



New York Theatre Wiresm

Theatre Dance Performance Art Music
Alternative and International Theatre

"MARY JANE"

by Glenda Frank

"Mary Jane" is an absorbing drama of how mothers cope when kids have incurable illness.

"Mary Jane."

Playwright Amy Herzog, Director Anne Kauffman.
New York Theatre Workshop, 79 East 4th St., New York City
212-460-5475; <https://www.nytw.org/show/mary-jane/>
Opened Sept 25, 2017, closes Oct 15, 2017.
Reviewed by Lucy Komisar Sept 23, 2017.

YOURS FAITHFULLY

"Mary Jane" by Amy Herzog. Directed by Anne Kauffman. Produced by New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4 St., NYC. Sept. 6 – Oct. 29, 2017. Sun., Tues., Wed. at 7 PM. Thurs. - Sat. at 8:00. Sat. and Sun. at 2:00. Tickets are \$49 - 79 at 212-460-5475 and info@nytw.org. Reviewed by Glenda Frank

Mary's Jane's toddler may not appear on the stage of New York Theatre Workshop, but he is never absent – in the sound of the respirator from the next room; in conversations with nurses, doctors, other mothers; even as the superintendent of Mary Jane's building she snakes a clogged drain. He is the tiny, intubated form in the hospital bed. "Mary Jane" by Amy Herzog (Pulitzer Prize finalist for 4000 Miles), commissioned by Yale Repertory Theatre, focuses on the mother of a dying child. But it is also about the caretakers – mothers, sisters and daughters – who place their dreams and careers on hold without complaint.



Liza Colón-Zayas and Carrie Coon. Photo by Joan Marcus.

Mary Jane (Carrie Coon, Emmy nomination for "Fargo") seems chipper. She is upbeat when she advises the mother of a handicapped infant (Susan Poufar) how to deal with funding agencies, questions to demand answers to, the best equipment to hold the child erect, to secure his head, to monitor his vitals. She is cheerful when she talks about Alex to his nurse (Liza Colón) and her niece (Danaya Esperanza). But the super (Brenda Wehle), whose sister battled cancer, recognizes danger signs, a body tension that she warns Mary Jane could lead to illness. She advises yoga, a good diet, and a recognition of the price she is paying for being a good mom.

Mary Jane has a curious hold on reality. She knows the medications, the best wheelchair, and benefit allowances. She understands if she keeps missing days of work to be at the hospital, she will lose her job and her health insurance. But when her son has a seizure, she does not recognize the significance of it. In the hospital she worries about daily x-rays, and is taken aback when the doctor reminds her that possible radiation damage won't manifest for 20 years. Even after 7 weeks of hospitalization, she has not come to terms.

She meets another mother, the sharp-tongued Chaya (Susan Poufar), who has many children, but she too suffers when her daughter is hospitalized. As a member of a supportive Jewish community, she wonders how Mary Jane can survive without "a village." Chaya's daughter has many visitors. Another child in the room cries continually and no one visits.

The Buddhist nun (Brenda Wehle) who visits Mary Jane left her job to nurse her dying mother before her mid-life conversion. Their conversation is a high point of the play, two women struggling through grief toward a new vision of themselves.

"Mary Jane" is more a dramatized essay than a play. Confrontations and rage are sidestepped, even when they seem important. The protagonist is forgiving of the husband who abandoned her, who probably isn't providing child support. The doctor calls her Mom, not Mary Jane. Does she know her name? The one time Mary Jane does get upset is with the music therapist, but by then the dramatic momentum has passed.

For those of us who nursed a sick child, gave up years and opportunities, the play is a valentine. A friend who struggled with her son through the early years was moved to tears. But a solid drama, like "Wit," could have affected everyone. We feel so much for that cold, demanding professor who, toward the end, learns the value of human comfort. The woman who faces death, eye to eye, but on her own terms.

Director Anne Kauffman (2007, 2015 Obie awards) has done an admirable job keeping the pace lively and the tone light. In their double roles Brenda Wehle and Susan Poufar are charismatic and distinct. I look forward to seeing them again on stage.

The New York
THEATRE WIRE