

Strong lead performance grounds MCT's 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time'



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May 20, 2025

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**Quick Take**

In Mountain Community Theater's "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time," Wyatt Troxell delivers a masterful portrayal of a neurodivergent teen detective, though the production's minimal staging fails to match his nuanced performance.

Simon Stephens' "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time," adapted from Mark Haddon's groundbreaking novel, is a deeply moving story that asks theater to do what it does best: place audience members inside a perspective they might never have considered. Mountain Community Theater accepted that challenge and opened its production of "The Curious Incident" on Friday.

The play centers on Christopher Boone, a 15-year-old boy with exceptional intelligence and behavioral traits aligned with autism. He is obsessed with patterns, distrustful of strangers and calmed by the certainty of numbers. When he discovers his neighbor's dog, Wellington, has been killed with a garden fork, he decides — against the wishes of nearly everyone around him — that he will solve the mystery. "I'm going to find out who killed Wellington," he says early on, "because dogs are as important or more important than people."

That decision sets Christopher on a journey not just through his neighborhood but through secrets and truths that redefine his understanding of the world and his family. The play invites audiences to consider the challenges — and the beauty — of a mind that operates outside the norm. It challenges assumptions about ability, connection and communication, reminding us how often society misunderstands or marginalizes those who think differently. What begins as a mystery transforms into self-discovery, family conflict and resilience, offering an exploration of neurodiversity and the human condition.

Bringing "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" to the local stage is an admirable and ambitious endeavor. It demands emotional nuance, imaginative staging and a cast that can handle both intimate drama and physical storytelling. Mountain Community Theater deserves great credit for taking on such a layered, theatrical challenge. And while the result didn't fully reach the conceptual heights the script invites, it nonetheless offered moments of emotional honesty and was anchored by a powerful central performance.

Wyatt Troxell's portrayal of Christopher was, without question, the shining light of the production. His performance was committed, heartfelt and nuanced from the opening scene to the final moments. He skillfully portrayed Christopher's literal-mindedness, his sensory sensitivity and his unflinching honesty while still allowing the character's vulnerabilities to peek through. When he explains, "I find people confusing," or when he panics under pressure in a crowded public space, Troxell made those lines feel not only true, but lived-in. His portrayal never dipped into caricature; instead, it invited empathy and understanding. His energy carried the production and grounded every scene he was in.

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Unfortunately, much of the surrounding production did not rise to his performance level. Director Simon Hayward's lack of clear staging had the nine-member supporting cast milling about the stage, making it unclear their intention or the awkward scene changes.

"Curious Incident" is known for its immersive and sensory-rich staging. The blank canvas set is traditionally transformed with dynamic projections, lights and sound to reflect Christopher's inner world. Here, the walls were clearly designed with that intention in mind but remained largely unused. Aside from a few effective sequences in Act II — such as during Christopher's trip to London — the projections were either minimal or nonexistent. As a result, the audience was left outside of Christopher's experience, watching events unfold rather than being drawn into the intense, overloading sensations that define his reality.

Scenes that should crackle with sensory input — like the moment he uncovers a painful family secret — felt visually flat and dramatically muted. The lighting stayed largely static, the sound design understated and the staging bare. In a show that relies on movement, rhythm and even chaos to communicate the protagonist's world, the production instead leaned heavily on spoken text, leaving a conceptual gap between what we heard and what we should have felt.

There were, however, moments that broke through. One particularly moving scene involved Christopher's mother reading aloud from a series of letters she had written. "I was not a very good mother, Christopher," she says, the weight of regret heavy in her voice. Sonia Motlagh, in this role, delivered one of the most emotionally resonant performances of the evening — fragile and believable. It was a welcome moment of depth.

Siobhan, Christopher's teacher and emotional guide, is a pivotal role — serving both as narrator and a source of stability. Megan Stewart's delivery was spunky and empathetic, with lines such as "Sometimes we have to do things even though they're scary" offering comfort and insight.

The performance of Christopher's father, by contrast, was less successful. Though the character is written with layers of frustration, protectiveness, guilt and love, Mark Matthews' portrayal came across as stiff and disconnected. Physicality was rigid, emotional beats felt forced and this was most evident in the climactic confession scene — a moment that should devastate both Christopher and the audience — but here, it landed with only a fraction of its intended impact.

Still, despite the flaws, the production has heart. It's clear that the cast and production team approached this material with respect and earnest intention. Local theater is where risks are taken, where emerging talent finds its footing, and where communities connect over stories that matter. Theater is, at its best, a conversation — not just between actors and audience, but between community and story.

"The Curious Incident" is more than a story about a boy solving a mystery. It's a story about courage — about pushing past fear, embracing difference and choosing growth even when it hurts. MCT choosing to produce this play was an act of bravery in itself — and that should be recognized. The production delivers a performance full of truths that leave you seeing the world a little differently.