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Bangor

# **Orono theater presents play about a boy with autism, with performance for people with autism**





Linda Coan O'Kresik | BDN

Some Theatre Co., an Orono-based theater group, rehearses “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time” at the Keith Anderson Community House on Wednesday evening. The play is about “Christopher Boone,” a boy with autism played by Robert Wynne (center), who uses his unique gifts to solve the mystery of the death of his neighbor’s dog. A sensory-friendly performance for people with autism will be held at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 2, 1at the Community House.

By **Emily Burnham**, BDN Staff • February 17, 2019 8:06 am

## In the Tony Award-winning play “**The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time,**”

protagonist Christopher Boone, who is on the autism spectrum, uses his unique gifts to solve the mystery of the death of a neighbor’s dog. When the play was on Broadway, it used intense lighting and sound

POLL

design and carefully choreographed movement to convey Christopher's rich inner world and atypical way of thinking.

Ironically, however, many individuals on the autism spectrum would have had a difficult time sitting in the audience in a theater filled with those loud sounds and bright lights — sensory stimulation like that can trigger uncomfortable feelings and reactions for those on the spectrum.

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That's why Orono-based theater group Some Theatre Co. will offer a special sensory-friendly performance of "The Curious Incident" when it stages the play this week. That sensory-friendly performance is set for 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Keith Anderson Community House in Orono.



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Chad Moores (right), who plays "Ed Boone," rehearses "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" with Robert Wynne, who plays his son "Christopher Boone," a boy with autism.

A sensory-friendly show generally involves dim but not fully dark house lights, softer sounds with less abrupt auditory cues, and fewer bright and flashing stage lights. Audience members are also welcome to get up and move around if they become overstimulated.

Director Erryn Bard said Some Theatre has offered sensory-friendly shows before, but that this one was special because the story of “The Curious Incident” directly reflects the experiences of people on the spectrum.



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Erryn Bard, director and “Siobhan,” a character in Some Theatre Company’s performance of “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time,” rehearses at the Keith Anderson Community House in Orono on Wednesday evening.

“[This show] not only offers challenging roles for a diverse group of actors in our community, but also challenges its audience to understand the complexities of truly accepting difference,” Bard said. “I think it sheds light on

the strength and bravery that some people on the spectrum have to exude just to function in our society.”

Cathy Dionne, executive director of the Autism Society of Maine, said sensory-friendly programming allows people on the spectrum to enjoy the things that neurotypical people can enjoy, without having to worry about being uncomfortable or drawing unwelcome attention in a public setting.

“We encourage any organization that offers events and shows like this to offer just one show that is sensory friendly,” Dionne said. “It just makes it so everybody can enjoy a play or a movie or a game, regardless of what special needs they might have.”

Some Theatre isn't the only theater company in eastern Maine to stage “The Curious Incident” this year.

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Midcoast Actors' Studio, based in Waldo County, will produce the play April 26-28 and May 3-5 at the Crosby Center in Belfast. The group has received a grant from the Maine Humanities Council and the Maine Arts Commission to develop programming around the production, including a panel discussion after one of its performances during the first weekend of shows.

There are other theater companies in Maine that offer sensory-friendly performances: Lyric Music Theater in South Portland and Maine State Music Theatre in Brunswick both offer at least one, if not several, sensory-friendly shows each year.

Beyond theater, there are many other sensory-friendly events for all sorts of interests.

Cinemas statewide offer movie screenings for patrons with autism, including a sensory-friendly screening of the upcoming Disney movie “Dumbo,” set for 10 a.m. Saturday, April 6, at Flagship Cinemas in Auburn, and monthly sensory-friendly screenings at Smitty’s Cinemas locations in Topsham, Biddeford, Sanford and Windham.







Courtesy of the Autism Society of Maine

A sensory-friendly movie screening held last year by the Autism Society of Maine.

The Maine Mariners, the Portland-based professional ice hockey team, will host a sensory-friendly game on March 6 against the Norfolk Admirals of Virginia. A quiet room at the Cross Insurance Arena in Portland will be available for sensory breaks. And at the Maine Discovery Museum in Bangor, there are biweekly “My Day To Play” events for sensory-sensitive children and their families.

“It’s the sort of thing that people just don’t always think about,” Dionne said. “When the horns go off every time there’s a goal, it can be overwhelming. Even just having a room that people can go into to relax and feel better can make all the difference. It allows everyone, on the spectrum or not, to have fun together.”





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Some Theatre Co.’s production of “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time” is set for 7:30 p.m. Feb. 22 and 23 and 2 p.m. Feb. 23 and 24 at the Keith Anderson Community Center.

Thursday’s sensory-friendly performance is free, and is sponsored by the Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research, which is based at the University of Maine.

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