



# JESUS HOPPED THE A TRAIN

by **Stephen Adly Guirgis**

directed by **Mark Brokaw**

**SignatureTheatre** STUDY GUIDE



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Synopsis and Character Biographies .....	3
Inside the Mind of the Playwright .....	4
Interview with Director Mark Brokaw .....	5
Understanding the World of the Play: A Look Inside the U.S. Judicial System .....	6
Interview with Actor Stephanie DiMaggio .....	11
Activities .....	12
Glossary .....	13
About Signature Theatre .....	14



Sean Carvajal, Ricardo Chavira and Edi Gathegi, photo by Joan Marcus.



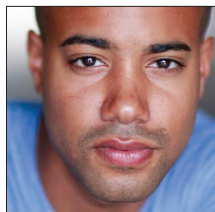
# INTRODUCTION

## SYNOPSIS

Angel Cruz is a 30-year-old bicycle messenger awaiting trial for shooting a religious cult leader. Inside Rikers Island, a terrified Angel is befriended by a charismatic serial killer named Lucius Jenkins. While Lucius encourages Angel to seek a higher power and focus on the light, Angel's public defender Mary Jane finds herself invigorated by the moral quandary of Angel's crime. Does committing a crime make you guilty, and if not, what does?



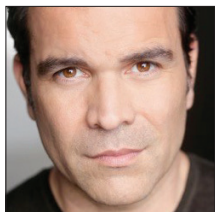
## CHARACTERS



### Angel Cruz

*(Sean Carvajal)*

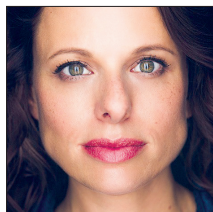
Angel has been arrested on charges of attempted murder for shooting the religious cult leader Reverend Kim. Angel explains to Mary Jane that he shot Reverend Kim for entrapping his good friend Joey in his church and stealing him away from his friends and family. After Reverend Kim dies on the operating table, Angel's charges escalate to murder in the first degree.



### Valdez

*(Ricardo Chavira)*

Valdez is a corrections officer in a protective custody unit. He oversees Angel and Lucius during their hour-long breaks in the outdoor exercise yard. He's cruel to the inmates, and is quick to punish them for any behaviors he deems out of line.



### Mary Jane Hanrahan

*(Stephanie DiMaggio)*

Mary Jane is the public defender assigned to Angel's case. In their initial conversation, Angel mistakenly confesses to her. Despite this, Mary Jane decides to continue representing Angel. Mary Jane has grown jaded with the judicial system, but she's drawn towards Angel's sense of conviction in his crime and belief that he's done the right (albeit criminal) thing.



### Charlie D'Amico

*(Erick Betancourt)*

Charlie is a corrections officer in a protective custody unit. He is released from his post near the beginning of the play. Charlie grows fond of Lucius while guarding him in the yard, and reflects that while they did not know each other well (and despite Lucius' crimes) he felt close to him.



### Lucius Jenkins

*(Edi Gathegi)*

Lucius is serving time for a series of murders committed between Florida and New York. Lucius has struggled with substance abuse, and has turned his attention towards religion during his time in prison. Lucius tries to draw out those around him and focus on the light rather than the darkness in life.



# INSIDE THE MIND OF THE PLAYWRIGHT

## Where do you draw your inspiration from?

**As many artists will attest, inspiration can come from anywhere. Some artists begin their process with a character in mind, others with a location. Many cite other artists or works of art for sparking a new thought or idea. Some artists are drawn to specific time periods or historical events. Other artists are inspired to write what they know.**

Stephen Adly Guirgis has said he writes plays about what keeps him up at night. While writing *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train*, Stephen was thinking about a close friend who had joined a cult religion called The Unification Church, also known as the "Moonies," after leader Sun Myung Moon. The Church's doctrine combines western Christianity with Korean shamanism, and focuses on the belief that a single divine ruler can restore humans to the world of God's ideal through procreative marriages. Young members of the church were often expected to fundraise constantly, and much of the money raised went directly into Moon's personal business investments. This sentiment is echoed by Angel Cruz when he says, "How many Sons of God you know drive a Lexus? Or got million-dollar stock portfolios? Or go skiing in Aspen?" The Church is notorious for severe treatment of its members, including the use of sleep deprivation and isolation from outside friends and family that have been likened to brainwashing. In 1982, Moon was convicted of filing false US federal income tax returns and criminal conspiracy and was imprisoned for 18 months. Today, the Church is believed to have approximately 200,000 members in more than 100 countries.



