

MARY JANE

By Amy Herzog
Directed by Georgette Verdin



NORTHLIGHT
THEATRE

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Guide Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to establish a set of expectations for the play you are about to witness! We hope it helps give you time to anticipate and prepare for any needs that might arise throughout the duration of the show. We also hope it helps to give clear descriptions and context for the show that might otherwise be difficult to discern on your own. It is possible that this guide might miss the mark on certain aspects; as we know there will be needs we cannot anticipate and context we did not think to offer. You can engage with this guide as a map used to navigate the show, we hope it makes this experience more accessible.

Table of Contents

Performance Schedule	Pg. 3
Full Show Synopsis	Pg. 4 - 6
Sensory Guide	Pg. 7 - 9
Stimulation Expectations	Pg. 7 - 9
Content Notes	Pg. 9
Reference Photos	Pg. 10 - 11
Actor IDs	Pg. 12 - 13

NORTHLIGHT THEATRE

Performance Schedule

Tuesday – Thursday Evenings (all times are estimates)

6:30pm The lobby opens for concessions & socializing.

7:00pm The auditorium opens for you to take your seat.

7:30pm The show will begin.

9:30pm The show will end.

Friday – Saturday Evenings (all times are estimates)

7:00pm The lobby opens for concessions & socializing.

7:30pm The auditorium opens for you to take your seat.

8:00pm The show will begin.

10:00pm The show will end.

Saturday – Sunday Matinees (all times are estimates)

1:30pm The lobby opens for concessions & socializing.

2:00pm The auditorium opens for you to take your seat.

2:30pm The show will begin.

4:30pm The show will end.

Weekday Matinees (all times are estimates)

12:00pm The lobby opens for concessions & socializing.

12:30pm The auditorium opens for you to take your seat.

1:00pm The show will begin.

3:00pm The show will end.

NORTHLIGHT THEATRE

Full Show Synopsis (spoilers included)

MARY JANE is a play about a single mother; as the story's namesake and lead, she navigates the inequities of the healthcare system. She is the sole caretaker of a 3 year old named Alex who lives with complex layers of Disability. Alex suffers from a chronic seizure disorder that starts to flare with new complications throughout the length of the play.

He has a Seizure Disorder, Paralyzed Vocal Chords, Cerebral Palsy, Lung Disease, and he experienced a Brain Bleed at birth. Alex is very ill and needs 24 hour care to support his ability to eat, receive medicine, and maintain the baseline status of his health.

Mary Jane spends the majority of her time caring for Alex. However, she is not a stay-at-home mom, she is a single parent with a full-time job — a job that she desperately needs for the benefits. Mary Jane struggles to maintain her good standing at work, which threatens the level of access that Alex will have to adequate care.

Both Mary Jane and Alex currently struggle with the lack of adequate support for government and private insurance funded programs for chronically ill children. The main points of tension that arise in the play around this matter are with in-home Nursing, state-rendered supports, and in-patient Music Therapy.

To start, Mary Jane is seen relating to the women in her life; the super in her building, in-home nurses assigned to Alex's care, and a community member who is also mothering a Disabled infant. These women are her community – together they share in mundane, joyous, and heartfelt moments that weave together a thread of community care that strengthen Mary Jane's resolve as she navigates the workload of caring for her sick child.

These interactions and the conversations that unfold within them reveal the practical and emotional waters that Mary Jane must swim in order to advocate for the care that Alex deserves. We witness the moments of joy, connection, and mutual care that curb the day-to-day challenges of parenting a chronically ill child.

Mary Jane finds an especially kindred communal connection with Sherry – a nurse who is assigned to Alex's care. Through her insurance, Mary Jane is able to afford in-home care for Alex. She has the support of a team of nurses that rotate care throughout the

week. Sherry is there most often to support the at-home effort. We learn that she is exceptional at her job, and shows up in a way that allows Mary Jane to rest and become more hands-off with Alex's care.

In the opening scenes of the play we see the friendship that Mary Jane and Sherry have. It is playful and supportive. Their connection holds a quality of grounding that seems to allow Mary Jane to release aspects of the perpetual anxiety that she carries. Sherry is just as much of an active advocate for Alex's care – we know that Mary Jane is not completely alone.

However, the rotational in-home care is not enough. Caring for someone who is sick is a 24/7 job. We learn that one or more of the rotational nurses, who exist outside of the play's action, are unable to show up for Alex in a way that Mary Jane can count on — which causes her to have to take on more of the workload, dwindling her capacity to work, rest, and continue building a community.

We witness the struggles Mary Jane endures while trying to keep her job. She struggles to balance the work with the high level of care that Alex needs. Her boss is losing patience, which poses the threat of Mary Jane losing her insurance.

