups, suspends the storybook whimsy to give us a more straightforward look at people battling with the ogres of contemporary life that is vitally and compellingly off-center ... An eloquent mess of a play — beautiful, ugly, and familiar.”*

—The New York Times

*“Hilarious and enlightening ... Craig Lucas has a gift of gab.”*

—Entertainment Weekly

*“There is no more fearless a playwright than Craig Lucas ... ODE TO JOY is the most powerful thing he has turned out in years ... riveting, extraordinary drama.”*

—Lighting and Sound America

*“A sensitive dramedy with much to savor ... Craig Lucas’ skill as a playwright lies in his ability to develop a mature, adult relationship that you grow to care about.”*

—TheaterMania.com

*“ODE TO JOY thrives on the ways we either take control of our lives or let them eat us alive ... [Lucas] probes deep without ever losing sight of the infinite possibilities of life that keep the light at the end of the tunnel burning bright ... a notable, memorable success.”*

—TalkinBroadway.com

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PRELUDE TO A KISS  
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and others

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