*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time - Introduction*

Welcome to this introduction to the audio-described performance of the National Theatre’s production of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. The play is by Simon Stephens and is based on the novel by Mark Haddon. It's directed by Marianne Elliott.

The audio-described performance at the **Grand Opera House, Belfast** will take place on Thursday 21st April. These programme notes were prepared by nisightlines.

**Please note that loud sound effects, high intensity lighting and video effects, including strobe lighting, feature frequently in this production.**

The performance itself lasts about 2 hours and 40 minutes, including a 20 minute interval.

There now follows information about *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* which includes descriptions of the set, characters and costumes*.* This will be followed by additional useful information and contact details.

The play takes us into the world of Christopher Boone, a teenage boy who has an extraordinary brain: he's exceptional at maths while ill-equipped to interpret everyday life.

In developing the character of Christopher, the author of the novel, Mark Haddon, drew upon a long list of habits, beliefs, quirks and behaviours from friends, acquaintances and family members. ‘It would be unfair of

me,’ he says, ‘to name the person who can’t eat a plate of food if the salmon and the broccoli are touching, or who can’t use a toilet if a stranger has used it. Suffice it to say that neither of them would be labelled as having a disability. For Christopher, it’s the number and combination of his eccentricities which cause him difficulties.’

The stage is like a large box, open at the front. The inside of the box looks like graph paper - but black with a white grid. At each intersection on the grid is a small white dot. On the stage floor, Zero marks the centre line which runs from the front of the stage to the back. Either side, the squares are numbered - plus to the left of zero and minus to the right. The grid on the walls is lettered from F at the front to letter Q at the back. About a third of the way back in each side wall is a hidden door. There is another hidden door in the centre of the back wall.

Running down the sides of the stage floor, and across the back, is a low wall made of white Perspex. It's just over a foot high and the same width. This border also runs up either side of the rear wall, continuing above the stage to indicate the top of the box. The Perspex can be lit from within with different colours, often white, so that it glows. As the story progresses, actors often stand or sit on this low perimeter wall.

Props that feature in the play are laid out on the wall. Each one is carefully labelled - as it would be if it was backstage in a theatre. In contrast to the monochrome set, the props are brightly coloured - a vivid pink mug, a bright green comb, a yellow football, orange underpants, a Day-Glo orange wrench. During the action, other props are taken from a number of trap doors. Some of these are concealed within the walls, others in the floor. There's a cast of 13 who, between them, play ten main characters and over 30 minor ones.

**Christopher Boone** is 15 years old, with a phenomenal memory and a highly developed ability in maths. Christopher is tall and slim with a pale face and a mop of dark hair. He stands very straight, with his chin tucked in. In Act 1 he wears a pale blue hoodie zipped over a white t-shirt on which the NASA logo can be glimpsed, grey jogging bottoms, bright red socks and grey trainers with scarlet soles and laces. In Act 2 he wears a bright orange anorak and has a backpack over his shoulders. Later, he wears a lime green hoodie over a red t-shirt with the word *Maths* in lime green beneath a lime green globe. Christopher is a little awkward and when he gets anxious, he fiddles with the drawstring of the hoodie, his hands high on his chest. He finds it difficult to look people in the face, swivelling his eyes away from their gaze, or blinking repeatedly. Christopher hates being touched and will fling himself to the ground if someone tries to, curling himself into a foetal ball and groaning. Whenever the chaos of the world threatens to overwhelm him, Christopher escapes to the secure and immutable world of prime numbers. Sometimes, when trying to clarify a mathematical problem, Christopher draws on the floor in chalk. His drawing is simultaneously projected onto the back wall.

During the action of the play, furniture and other larger items are suggested by white wooden boxes - each of which has a prime number painted on it in black. The boxes are about 2 feet high, and 1 foot square. One box is made of white Perspex and, like the low wall and border, it can glow from within.

Different locations are created using a combination of these boxes and inventive use of lighting and projection. Houses are represented by white outlines - as through drawn in chalk on the walls. Each has a large number to identify its place in the street. On stage in front of them, the white boxes are arranged to create furniture: four stacked up become a kitchen cabinet, with the Perspex box, glowing orange, suggesting a microwave. In Christopher's neighbour's house, to the right, the Perspex box becomes a green glowing TV - a chalk-drawn TV arial jutting up above the roof line. In another house, in the rear left corner, the box glows blue to suggest a fish tank. Three wooden boxes in a diagonal line form a park bench; 2 boxes, one on top of the other, become the desk in a police station; or 9 shoved together represent suitcases.

The only real piece of furniture on stage is an orange stackable chair, which stands to the left of the space, with a large bright green book laid on it. The chair belongs to **Siobhan** - Christopher's teacher and mentor at the special school he attends. Siobhan’s in her thirties with an elfin face and red hair tied back in a pony-tail. Her clothes are simple and practical, a white shirt worn over tapered pale blue jeans which stop short of her ankles, and white lace-up shoes, and she moves neatly and precisely. Siobhan acts as a narrator through the story, sitting on the orange chair and reading from the large green book. At times she speaks as though she were not really present, her voice resounding in Christopher’s head, encouraging him and reminding him of coping strategies she has taught him.

Christopher’s father, **Ed,** is in his forties but looks older, with greying dark hair and scruffy stubble. He has a rumpled look about him. Ed moves slowly and deliberately, with an air of permanent exhaustion, his short, stocky frame drained of energy. He’s a heating engineer and wears work clothes - a dark green fleece with his firm’s discreet logo on the breast, a matching green T shirt, old blue jeans and grey sports hiking boots.