It is impossible to overlook Mary Jane's loneliness. She is isolated from people who exist outside of the scope of healthcare. Mary Jane is tired and we bear witness to the anxiety, exhaustion, and overstimulation she is experiencing. We witness her yearning for a more intentional and interconnected community of support.

As a parent, Mary Jane is unwavering in her advocacy for her son's care. She is well-versed in how to communicate with medical professionals and we see her generously offer the wealth of knowledge that she has gained in her years of advocacy work when connecting with other parents of disabled children. In the advice she offers Brianne, she helps to close the gaps in knowledge about the never-ending list of mobility aids and resources that will help her care for her chronically ill child. Mary Jane gives us a powerful inside look at how important it is to remain persistent, advocate for your needs, and intentionally mirror the language used by the State Health Department that unlocks the door to social support services.

When Alex experiences a health crisis at the end of Act One, the story takes a turn from showcasing the practical challenges of caring for a child with disabilities into witnessing more of the emotional impacts.

Alex has a seizure that sends him to the hospital. He is there for 7 weeks. Over the course of her time in the hospital, Mary Jane encounters other women who are caretakers in various capacities. She meets doctors, nurses, therapists, chaplains and mothers who are all suspended in the world of health care.

The encounters are all charged with a tinge of grief that is causing Mary Jane to start to unravel. She begins to lean into conversations, this time with strangers, from a place of co-processing — in an attempt to release the overwhelm and fatigue she is experiencing. Through this leaning in, we learn that Mary Jane is seeking solace, support, and something so amorphous and divine, even she cannot fully describe it.

While in the hospital, Mary Jane encounters a woman named Chaya, who is existing in the parallel experience of parenting a chronically ill child. We learn that Chaya, unlike Mary Jane, is married and more thoroughly resourced with communal support. They share a moment of resonance about how others may perceive themselves as being supportive, when they are actually creating dynamics that limit and downplay the realities of navigating chronic illness. Mary Jane opens up to Chaya about her spiritual curiosity, she wonders if having a religious foundation makes the hardships of parenting a child with disabilities lighter to bear. She questions if lacking spiritual connection is somehow linked to the hardships of her experience.

In the final scene of the play, Mary Jane meets a Buddhist hospital chaplain named Tenkeh. Their time together is brief but impactful. We get to witness the continuation of Mary Jane's spiritual curiosity. This time, it centers more on her own experience; we learn that Mary Jane also deals with chronic illness in the form of painful migraine episodes. Her migraines often build to a point of impaired vision – as her pain surmounts, she sees colorful auras that blot out her vision and consume the entire room. As Mary Jane weathers the pain of her oncoming migraine flare, Tenkeh offers Mary Jane the space to talk about Alex in a way that allows us to know more of his personality and the playful connection of their relationship as mother and son. We can sense that this moment of witnessing, of sharing in the mundane and divine curiosities that draw their interests in the moment, is the kind of communal and spiritual support that Mary Jane has been longing for.

The women she encounters in the hospital help to bring her closer to the kind of communal witnessing and support she has been needing. The women bear witness to the fraying of her emotional exhaustion and overwhelm. The play concludes in a place where Mary Jane is still seeking clarity and community — she is still tired, and she is in a considerable amount of pain — but somehow, she has also found clarity within the walls of the hospital and community within the women who co-exist there.

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Sensory Guide :: Stimulation Expectations

Lighting

Are there any jarring, abrupt, harsh, or quick lighting cues?

In general, the lighting in this show is very calm. There is natural lighting to mimic various indoor settings.

In the third scene, there is a moment where a toy ladybug that Alex loves is fixed and the lights from the toy spill out past the stage, and reach just slightly into the first few rows of the audience.

About halfway through the play, Alex experiences a health crisis; there is a shift in lighting to accent the urgency of the moment.

Once at the hospital a curtain is used to signify where Alex's bed is, this area is often back lit. The light facing the audience is buffered by the curtain.

At the end of the play, Mary Jane is experiencing a migraine that creates auras in her vision. The light shifts to a wash of cool tones that merge between purple and blue — and then finishes in a semi-quick flash to a bright white light

What about the brightness level of the lights?

The brightness level when in the home or hospital during the day is pretty standard — but could be considered bright to some.

If you have light sensitivity, we are providing sunglasses to help mitigate the overstimulation anyone might experience! Please ask an usher or Northlight support staff upon entry and settling in

Any cues where the lighting goes into a full or partial color wash of the stage?

Yes, in various moments, color lighting is used to communicate shifts in intensity, tone, or emotion. Sometimes lighting is used as a creative transition or to define a demarcation of the rooms on set.

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Sound

Are there any loud or jarring sounds during the play?

When Alex goes into a health crisis, you will hear lots of beeping and intense music coming from off stage. The beeping is there to indicate that the monitors, which help to take care of Alex, are signalling that he is in distress.

Are there any off stage sound cues? What are they?

