



“Corteo,” Cirque du Soleil’s longest-running arena production, comes to the Liacouras Center May 30-June 2. —SUBMITTED

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL’S LONGEST-RUNNING ‘CORTEO’ COMES TO PHILLY STAGE

Rita Charleston

TRIBUNE CORRESPONDENT

“Corteo” — which means cortege in Italian — the longest-running arena production from Cirque du Soleil, is heading to the Liacouras Center May 30 to June 2. Since its creation, the show has amazed and delighted over 10 million spectators in 20 countries on four continents and is still going strong.

A joyous procession and a festive parade imagined by a clown, the show brings together the passion of the actor with the grace and power of the acrobat to plunge the audience into a theatrical world of fun, comedy and spontaneity in a mysterious space between heaven and earth.

In a Cirque du Soleil first, the stage is central in the arena and divides the venue with each half of the audience facing the other half, giving a unique perspective not only of the show, but also a performer’s eye view of the audience.

A major Canadian-based organization, Cirque du Soleil boasts approximately 1,200 artists from some 80 different countries. One of the featured performers in this particular show is French-born Joris Kondjia. Although he’s been with Cirque for years, he’s only been touring with “Corteo” for a little over two years.

“I began gymnastics when I was about 5 years old,” Kondjia begins. “When I was in high school I joined the Pole France

Lyon, and eventually became a member of the national team and the U18 French junior gymnastics team.”

It was while at university that he discovered the world of the circus when he was spotted and approached during a competition to join Cirque du Soleil. He says he immediately seized the opportunity.

“In the beginning I never saw myself as a circus performer. I was a gymnast,” Kondjia remarks. “But little by little — and with much practice — I saw how my skills began to fit in perfectly with the kinds of shows Cirque du Soleil was presenting.”

Kondjia says about 10 years ago he saw his career as a gymnast waning a bit. “But I wasn’t

ready to retire. There was much more I still wanted to do. So performing in various shows with Cirque became my primary occupation.”

But it’s not easy to become involved with the shows, he continues. “One may have skills, but it takes many, many months of conditioning and preparing to be ready to be in one of their shows. Believe me, it’s a long process. It can take six to nine months of rigorous training before you’re seen as competent enough to join the show and the rest of the performers.”

And it shows. The daring and precise acrobatic feats of performers like Kondjia are truly amazing. Today, it comes as second-nature to Kondjia, and he’s

the first to admit he loves everything about what he does.

“I love the connection I have with the audience and seeing their reaction to what we are doing. It’s a thrill for us as performers to keep the audience entertained and often on the edge of their seats,” he shares.

“It’s also a thrill for me to tour with the show. I love meeting new people from around the world, the audiences and performers as well. I also love seeing new places I might never have had the opportunity to see before. I truly feel very lucky to be doing what I’m doing.”

For more information on Joris Kondjia and the Corteo performance of Cirque du Soleil, visit www.liacourascenter.com.

Halle Berry returns to the big screen with ‘Never Let Go’ thriller

Kathia Woods

TRIBUNE CORRESPONDENT

Halle Berry, renowned for her captivating performances in “Gothika,” “The Rich Man’s Wife,” “Perfect Stranger,” “Dark Tide,” and “The Call,” has ventured into the realm of horror and thriller films. During Lionsgate’s CinemaCon panel in April, the Academy Award-winning actress revealed her motivation for taking on the role in “Never Let Go.”

Berry described herself as a “bona fide adrenaline junkie” at the CinemaCon gathering, the actress expressed her desire to delve into new experiences and explore different worlds. “The bigger the rollercoaster, the bigger the bungee jump, the longer the zipline, I’m your girl,” she shared enthusiastically. “This gave me an opportunity to be a part of a world I had never seen before.”

The film offered her precisely that, granting her the opportunity to immerse herself in an unfamiliar realm and embrace a novel and enriching experience.

On Thursday, Lionsgate released the first trailer for the movie, showcasing a terrifying addition to director Alexandre Aja’s impressive collection of survival thrillers. Aja, who has directed films like “Crawl” and “Oxygen,” brings a unique

style of horror that focuses on people trying to survive the terrifying situations they face.

In “Never Let Go,” Berry portrays a mother of twin boys. The family resides deep in the woods, far removed from civilization. Berry’s character adamantly believes that they must protect themselves from the malevolent spirits lurking around their cabin. However, one fateful day, one of the boys begins to question the existence of these spirits and embarks on a quest to uncover the truth. His journey leads him to become lost in the woods, prompting his mother to desperately attempt to rescue him.

Berry’s character in the film leads her children into the woods, using a rope to ensure their safety. This creates an eerie image, further emphasized by the occasional appearance of strange hands reaching out to grab the characters. Starring alongside Berry are Anthony B. Jenkins and Percy Daggs IV, who portray her two sons, and Matthew Kevin Anderson and Stephanie Lavigne, who play “The Stranger” and “The Evil,” respectively.

In an interview with Entertainment Weekly, Berry discussed her portrayal of the interactions between her family and certain individuals.

“There was no electricity, no lights, and my character was skinning squirrels,” Berry explained. “And they’re eating bugs and frogs, raw frogs, in the woods. It was a challenge, a little bit of method acting. I had to thoroughly skin a squirrel. These things wildly challenged me to create some reality within this world that felt so foreign.”

For Berry, “Never Let Go” is a reunion with the studio that helped her make history by being the first woman of color to win an Academy Award for Best Actress.

Over the years, the actress has expressed how the award hasn’t created opportunities for herself and other women of color, especially Black women. Observing Black women, who received nominations but failed to win, has been disheartening. Despite the addition of new names, the goal remains elusive.

Berry was happy to give the Oscar to Michelle Yeoh, who became the second woman of color to win Best Actress in the 95-year history of the awards.

Berry, whose last big starring role was in her directorial debut “Bruised,” is happy to have another opportunity to star in a big film with children as co-stars.

“Never Let Go” premieres in theaters on Sept. 27.



From left, Anthony B. Jenkins, Halle Berry and Percy Daggs IV in a scene from “Never Let Go.” —PHOTOS COURTESY LIONSGATE



Halle Berry in a scene from “Never Let Go.”