We first meet Christopher’s mother, **Judy**, on holiday. She’s a slender woman with a smiley face, her brown hair worn in a pony-tail, giving her a girlish look. Judy relaxes in blue denim cut-off shorts and a navy swimsuit banded with white stripes. Later she wears a summer dress- a dark blue floral print with a V neck, and short sleeves. We also see her in a navy and white striped top, blue jeans and flat, navy pumps. And on another occasion wearing a straight knee-length navy skirt with a navy and white spotted top.

Across the road from Christopher at number 39, lives **Mrs Shears,** a worried looking woman in her forties. We first encounter her, dressed for bed, in pale pink pyjamas and a bright pink dressing gown. Later, she wears a bright pink top and black and white leggings. Mrs Shears looks permanently tense.

She’s estranged from her husband **Roger Shears,** who’sslim and rather nondescript, but smartly turned out in a grey suit and tie. His dark hair is neatly cut, and his complexion pallid. Despite his thin, pale lips Roger tries for an affable smile, but it’s at odds with his tense, impatient manner.

A friendlier neighbour is **Mrs Alexander**. She’s an older lady, a little deaf and a little twittery. Her grey hair is arranged into soft waves, and she tilts her head on one side to hear, smiling a bright, perky smile. Mrs Alexander has gold-framed glasses and she’s dressed in a silky grey blouse with a pussycat bow and a plain, grey skirt. Her sleeveless cardigan is a pale mauve, and she has a matching mac and pair of garden shears. On her feet are spotless white trainers with scarlet laces and when outside she wears a red and white football scarf.

**A neighbour at number 37** is interrupted in her kitchen. She’s a young black woman with a broad, friendly smile and thick black curls. She’s dressed in a grey baggy tee shirt, black and white print leggings and trainers with lime green laces. On her hands are a pair of bright green oven gloves.

The local vicar, **Reverend Peters**, is a vague but kindly figure, of medium build, in his 60s with crinkly grey hair. His clothes are country gentleman style: brown cords and a tweedy jacket, over a mustard-yellow cardigan, beneath which is his black shirt and clerical collar. A young **policeman** arrives, wearing a high visibility jacket over his uniform. He’s thin faced, with dark hair and five o’clock shadow on his chin.

The whole company is onstage for much of the time, sitting on the low perimeter wall, sometimes stepping forward to become a character in Christopher’s story.

For example, the actress who plays Mrs Shears puts on a tailored jacket, glasses and a red silk scarf to playChristopher’s headmistress. A man pulls on a hat festooned with fishing flies, to feed his fish in the glowing blue fish-tank. Christopher's TV-watching neighbour – who introduces himself as Mr Thompson's brother - wears a bright orange T shirt with the words *"Beer - helping ugly people have sex for 2000 years".*

The ensemble also create a busy street, marching like silent automata, anonymous grey commuters, sitting silently on a train, or joining in the endless stop-go rhythms of the Tube. As they move around the space, the dots at each intersection of the graph paper light up in various colours - creating pathways, lines and patterns across the stage. Words or sentences are projected onto the walls, gliding up and down, spinning, shrinking and growing, merging into each other. Sometimes the actors become inanimate objects, a door for Christopher to open, or a mat on which he wipes his feet. Stooped over they are a chair - or the bed where Christopher lolls to play his computer games. At other times the ensemble works together, manipulating other characters, lifting them and sweeping them through the air. When Christopher talks of outer space, the dark stage glitters with tiny pricks of white light - the earth and other planets float past, diminishing in size as, lifted high above the heads of the ensemble, Christopher seems to float in weightless slow-motion deeper and deeper into space.

Scenes flow seamlessly from one to another. When Christopher's dad Ed enters the space, we're at home. When Siobhan speaks, we're at school. Sometimes locations overlap - and we're in two places simultaneously. Sometimes, too, lights flash across the intersections of the grid, and bright lights sweep the auditorium.

**Cast and production credits**

Christopher is played by **Scott Reid** or **Sam Newton**

His teacher, Siobhan, by **Lucianne McEvoy**

His father, Ed by **David Michaels** and his mother Judy by **Emma Beattie**

The Ensemble play a variety of roles including:

Christopher’s neighbour, Mrs Shears, who is played by **Eliza Collings**

Her husband, Roger Shears, is **Oliver Boot**

The friendly neighbour, Mrs Alexander, is **Debra Michaels**

The neighbour at Number 37 is **Crystal Condie**

The Reverend Peters by **Bruce McGregor**

Other members of the Ensemble are **Joel Harper-Jackson**, **Emma-Jane Goodwin, James Parks, Jams Thomas** and **Danielle Young**

Toby is played by Baffin or Watson

Music is by Adrian Sutton and Sound Design by Ian Dickinson for Autograph

The Movement Directors are Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett for Frantic Assembly,

Lighting Design is by Paule Constable

The Designer is Bunny Christie, with Video Design by Finn Ross

The Associate Director is Elle White

The Consultant Associate Director is Katy Rudd and the Resident Director is Kim Pearce

The Director is Marianne Elliott.

**Additional Useful Information and Contact Details**

Guide dogs are welcome at the Grand Opera House. However, if you are bringing your dog, please could you let the theatre know in advance, if you have not already done so.

If you require any further information about your visit to the Grand Opera House you can call 028 9024 1919 and speak any member of the box office team.