

S M A L L

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY ROBERT MONTANO

DIRECTED BY JESSI D. HILL



THE SHOW

"BOBBY IS A SMALL PUERTO RICAN/ITALIAN KID FROM LONG ISLAND WITH A BIG DREAM. SOON HE'S GALLOPING HEADLONG INTO THE STRANGE, OBSESSIVE WORLD OF PROFESSIONAL HORSE RACING. BUT THE TRACK IS AS DANGEROUS AS IT IS EXCITING, FULL OF COLORFUL CHARACTERS AND POWERFUL BEASTS. THE JOCKEYS AND THEIR ASSOCIATES FORM A MAKESHIFT BROTHERHOOD EVEN AS THEY WRESTLE WITH THE EXTREMES OF THEIR SPORT. BUT WILL BOBBY OUTGROW HIS DREAM OR BE CONSUMED BY IT?"

SMALL IS A TOUR-DE-FORCE ABOUT FINDING AND LOSING YOURSELF IN THE MESSY PROCESS OF GROWING UP AS ONE YOUNG MAN'S DREAMS UNEXPECTEDLY LEAD HIM FROM THE BELMONT RACETRACK TO THE BROADWAY STAGE."



ROBERT MONTANO WAS RAISED IN HEMPSTEAD, LI, CLOSE ENOUGH TO BELMONT PARK RACETRACK WHERE HE HAD HIS FIRST CAREER AS A PROFESSIONAL RACEHORSE JOCKEY. HOWEVER, BY AGE 20, MOTHER NATURE CAUGHT UP TO HIM AND OUTGREW HIS SILKS. SMITTEN BY THE FILM SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER, ROBERT TRADED HIS JOCKEY BOOTS FOR BALLET SLIPPERS AND APPLIED TO ADELPHI UNIVERSITIES DANCE DEPARTMENT WITHOUT ANY PRIOR TRAINING. HE WAS ACCEPTED AND OFFERED A FULL SCHOLARSHIP. ONE WEEK SHY OF GRADUATING HE BOOKED HIS FIRST GIG IN, "CATS."

HIS CAREER TOOK OFF JUMPING FROM ONE SHOW TO THE NEXT, WORKING WITH GREAT DIRECTORS AND CHOREOGRAPHERS SUCH AS HAL PRINCE, ROB MARSHALL, AND JEROME ROBBINS. HE HAS ALSO HAD THE PLEASURE OF WORKING WITH THE LEGENDARY, CHITA RIVERA IN KISS OF THE SPIDERWOMAN, AS WELL AS HER ACT, CHITA PLUS TWO... HE SANG AND DANCED WITH PETER ALLEN IN LEGS DIAMOND, AND STARRED AS OZZIE IN ON THE TOWN, DIRECTED BY THE INNOVATIVE GEORGE C. WOLFE.

BUT HE COULDN'T CONTAIN HIS CREATIVE SCOPE TO ONLY MUSICAL THEATRE SO HE VENTURED INTO PLAYS, FILM, AND TELEVISION.

HE HAS CREATED ROLES FOR THE ACADEMY AWARD NOMINATED WRITER, JOSE RIVERA IN CLOUD TECTONICS, AND REFERENCES TO SALVADOR DALI MAKES ME HOT, LYNN NOTTAGES PLAY, FABULATION, BESS WOHL'S, BARCELONA, TIRA PALMQUIST'S, TWO DEGREES, KEN LIN'S, FALLOW, RICHARD VETERE'S, ONE SHOT ONE KILL, AND EDWIN SANCHEZ'S, DIOSA. AT ACTORS THEATRE OF LOUISVILLE, ROBERT WAS GIVEN THE HONOR TO PORTRAY CAL IN THE EPIC OF EAST OF EDEN, DIRECTED BY JON JORY, LATER TO BE INVITED BACK TO EXERCISE HIS SHAKESPEARE IN COMEDY OF ERRORS. HE HAS ALSO PLAYED, RALPH, OPPOSITE JOHN C. REILLY IN MARTY.

ON TELEVISION: HE'S GUEST STARRED IN CBS' BULL AND BLUE BLOODS, FOX'S PRODIGAL SON, SHOWTIME'S, CITY ON A HILL. NCIS: NEW ORLEANS, ELEMENTARY, SEARCH PARTY, SEX IN THE CITY, CSI: MIAMI, BLUE BLOODS, LAW & ORDER, AND HBO'S FILM UNDEFEATED, DIRECTED BY JOHN LEGUIZAMO.

IN FILM: HE APPEARED IN "SHAME" WITH MICHAEL FASSBENDER. PLAYED OPPOSITE MARK WAHLBERG AND JOAQUIN PHOENIX IN "THE YARDS." PARTNERED CATHERINE ZETA - JONES IN, "CHICAGO." AMONG OTHER NOTABLE WORK IN CENTER STAGE, IT RUNS IN THE FAMILY, AND PASSIONADA.

