

STUDENT WORKSHEET 4

CEDRIC NEAL - INTERVIEW



“PEOPLE WILL GET TO KNOW GOLDIE WILSON’S JOURNEY. BECAUSE IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT, GOLDIE WILSON’S CHARACTER IS THE EPITOME OF THE AMERICAN DREAM. THAT IF YOU WORK HARD ENOUGH, IF YOU PUT YOUR MIND TO IT, YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING.”

CEDRIC NEAL

Cedric Neal originated two key roles in **BACK TO THE FUTURE: The Musical** - Goldie Wilson and Marvin Berry. The character of Goldie Wilson only appears briefly in the film, but he plays more of a central role in the stage musical. We interviewed him during his time working with the show about playing the role:

Q. HOW DID GOLDIE WILSON’S CHARACTER DEVELOP?

The song that I do, ‘Gotta Start Somewhere’, is actually the first time that the George McFly character hears the term ‘If you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything.’ But during the first workshop, that song ‘Gotta Start Somewhere’ was exactly 90 seconds long of a development of the workshop. Nick Finlow, our musical supervisor, and John Rando, our director, along with Colin Ingram in the workshop presentation, said that there’s something to this. There’s something to this song. There’s something to Cedric doing the song. So we need to expand it.

It’s now a five-minute production number with four key changes that involves everybody in Hill Valley. So that’s how that character came to grow. I just think it was Bob Gale’s way of saying the story of Martin McFly and George McFly and **BACK TO THE FUTURE: The Musical** is the epitome of the American dream. There’s no other character in the show that epitomizes or manifests the American dream like Goldie Wilson does.

Q. WHAT HAVE YOU ENJOYED MOST ABOUT PLAYING THE TWO CHARACTERS - GOLDIE WILSON & MARVIN BERRY?

The thing that I’ve enjoyed most about playing Goldie Wilson and Marvin Berry is that it’s representation of a black American man who’s not traumatized. Who’s not tokened. Who’s not, ‘Yes sir, master. No sir, master.’ The thing I’ve enjoyed about Goldie and Marvin Berry is both of those characters only bring joy when on stage. Joy in different ways. It’s just I cannot leave the stage when I’m in Act One being Goldie Wilson without a smile on my face, because I know, this may sound conceited, may sound puffed up, but I promise you, that’s not where it’s coming from: I know that when that Goldie Wilson character leaves that stage after ‘Gotta Start Somewhere’, somebody in the audience that wasn’t smiling before is smiling now.

And that I get to be the character to say, ‘Look, yeah, I’m working in a diner right now. Yeah. I have to go to night school, because I haven’t had the best education, but that’s not going to stop me.’ That’s almost identical to Cedric’s story in that I’m from the hood in Dallas, Texas. Where we vary is I had a very good education. I went to one of the top performing arts high schools in the United States. But being from the hood, I used to want to be a classical opera singer.

It was at an early age, my mother and my father taught me that I could be anything I wanted to be. Just because we were in the hood didn't mean that I had to stay there and that my dreams couldn't surpass being a basketball player or a rapper. So that's what I enjoy about Goldie and Marvin Berry. Marvin Berry is just the coolest ... I think Goldie Wilson is on 10 all the time. He's trying to make it happen, trying to fight the system and be that mayor. Whereas Marvin Berry is chill. He's a cool man. He's a ladies man.

“Both those characters just bring me so much joy.”

Q. HOW DO YOU DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE CHARACTERS IN TERMS OF YOUR CHARACTERISATION?

They're coming from two different backgrounds. They both had struggles in different manners. Goldie's struggles led him to be in the diner, dropping out of school with the aspirations of going back to school. So that's what drives Goldie. Goldie is soulful, determined. Whereas Marvin Berry has probably been playing music his entire life. It's in his bones. Chuck Berry's cousin. It's in their family. He doesn't get excited about much like Goldie Wilson.

“Marvin Berry is just cool. He doesn't go above a seven. Goldie Wilson is a mover, animated when he talks, when he sings through song. Marvin Berry is just chilled. Goldie's heightened. Marvin is grounded.”

Q. HOW DID THE FILM INFLUENCE YOU IN TERMS OF YOUR RESEARCH AND THE WAY IT'S INFORMED YOUR PERFORMANCES, DO YOU THINK?

Greatly. Goldie is in the movie for, I think, 45 seconds. But having said that, whenever I say to anybody that I play Goldie Wilson in **BACK TO THE FUTURE: The Musical**, they immediately quote all of Goldie's lines. The same inflections that Donny Fullilove does them in the movie. So I knew going into rehearsals that that diner scene, because the lines in the diner in the movie are the same lines in the diner in the show. So I have to deliver them exactly like Donald Fullilove in the movie. When we were in Manchester, I wore my diner hat on straight. Then I went back and looked at the movie after we closed, and I noticed in the movie that he has it tilted to the side. So for the London run, my hat is shifted now. I've developed a relationship with Donald Fullilove, who was the original Goldie. We're social media friends. He's handed the baton to me and told me how much people love this character. He's just been so supportive. Then with the Marvin Berry character, the only thing that I really took from the movie was that they were party-goers and that he was from a cool background. But you don't cross him.

Q. WHAT DO YOU THINK HAVE BEEN THE REAL CHALLENGES OF WORKING ON THE SHOW OR MAYBE PLAYING THE TWO CHARACTERS?

The most challenging thing was back in the workshops. We did six workshops. I've hit on this a little bit, but making sure that there was a distinction between this one black man playing these two black characters. It still happens to this day. People give more attention to the Goldie Wilson character because he's in the show more, but less to Marvin Berry's. I'm offended when people say that I only play Goldie Wilson. I play Goldie Wilson and Marvin Berry. So I wanted to make sure that Marvin got as much notice as Goldie. Even though Goldie's numbers are flashier and his character's flashier; but they're flip sides of the same coin. I just wanted both characters to be distinct. So that was the main challenge.

“I want to make sure that people know that black people did exist in 1955 and 1985 US. It was still a socially divisive place, and it still is to this day. But that there were black people in Hill Valley, California. I want both of those characters to be respectable, absent of trauma and clearly distinctly two different African American men.”