



Review: Visceral ‘Curious Incident’ dazzles differently

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Wellington the poodle is dead, struck down with a pitchfork.

The traumatized 15-year-old boy who finds him, and gets accused of the crime, immediately sets out to solve the neighborhood murder in the spirit of his favorite fictional character, Sherlock Holmes.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, based on Mark Haddon’s novel and adapted to the stage by Simon Stephens, grabs the audience’s attention in the first few minutes and never lets go. Humorous and achingly sad, Rochester is the first stop on the national tour of this long-awaited Tony Award-winning production during its short run at the Auditorium Theatre through Sunday, Oct. 2.

Christopher John Francis Boone lives in Swindon, England, and is a hero detective like none other. He has a brilliant mind for logic, knows all the countries of the world and every prime number up to 7,056, but detests the colors yellow and brown, hates being touched, and screams, moans and covers his ears when faced with sensory overload.

Performed flawlessly by Adam Langdon, Christopher tells us all we need to know about his condition without reference to medical terminology. He is a boy with an extraordinary brain and strong ability in A level math, but is ill-equipped to interpret everyday life.

As he progresses into his investigation of “Who killed Wellington and why,” he makes some remarkably brave, coming-of-age decisions about his family and his life. And the magnitude of this challenge is both dramatic and poignant when he faces his fears and moves beyond his immediate neighborhood.

As expected, the Curious Incident’s geometric-style stage adds the wow factor to the wondrously strange workings of Christopher’s mind. The huge black box with a “Tron-like” grid flares into life with multisensory projections of math equations, maps, constellations, trains — and the imagery is pumped up into something exhilarating by the strident electronic score.

Amid the visceral surroundings, Langdon paints a realistic portrait of Christopher. Langdon is outstanding in every respect — from his controlled and consistent manner to his physicality and mental rigidity. He is who he is: never a figure of pity, but a well-rounded character who is at times humorous, clever, persistent, naughty, irritable and somewhat irritating.

The adults in Christopher’s world, his selfless dad (a masterful Gene Gillette), his mom (a heartwarming Felicity Jones Latta), and his favorite teacher Siobhan (beautifully played by Maria Elena Ramirez, who also is the narrator of the show), garner our sympathy. They are almost heartbreaking to watch as they deal with the incredible stresses of helping Christopher achieve independence to become the best he can be. Under the direction of Marianne Elliott, the ensemble (more than a half dozen actors posing as Londoners, teachers, neighbors) adds great credibility to the cast with their various shifting roles, accents and effective stagehand mastery. Relentlessly active, they flow on and off stage, whether marching in lockstep while carrying Christopher overhead or lounging around contributing bits of dialogue.

Whimsical touches in the production include a live pet rat and a magical train set that expands to include all of London.

Brilliant in scope, this curiously different story allows us to get inside the beautiful mind of a boy who teaches us that impossible obstacles can turn into limitless possibilities. Hands down, this is a show that is as extraordinary as its hero.