PRAISE FOR “SMALL”

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Robert Montano’s one-man show is a vivid account of a young man who yearns to be a jockey

By
Charles Isherwood
Aug. 24, 2023 5:37 pm ET

Small

59E59 Theaters, 59 E. 59th St., New York, \$44, 646-892-7999, closes Sept. 2

When does a dream become a delusion—and a potentially fatal one? That is the tense question implicitly posed in “Small,” a gripping and vividly acted one-man show written and performed by Robert Montano.

The autobiographical “Small” unspools the story of young Bobby, whose early love of dancing—of Puerto Rican descent, he dreams of being Bernardo in “West Side Story”—gives way to a new obsession when his mother takes him to the Belmont Park racetrack near their Long Island home. Entranced by the horses but also intrigued by the jockeys in their glossy finery, Bobby, who at age 12 is just 4 feet 6 inches tall and self-conscious about his stature, sees for himself a new future.



Robert Montano PHOTO: DORICE ARDEN MADRONERO

Mr. Montano, a vibrantly watchable performer, plays many characters as Bobby begins his odyssey through the horse-racing world, and he invests each with sharply different colorings: the paternal warmth of the jockey who becomes his mentor; the unsavory and casually bigoted attitudes of workers at the track; his loving parents, whose marriage isn’t without flaws (she gambles and spends; he drinks).

But as Bobby grows incrementally closer to achieving his goal of getting astride a horse in a professional race, he also begins, well, growing. Within just a few years he has shot past 5 feet, and naturally with increased height comes increased weight, a potentially disqualifying development for aspiring jockeys, who step on the scale before each race.

Mr. Montano enriches his story with dollops of humor, but Bobby’s tale darkens as he indulges in increasingly desperate measures to maintain an acceptable weight, including “flipping,” otherwise known as purging, and taking amphetamines seemingly by the fistful.

Directed with finesse by Jessi D. Hill—one almost imagines a riding crop in her hand as Mr. Montano’s boundless energy keeps him in constant motion—“Small” eventually pivots to a coda in which Bobby returns to his original passion for dance (Chita Rivera, with whom Mr. Montano has had a professional association for more than 30 years, is among the show’s producers). While these scenes do not have the compelling power of Bobby’s abortive jockey career, they bring the show to a conclusion that is satisfying without being sentimental, for the simple reason that it is true.

Review: SMALL at 59E59 Theaters- Robert Montano's Excellent One Man Show

Small runs through September 2, 2023.

By: [Marina Kennedy](#) Aug. 17, 2023

"I did what I had to because I really wanted to race." By Bobby in *SMALL*

[Robert Montano](#) tells his coming of age story about Bobby, a teen from Long Island who enjoys musical theatre but becomes fascinated by the world of horse racing and aspires to be a jockey. It's an exciting time for the young man as he goes regularly to Belmont Raceway with his neighbors who work there. Bobby gets to meet people in the business, has a natural affinity for horses, and shows promise in the sport. But he is also exposed to the dangers of the horse racing that include perilous accidents and the health risks that some jockeys take to make a low weight. It's questionable if becoming a professional jockey will actually be Bobby's future.



[Robert Montano's](#) spirited performance is nothing short of amazing as he shares his unique understanding of horse racing and takes the audience on the ride. He portrays Bobby and assumes many other roles seamlessly that include his mother and father; his mentor, Robert; the horse trainers; and other jockeys. Montano has written the show with just the right amount of drama, action, and humor. Audiences will also appreciate his love of dance that is wonderfully expressed.



The Creative Team for *SMALL* has done a top job of bringing the show to the Upper East Side Stage. The Team features scenic design by Christopher & [Justin Swader](#); lighting design by Jamie Roderick; sound design by [Brian Ronan](#); and properties by [Buffy Cardoza](#).

There is no doubt that *Small* is destined to be a big hit. It runs for 90 minutes with no intermission. See it while it is being performed at [59E59 Theaters](#) through September 2nd. The Theater is located at 59 East 59 Street (between Madison and Park Avenues) New York, NY 10022. For tickets and more information, please visit <https://www.59e59.org/>.

NEW YORK STAGE REVIEW
AUGUST 14, 2023 8:00 PM

SMALL: THE HEIGHTENED STORY OF A GROWING JOCKEY HOPEFUL

By [David Finkle](#)

★★★★☆ Robert Montano, directed by Jessi D. Hill, graphically recalls his adolescence at Belmont Park



Robert Montano in *Small*. Photo: Dorsen Arden Madronero

Obsession is what *Small*, written by Robert Montano, is all about. Fittingly, the autobiographical work is obsessively performed by Montano. It and he are something to see, all right.