Playwright Stephen Adly Guirgis, photo by Gregory Costanzo.

**"Do you know what Reverend Kim say? He say he's the Son of God!"**

- ANGEL, *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train*



A 1991 New York Post article about a Moonie recruit

**"The genesis of the play was that a really close friend of mine joined The Unification Church, and there was a period of my life when I devoted a lot of time to trying to get him kidnapped and deprogrammed, and I went on stakeouts and I was planning to... but it never ended up working. And then I went to therapy, and I learned that people are going to do what they're going to do, and that I was so into getting him back because it was such a strong connection to my childhood. I think I was in a place where I wasn't ready to move on into adulthood, so I was holding onto him in that way. Then in therapy, I just started getting on with my life a little bit. But I knew I would write about it someday. A few years later, when we did the play, the guy Joe that inspired the story came to the play."**

- Stephen Adly Guirgis on *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train*



# INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR MARK BROKAW



## What first drew you into Stephen's writing?

I love Stephen's language. He's a writer who really pays attention to what he puts on the page. I always say at the beginning of rehearsal, the better the writer the more you have to pay attention to the punctuation. I think he's a writer where you need to pay very close attention to the punctuation because everything he puts on the page is deliberate.

## How do you approach working with actors?

When working with anybody, whether it's an actor, designer, or writer, you're trying to unleash whatever is most needed for the task at hand. It's never trying to make somebody into someone they're not, but it's helping them use what's inside of them to maximal potential.

## You mention designers. What was the design process for this show? How have you worked with designers to capture the world of the play on stage?

This play is a real challenge because it takes place during many different time periods, from many different points-of-view, in many different locations. The great thing about doing a play about Rikers Island is that in the twenty years since the play was written, there's been a lot of attention about Rikers and what happens there, in terms of the treatment of the prisoners as well as the treatment of the people who are there to protect the prisoners. There's a lot of visual research out there and a lot of documentaries.

## What do you think audiences should know coming into the play, or what do you hope they'll walk away from the play experiencing?

I hope that audiences walk away with the same kind of appreciation for Stephen's gift for language that I have. I had it as an audience member before, and I have it now as a director being in the room working with it every day. It's really been a gratifying play to work on because it never fails you. Sometimes with plays, an actor has a question, or you have a question. The answer may not be on the page, and you have to look elsewhere. With this play, the answer is always on the page. It's very exciting, gratifying, and fulfilling to be able to work on a play like that.



top to bottom: Mark Brokaw speaks to the cast and crew at first rehearsal; costume designer Dede M. Ayite describing her design research for *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train*, photos by Gregory Costanzo. Edi Gathegi in *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train*, photo by Joan Marcus.



