

BEGINS OCTOBER 29 / TONY KISER THEATER

THE UNDERLYING CHRIS

BY
WILL ENO
DIRECTED BY
KENNY LEON

The Underlying Chris, a world premiere play from Pulitzer Prize finalist Will Eno, is a life-affirming and high-spirited look at how a person comes into their identity, and how sometimes it's life's tiniest moments that most profoundly change our lives. In these divided times, *The Underlying Chris* serves as a celebration of our differences, our individuality, and the many mysterious, difficult, and beautiful things we share simply by being alive.

The Underlying Chris is co-commissioned by Center Theatre Group and Second Stage Theater.

A CONVERSATION WITH WILL ENO

THIS IS A WORLD PREMIERE PLAY! WHAT DOES *THE UNDERLYING CHRIS* MEAN AND WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THAT TITLE?

The play is about the essence of this character Chris, and how that deep-down essential part of us remains, throughout the many changes and challenges and phases of life. I like the word “underlying” as an adjective, meaning underneath us in the earth, as in “Here lies the underlying so-and-so.” My daughter, since she was two years old, has always been a good person to talk with about titles. She has always felt that the title should have been “The Underlying Halloween Chris.” We shall see.

THE PLAY DELVES INTO TOUCHSTONES IN A PERSON'S LIFE, AND HOW OVER TIME, THOSE INDIVIDUAL MOMENTS CREATE AND INFLUENCE A PERSON. WERE THERE CERTAIN TOUCHSTONES FROM YOUR LIFE THAT INFLUENCED THE WRITING OF THIS PLAY?

Yes, absolutely, though some of them, maybe most of them, would be hard for me to identify and articulate, as they can be so small and unnoticeable at the time. Certainly, the birth and arrival of our daughter Albertine has been the most momentous event in my life. And because of her being here on Earth, every little part of every day has been different, so it gets very hard to sort out the actual life-changing moments, since they all kind of seem like that. I don't want to be coy or vague here—it's just that it is all kind of mysterious and chicken-and-egg. Certainly, every play I've written or thought about writing is somehow very much on the path to *The Underlying Chris*. This is definitely a play that brings into focus a lot of things that I as a playwright have thought about, and that I as a human being have struggled with. The notion of identity, in its most simple terms. What is the realest thing about me, what is the irreducible part, and all that. It has been a good source of calm and happiness to be working on this play in the last couple years because it has felt like that rare thing where one's private pre-occupations and worries sort of line up with some part of a national conversation.

WHAT TYPES OF THINGS ARE YOU DOING WHEN YOU'RE NOT WORKING ON A PLAY OR AT THE THEATER?

Hanging around with my daughter and doing doodles or riding a bike or cooking something is my favorite thing to do. At the other end of the spectrum, I went axe-throwing with my buddy Oliver Butler the other day, and that was a lot of fun. There's a place in Brooklyn where they have it. Throwing a ball around or playing tennis are things I can do until the sun goes down. I have done housepainting and carpentry for more years on Earth than I have done almost anything else, and I still really love building things or working on some project. I have been teaching my daughter the basics of carpentry and that feels really good. We have all - my wife Maria, daughter Albertine, and I—been able to travel a lot, usually for work, but we have made some great trips out of it. Albertine has six or seven stamps in her passport and is a ton of fun to travel with.