

Movies

HAPPY GUY

Robin Williams, one of *Happy Feet Two*'s voices, talks about getting married for the third time, his animation work and how his heart surgery changed his life



LOS ANGELES — At 60, Robin Williams is a newlywed for the third time. So when he describes Ramon, the lovesick penguin he performs in *Happy Feet Two*, as a “hopeless romantic” he knows of what he speaks.

Last month, Williams married graphic designer Susan Schneider following his 2008 split from Marsha Garces, with whom he has two children, Zelda, 22, and Cody, 19. He and his

first wife, Valerie Valardi, have one son Zachary, 28.

Williams and Schneider met shortly before another milestone: Heart surgery in 2009 to replace his aortic valve. As he puts it, “I have a cow valve, which means I can s--- standing up.”

Professionally, his life has been no less transformative, as he made his Broadway debut performing in *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*.

On Friday, he —or his

voice, anyway — returns to the big screen in the sequel to 2006's *Happy Feet*.

QMI Agency sat down with the Oscar-winning actor recently at a Beverly Hills hotel:

In the past few years you've performed the Weapons of Self-Destruction comedy tour as well as acted on Broadway, but for a lot of average moviegoers, they may be wondering where you've been.

“It's been two years, I think, since World's Greatest Dad. Yeah, it's been a wild journey. The stand-up, then the Broadway show for five months, then getting married and going to Paris.

‘Where've you been?’ A few places. Life is good.”

Did you just feel the need for a change professionally? You were making movies consistently.

“Nothing was coming in for a while, then the play came up and I said, ‘Yeah, it's worth trying.’ The only reason I did it was because my manager's wife had seen it and said it's really powerful. I read it and went, ‘Let's take

the shot.’ And it was worth doing. It was very powerful and weirdly spiritual.”

Does that kind of experience re-charge you creatively?

“It just recharges your desire for good writing and good acting with other people. With an ensemble that good, you just go, ‘Yeah, this is a great experience.’ The thing about Broadway and being in that community

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Happy Feet Two

and seeing other plays, it was very moving."

Theatre is one of the last remaining ancient human rituals.

"It is an ancient ritual. But it still kicks. It's like live comedy. It's a whole other game."

You call your character Ramon in *Happy Feet Two* a hopeless romantic. You're just back from your third honeymoon, so that's got to describe you as well.

"Bobcat Goldthwait had the best line about that. He said getting married for the third time is like bringing a burn victim to a fireworks show. It's like, 'What are you doing?' But you go, 'Hey, it's worth it; I'm willing to try because she's an amazing woman.' I'm at a different phase of my life just in terms of being present. Am I Larry King? No. I want this to be it. There should be a three strikes law. If you want to do it again, you should give up a body part."

It's been more than two years since your heart surgery. Do you have some perspective now on that experience?

"It gives you a deeper appreciation of everything. And certainly for men. They literally crack the box to go in there. It opens you up emotionally. You're vulnerable physically, but also emotionally ... Now it's Me 2.0. You go, 'You got your second shot — what are you going to do with it?' Those kind of things come along and humble you, but in a good way. I want to pursue work as this idea of interesting things with interesting people."

Because you have nothing to prove at this point.

"Only to yourself. The toughest critic of all is usually yourself. There's always that voice going, 'What are you doing?' So you have to push your envelope. Most artists have two inner voices. One that tells them they're the greatest thing ever and the other that tells them they suck. I don't have that voice that says you're the greatest thing ever. I have a voice that says 'You're OK.' And I have a voice that says, 'You suck.' And then I have the honest voice saying, 'That was good, but you can do better.'"



Clockwise from top: Robin Williams pulls double duty voicing penguins Lovelace and Ramon in *Happy Feet Two*; Williams with wife Susan Schneider.

“With *Aladdin*, I snuck into a theatre and just listened to all these people laughing — kids and adults, sometimes laughing at different references and a lot of them laughing together. I went, ‘That’s the best thing of all. It’s a gift. If you can do that, it’s a good day.’”

Robin Williams, who voiced the Genie (right) in Disney's *Aladdin*.



You have a long history with animation. It's been 18 years since *Aladdin*, which was a landmark. Before that, A-list actors never voiced animated films. Now they all seem to.

"The first day (on *Aladdin*), I asked them, 'Can I try something?' They said, 'Sure.' And 20 hours later, they had 40 different characters. For me the joy

was seeing what they drew after the voices I gave them ... They pushed the limits ... Then it became this tradition of comedians and A-list actors doing animation ... I watched (*Happy Feet Two*) in 3D and I felt like a kid. The French have always treated animation as basically for adults. With *Aladdin*, I snuck into a theatre and just listened to all these people

laughing — kids and adults, sometimes laughing at different references and a lot of them laughing together. I went, 'That's the best thing of all. It's a gift. If you can do that, it's a good day.'"

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A huddle of voice actors

LOS ANGELES — For once, they were in step together.

Rather than record their roles separately as is the case on most animated productions, the cast of *Happy Feet Two* — including Elijah Wood, Robin Williams, Hank Azaria, Common and Sofia Vergara — gathered in Australia to perform their respective penguin parts.

"It was one of the most gratifying creative experiences I've had in any medium," says Azaria, the alter-ego of such cartoon characters as Moe and Apu on *The Simpsons*.

"In my cranky old age, I actually prefer recording alone now for the most part, on *The Simpsons* for example. I find if I focus on what I'm doing, I can do a lot of variations ...

But the community of us being together — not only was it fun and a very warm experience, it became a rehearsal as we were doing it. And I was just trying to find my character. I've done theatre experiences that were less united and less of a gratifying experience.

"Also we did so many takes, there were people there just keeping track of what was going on in each take just so they could find it again later. Especially with Robin — you need to keep track of what's going on."

Some things more than others.

As Williams says, when Vergara voiced Carmen, the love interest of his character, Ramon, "It was actually 3D in the room."

— Kevin Williamson



Elijah Wood as Mumble



Hank Azaria as Sven



Sofia Vergara as Carmen