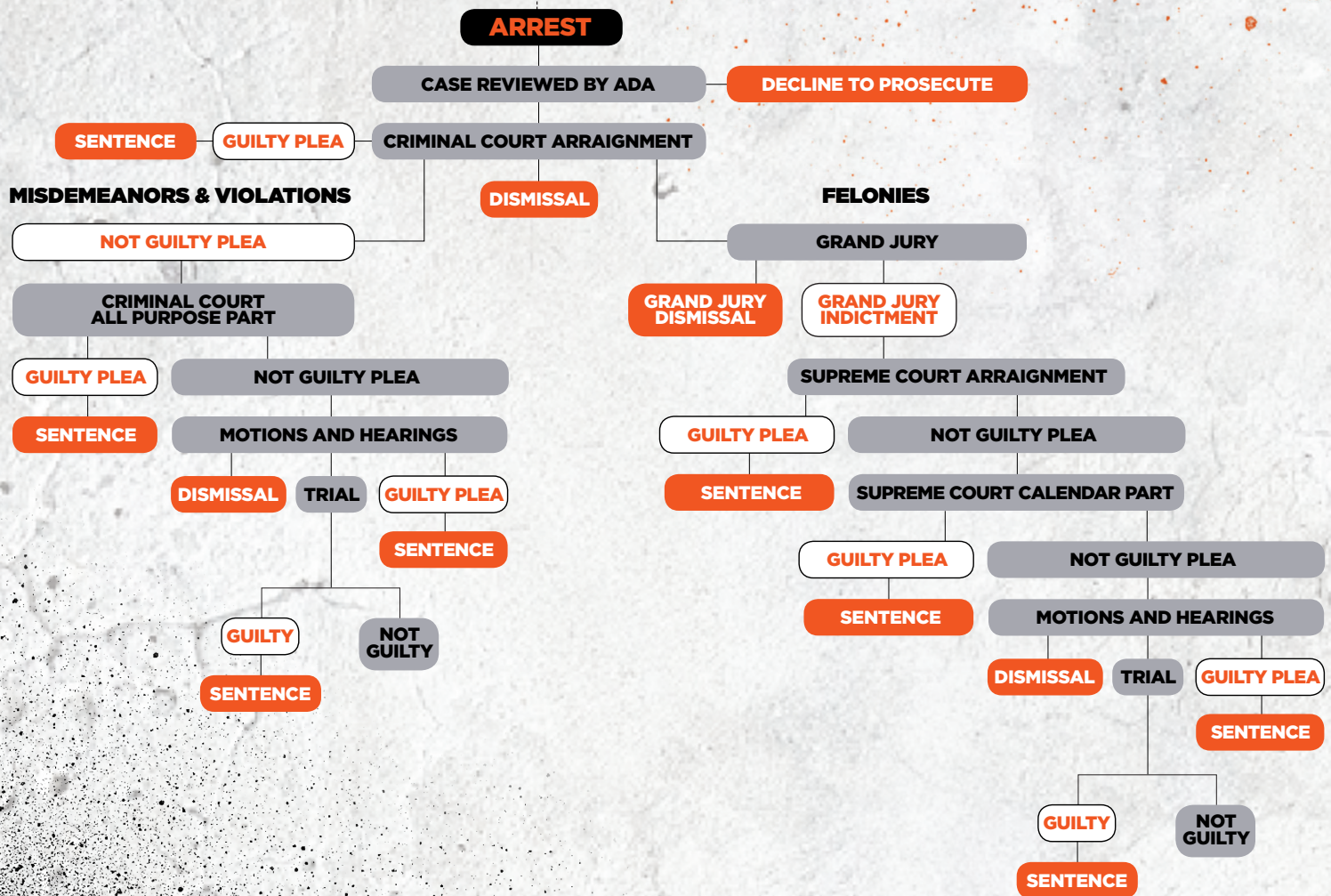
# UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD OF THE PLAY:

## A Look Inside The U.S. Judicial System

### The New York City Legal System: From Arrest to Sentencing

**Misdemeanor** A crime punishable with incarceration for one year or less.

**Felony** A crime of high seriousness, as opposed to a misdemeanor, which is a petty crime.



Source: The New York District Attorney's Office: Learning & Resource Center [manhattanada.org](http://manhattanada.org)



# What is Rikers Island?

## What is Rikers Island?

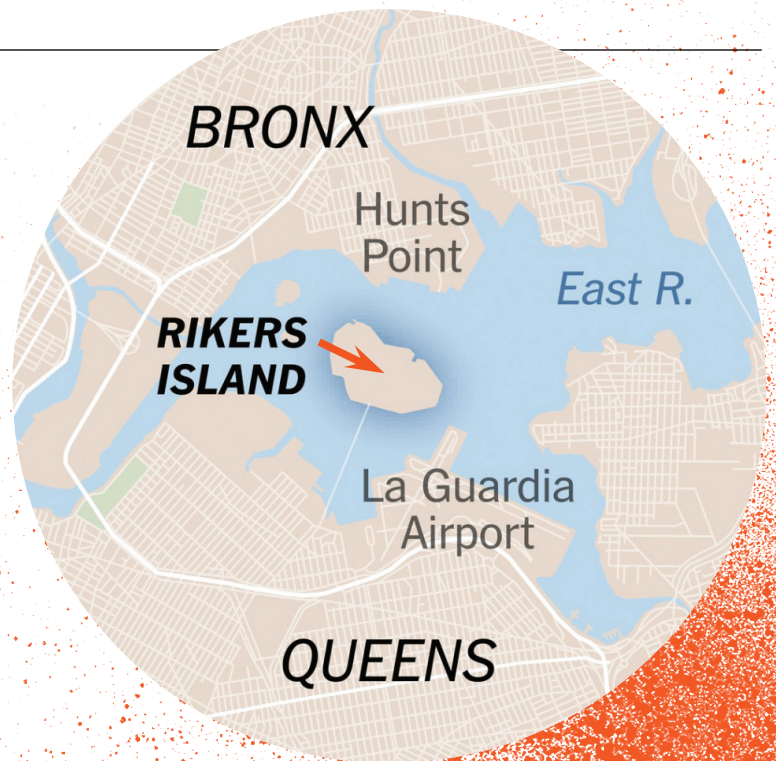
Rikers is New York City's principal jail complex. Approximately 77,000 people cycle through Rikers each year, with about 10,000 inmates held daily. Rikers is made up of 10 jail complexes for men, women, and adolescents.

