

JOSHUA JENKINS AS
CHRISTOPHER.

NIGHT OF THE DOG

HOW DOES A DEAD DOG WIN THEATRE AWARDS? AUDIENCES ARE FINDING OUT WITH THE TOURING PRODUCTION OF *THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME*.

THE CURIOUS *Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time* by Simon Stephens, based on the novel by Mark Haddon, centers on the mysterious death of a neighbourhood dog and has, curiously, caught the attention of theatregoers and critics alike.

Presented as a play within a play, teenage mathematical genius, Christopher Boone sets about solving the murder of a local dog named Wellington. The deceased canine, which has been speared with a garden fork, puts Christopher under suspicion, however, his clever detective work leads him not only to the culprit but on a journey full of frightening discoveries.

The story sounds simple but is anything but. Touching on autism, Asperger Syndrome, social disability, mathematics and isolation, the play has become a topic for study guides and critical essays.

It has also won five Tony Awards, six Drama Desk Awards and a record seven Oliver Awards (eventually broken by *Harry Potter And The Cursed Child*).

Playing Christopher in the UK and international tour, Joshua Jenkins explains how he prepared for the unique role: "Even though it's not mentioned in the book or the play that Christopher is on the autism spectrum, it's fair to say he possesses some of the traits and qualities of someone who is," says Jenkins.

"We explored that by visiting some schools in London where we spoke to students, parents and teachers who were incredibly generous with their time. They told us stories and briefly let us into their world. I read a few books and watched documentaries, which were helpful when it came to playing Christopher. Once rehearsals began, it was important for me to keep this information in the back of my mind where I knew I'd draw on it in a subconscious way," says Jenkins. "I wanted to stay

“
What might be a page of dialogue can turn into a ten-minute physical theatre sequence where Christopher is literally walking along the walls.”



THE LONDON PRODUCTION OF *THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME*, CURRENTLY PLAYING IN MELBOURNE.

true to what Simon Stephens wrote."

Playing Christopher is somewhat complex, given the role's sensitive nature. "The obvious challenge is the physicality," says Jenkins. "What might be a page of dialogue can turn into a ten-minute physical theatre sequence where Christopher is literally walking along the walls. Gaining a certain amount of fitness and core strength was incredibly important.

"It was also challenging to stick to the routines and patterns that Christopher has – things I'm not used to, such as no human-contact or trying to remember how Christopher reacts when a character is shouting. I made a list of his do-s and don't-s to help me remember things that seem perfectly normal to me but would be an enormous struggle for him."

The Times called the play "a phenomenal combination of storytelling and spectacle, and a theatrical rush" combining, as it does, elaborate music, lighting and projected imagery.

"It's a beautiful story about universal themes that we all go through daily, like family, loss, love, coming-of-age and difference," says Jenkins, explaining the play's broad appeal. "Things that we can all relate to no matter what our age or where in the world we're from, which is why the book was a worldwide best-seller. Add to that the spectacular production and you've got a unique recipe. It's already a gorgeous play, but it has the production values of an enormous West End show, and that itself is a rare treat!"

MORE: *The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time* is at the Art Centre, Melbourne Playhouse from 7 January to 18 February.

Go to: mtc.com.au