The story goes like this: When only entering his teenage years, Montano, known to his family as Bobby, was mightily impressed by *West Side Story* and, in particular, by the character of Bernardo. He was stopped in his youthful ambition by his size. Just over

five feet, he had retreated into timidity as a response to being regularly picked on at school.

He was unhappy about the dismal state of affairs until one eye-opening day. Behind his father's back, his mother took him to Belmont Park. She was hoping to win enough bets to buy flooring tiles needed at home. Once there on the clandestine visit, Montano was confronted by jockeys, especially by Robert A. Pineda. Impressed at the powerful Pineda presence, Bobby immediately ceased praying to God for height and began fervently praying to remain small.

Despite his parents' forbidding him to hang around the racetrack – his mother was worried about the danger to riders – he persisted, and over not too much time he began ingratiating himself with the Belmont personnel. He was a kid obviously determined to become one of them. They all recognized his gumption. Eventually he even got himself mentored by the exceptionally kind Pineda.

Now intent on a jockey career, he worried about what was occurring against his repeated prayers. His height and weight were obdurately mounting. Where 5 feet, 4 inches and 104 pounds was ideal, he was suddenly growing past that. Landing his first races, he was upping to 5 feet, 8 inches and more than 108 pounds. This was a bummer when the weigh-in included the saddle.

The day before his most important race astride a horse called Sow & Reap, he tipped the scales at 116 pounds. He had to shed 12 pounds overnight. Whereupon the toothy Montano sinks his teeth into recounting how he went about it in a harrowing and suspenseful sequence that weighs in as the high point of his intense 85-minute recollection.

The aftermath coda has Montano facing up to an unlikely continuing jockey career and his returning to his first obsession, dancing. Wandering into a dance hall one night by accident, he realized he got the beat and the moves to go with it. Dance study followed, and in time he even auditioned for the long-sought Bernardo role.

Whether he gets it won't be spilled here. What will be is an unexpected underlying theme with which *Small* tinkers. Most scripts founded on someone fighting against odds – racetrack or otherwise – lead up to the protagonist's inevitable final challenge and, at the last moment, triumphing.

Small is a moving example of the opposite: the notion that sometimes winning after having exhausted oneself in the attempt doesn't necessarily represent the most victorious outcome possible. There are preferable alternatives, and thanks to Montano for making the realistically worthy point.

Thanks as well to Montano and director Jessi D. Hill for how they represent it. On a set that Christopher and Justin Swader had made to resemble part of a paddock – sound designer Brian Ronan supplies the nearby racehorse whinnying – Montano matches his early obsessive behavior with a *tour de force* repeat. Here, there, and everywhere –

including barreling back and forth within inches of the front row – he barely stops to breathe.

Reliving the fateful Sow and Reap race – just before which he's frantically made weight – he demonstrates coming that close to losing his life. Not only does he hardly breathe during the sequence, audience members nearly stop their breathing as well. On the way out, one woman exclaimed, "He looked like he lost 10 pounds just doing that." In the act of recalling how he sacrificed for his sport, Montano unleashes a hyperactive show of sacrificing for his art.

Small opened August 14, 2023, at 59E59 and runs through September 2. Tickets and information: [59e59.org](https://www.59e59.org)



David Finkle is a freelance journalist specializing in the arts and politics. He has reviewed theater for several decades, for publications including *The Village Voice* and *Theatermania.com*, where for 12 years he was chief drama critic. He is also currently chief drama critic at *The Clyde Fitch Report*. For an archive of older reviews, go [here](#). Email: david@nystagereview.com.

ThoroughBredDailyNews.Com

Review: Small, a One-Man Off-Broadway Show

Monday, August 14, 2023 at 3:35 pm |
Updated: August 14, 2023 at 3:39 pm



Montano in SMALL | Dorice Arden Mondronero photo

By Sue Finley

Officially, SMALL is a one-man show, written and performed by Robert (Bobby) Montano, the story of his years-long attempt to maintain riding weight and the lengths he went to in order to do so. But it would be more appropriately described as a show with over a dozen roles, all played by Montano.

Over 85 minutes, Montano slides in and out of different characters that all of us in racing will recognize, from Bob and Sue Duncan to Robert Pineda to Mickey Preger to stereotypical assistant trainers and fellow exercise riders, jockeys, racetrack characters-even his own mother and father. He does so with ease.

For those of us who spent time around Belmont Park in the late 70s and early 80s, it's like a walk down memory lane, as he chats with Frank Pagano Jr., brushes past Angel Cordero, and dances at the Rafters, the popular Saratoga disco of the era.

On a Sunday afternoon at the 59E59 theater in midtown Manhattan, in the middle of the Saratoga meeting, I believe I am the only racetracker in the audience experiencing this, but the rest of the crowd found the performance as mesmerizing as I did, bursting into laughter or spontaneous applause at several points during the performance, and doing the only possible thing at the end of the show: giving Montano a standing ovation.

