

Proctors Theatre, Schenectady, NY

**Jagged Little Pill**, Lyrics by Alanis Morissette, Music by Alanis Morissette & Glen Ballard, Book by Diablo Cody

Movement Direction & Choreography by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui; Directed by Diane Paulus

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

***“I am disturbed by my fascination with you.”***

Alanis Morissette’s Broadway musical has three simultaneous stories about a single family living in a physical Connecticut but existing in an emotional limbo. Adopted 16 year old daughter Frankie has identity issues including her sexual orientation; at 18 son Nick has issues with his inability to stop a rape he witnesses; mother Mary Jane has issues about her perfection which becomes startled into reality when she is forced to confront her imperfections. All three stories make major impacts when acted by a marvelous cast of talented and attractive people which is what happens on stage at Proctors in Schenectady, NY.



Jade McLeod and the North American tour company;  
Photo: Matthew Murphy for MurphyMade, 2022

This touring production stars Heidi Blickenstaff who took on the role of Mary Jane Healy when the show was re-opened after Broadway’s Covid shutdown (she replaced Elizabeth Stanley). She is partnered by Chris Hoch as her husband Steve. Nick is played by Dillon Klena and Frankie was played on opening night by the understudy Jordan Leigh McCaskill, replacing Lauren Chanel. The quartet were fabulous, each in his or her own way breathing honesty into

their roles.

The score is strong if unmemorable. Rock ballads, up-tunes and exuberant ensembles abound. Joining the songs from Morissette's eponymous album with stories gives the songs a valid theatricality. They carry the stories honestly and with a special relationship to the needs of character and plot. If there is a jarring element in all of this it is not the sexual content of the story which seems only natural in the family's situations, but the startling lighting designed by Justin Townsend. Repeatedly, and often, bright lights shine out from the rear wall of the set, striking us, the audience, in the eyes and obscuring what is happening on stage, principally the dancing by the company and the important movements of the characters..

The set design by Riccardo Hernandez establishes the fluidity of the three stories and the environment in which this all takes place. It is very well done and brings a cinematic sense to the stage direction by Diane Paulus. Perfect costumes by Emily Rebholz help define the characters for us along with the hair, wig and makeup design by J. Jared Janas. Sidi Larbi Cherkadui served as the movement director and also choreographed the show. His work in both spheres is equally fine.



Heidi Blickenstaff;  
Photo: Matthew Murphy  
for MurphyMade



Chris Hoch; Photo: Matthew Murphy  
for MurphyMade,

Chris Hoch as Steve delivers a moving performance as the overly work-obsessed husband who still manages to see that his wife is in trouble and makes attempts to correct the problems between them. Heidi Blickenstaff has the more difficult role playing his wife whose long-hidden past has entered her present in disastrous ways. The actress sings with perfection of tone and a most expressive interpretive skill while acting her character's difficulties with ever-increasing horror. It is a performance that will haunt this writer for a long while.



Dillon Klena delivers the proper amount of angst as Nick and Jordan Leigh McCaskill brought truthfulness to Frankie's anger, emotionally challenging everyone else on stage including Jade McLeod as Jo, her girlfriend and Rishi Golani as her boyfriend. Allison Sheppard was an emotionally arresting Bella.



Heidi Blickenstaff, Dillon Klena, Lauren Chanel, Chris Hoch andn the company;  
Photo: Matthew Murphy, Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade

This is a show unlike any other; the closest comparison I can come up with is “Next to Normal” which was entirely different but had the same sort of impact on an audience. It’s score is a strange composite of exponential rock, raw ballads and dance music with lyrics that are supposed to be meaningful even if hard to hear and grasp. It is more an experience than a show and in many ways that is a good thing. Diane Paulus has moved her players more than her audience, but her efforts are worthwhile here. The final experience is valuable in so many ways.

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**Jagged Little Pill** plays at Proctors Theatre, 432 State Street, Schenectady NY through May 7. For information and tickets call 518-346-6204.