Most often, the sounds cue coming from off stage will be music, medical, beeping, and signing (which starts on-stage, until the actor who is singing walks off continuing their song)

Is there pre/post-show music? What about at intermission?

Yes!

What about the mic levels for actors? What is the accommodation for this show?

The mic levels for the actors stay at a pretty moderate range. There are some moments when laughing, crying, or speaking in anger – when those levels may spike, there is the potential that the sounds of these moments could be dysregulating due to their departure from the even tones of the show.

Remember to take breaks as necessary if/when-ever the space is not ideal for your needs!

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Blocking

Is there any running, dancing, or non-static blocking in the show?
Any entrances or exits from anywhere that is not stage?

Often characters will not be coming from backstage, there is a mixture of unique entrances and exits

MANY entrances and exits happen from the actor entrances that run parallel to and underneath the aisle seating of the theatre – sometimes it might look like someone is walking on to the stage from underneath you! They are!

Content Notes

Are there any violent, intense, or highly emotional scenes?

Yes! At the end of Act 1 – Alex enters a health crisis. The emotions of the scene are intense with urgency because every second counts! To highlight that urgency there are sound and lighting cues that could be jarring. You will hear beeping from the machines that are monitoring Alex's health and helping to keep him alive.

At the middle of the second to last scene Mary Jane becomes very angry with the Music Therapist – her stress surmounts in her voice and she begins to shout. This lasts for a few seconds.

There is singing shortly after this exchange that ends in another urgent moment, the singing is taken off stage and there is slight beeping to indicate the decline in Alex's health

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Reference Photos



North Shore Center for the Performing Arts (*Exterior*)

ID: The front of North Shore Center on a sunny day.

The building has white columns and its sides are primarily made of windows.



North Shore Center for the Performing Arts (*Entrance*)

ID: The doors to North Shore's building. The doors are paneled glass and there is a hand railing leading up.

A man is entering the doors.



North Shore Center for the Performing Arts (*Parking Lot*)

ID: The parking lot at the theatre. It is a sunny day with many clouds.

There is a sign that says "Theatre Parking Only" and several cars are parked.



Northlight's Auditorium

ID: The doors leading directly into the theatre. There are three doors which are all light brown wood. One door is open.

A man is waving "Hi".



Set Description for MARY JANE

SETTING: New York City, present tense – The play takes place from June - October

Part One: Mary Jane's apartment. The living room/kitchen of a small one-bedroom apartment in Queens, NYC. In the living room is a pull-out couch that serves as Mary Jane's bed. At stage right, there is a white door (the front door) with a shoe cubby hanging on it. Next to the door is a fridge, it is covered in magnets, photos and papers. Next to the fridge is the kitchen, it is very compact – complete with a gas range oven and sink. Directly downstage is a small wooden circle table and two matching wooden chairs.

On the adjoining wall to the kitchen is another door, it is the door to Alex's room. The wall next to it has a single window, in front of which lives Alex's stroller. Directly downstage from the window is Mary Jane's bed, the pull out sofa, which remains extended throughout the play's action.

Part Two: The "parents' room" on the pediatric floor of a Manhattan hospital. The set is drastically simplified. Where there were once walls that met at varying corners, there is now a long white curtain that covers the entire length of the stage. The curtain is somewhat sheer in some areas, it is most sheer where we can see Alex's hospital crib in the background. This area is lit with the intention to demarcate the space between Alex's bed and the foreground where the rest of the play's action occurs. In the foreground, there is the small wooden table and chairs, positioned directly down stage from Alex's bed. At the far right of the stage, there is a single gray loveseat.

ACTOR IDS



Lucy Carapetyan
Mary Jane

ID: A white woman in her 40s looks intensely forward, mouth closed, with the slight tension of a smile barely visible. Her long wavy brown hair is accented with gray throughout, and is swept in front of her shoulders, covering the green straps of her shirt.



Dara Cameron
Brianne/Chaya

ID: A white female with medium brown shoulder length wavy hair with brown eyes and a closed mouth smile. She is wearing a dark purple v-neck shirt and has a few wrinkles around the eyes and smile!



Kaylah Marie Crosby
Amelia/Kat

ID: A black young woman in her 20s with curly hair in an updo, bangs framing her face and a voluminous puff on top with silver stud earrings peaking through. She is looking directly at the camera with a light smile, shoulders are on a slant showing a corner of a gray sweater and a delicate silver necklace.



Elana Elyce
Sherry/Dr. Toros

ID: A Black woman with hair pulled back, body turned slightly with eyes looking directly into the camera; she's half smiling, mouth closed. She wears a wide neck orange shirt with a gold necklace; one gold earring is visible (though she is wearing two).



Mary Beth Fisher
Ruthie/Tenkei

ID: A white woman in her sixties. The photo shows short dark blonde hair which has turned silver/white. She has blue eyes and looks straight ahead with a slight smile.