Montano, [the guest on last week's TDN Writers' Room](#), grew up near Belmont Park, and found his 'in' to the racing world when he was delivering newspapers as a 12-year-old in Elmont, Long Island. Bob Duncan, the longtime NYRA starter, was one of his customers, and his wife, Sue, who would go on to be a trainer, was galloping horses. She began taking Montano to work with her at 4:30 in the morning, and he soon found a job with Preger.

Like any 12-year-old boy well under five feet tall, Montano starts out wishing he would grow, but as soon as he sets his sights on being a jockey, he starts praying to God for the opposite. And as he continues to grow, he takes his quest to extreme measures-amphetamines, purging, and 17-mile runs with his body wrapped in Saran Wrap. For people in the industry, it's a sad tale we've heard all too often. For the rest of the audience, it must have seemed shocking as he descends into stints in the hotbox in between popping Lasix pills. One time, he attempts to lose 10 pounds in a single day in order to accept a mount. Finally, his body wears out during the preparations for his last-ever race, which Montano recreates in stunning detail.

We root for Montano all along, through his riding days and onto college and a successful career as a t.v. and film actor, and Broadway dancer and actor.

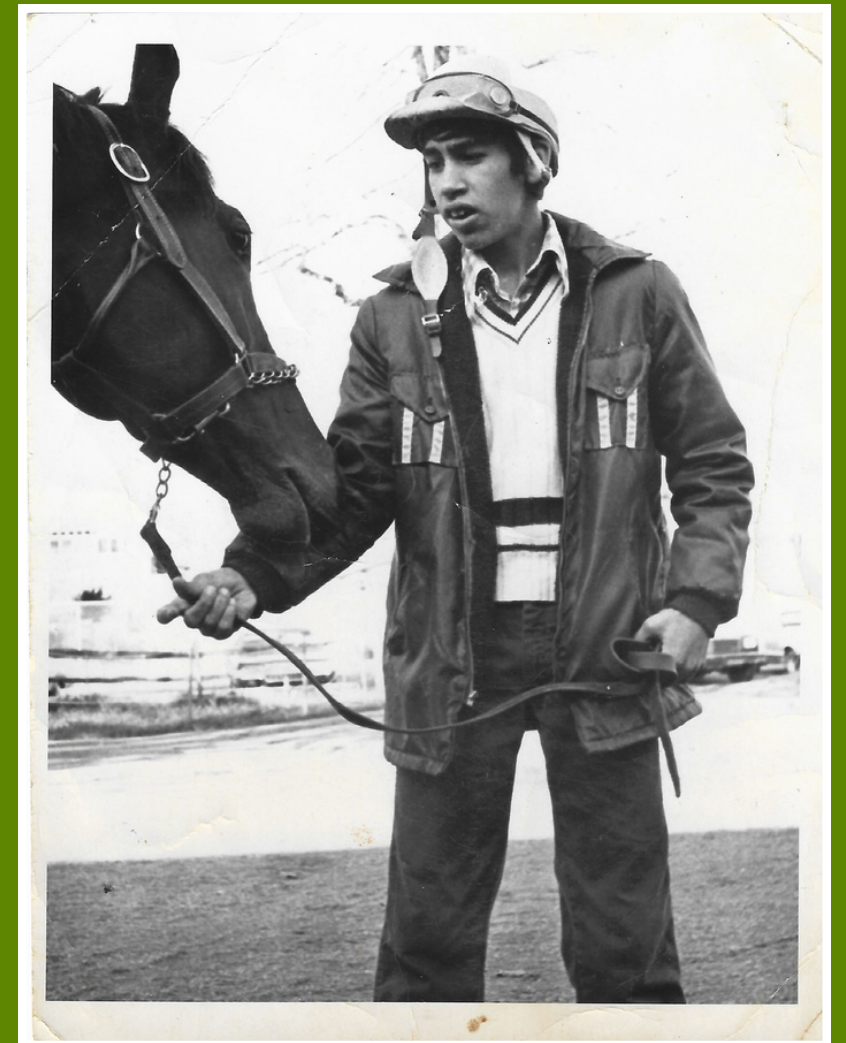
His love of racing is palpable, and you're not sure at the end if he wouldn't do it all over again, even knowing how hard it will be.

Someone in the row behind me said he was exhausted when the show was over; that's how much energy you expend pulling for Montano while you're watching.

It's not a stretch to see SMALL expanding to a production with a full cast, songs, and an orchestra.

In other words, like Montano, SMALL deserves to be something much, much bigger.

Small runs from August 12 to Sept. 2, 2023. For schedule and tickets, visit <https://www.59e59.org/shows/show-detail/small/>.



SPECTRUM NEWS 1

FRANK DILELLA'S THEATRE PICK



“SMALL”

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