## Where is Rikers Island?

Rikers is located between the northern tip of Queens and to the east of mainland Bronx on the East River.

## Who is on Rikers Island?

Rikers is used for those awaiting trial or convicted felons serving a sentence of a year or less. In fact, 85% of those held at Rikers at any given time are pretrial detainees, meaning they have not yet been convicted of a crime.





# An Inmate's Day at Rikers Island

As told by "Daniel," a recent Rikers inmate, in a Marshall Project\* interview

**4 AM** Wake up, shave

**5-5:30 AM** Breakfast

**6-7 AM** Time outdoors

*"It's not like we have pajamas, so you can pretty much just get up and go. But if you want to brush your teeth, you need to have done that already."*

**7:15-10:30 AM** Work on grounds crew/trash pickup

**11 AM** Lunch shifts begin

*"The CO would give us a long pep talk about wearing your ID and tucking in your shirt. They would always use the phrase 'You're grown ass men.'"*

**3-5 PM** Mail, quiet time for napping, reading, and working out

**5 PM** TV on, people play chess/checkers

*"You can also shower. COs can see in, but everyone wears underwear."*

**5:30-7:30 PM** Dinner

**8 PM** Phone, free time

**11 PM** Lights out (under more recent rules, 9 p.m.)

*"And every day is exactly the same."*



Unlike the Rikers inmate schedule to the left, Angel Cruz and Lucius Jenkins are in a special **PROTECTIVE CUSTODY** unit. Angel and Lucius are kept in their cells for 23 hours a day. For the remaining hour, they're brought outside into the yard and kept in cages.

## PROTECTIVE CUSTODY

A type of imprisonment used to protect an inmate either from harming other prisoners, or for their own protection. Protective custody usually involves a degree of solitary confinement. Prisoners in PC are there for their own protection retain the privileges that prisoners in General Population have, such as phone calls, reading materials, and use of the commissary. Those there for harming other prisoners do not.

\*The Marshall Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization that seeks to create and sustain a sense of national urgency about the U.S. criminal justice system. We achieve this through award-winning journalism, partnerships with other news outlets and public forums. In all of our work we strive to education and enlarge the audience of people who care about the state of criminal justice. [www.themarshallproject.org](http://www.themarshallproject.org)





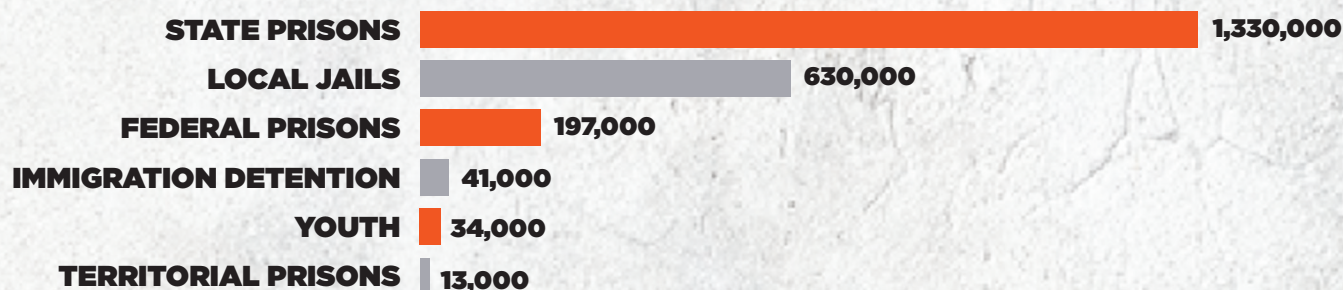
# The United States Prison System

## STATISTICS\*

\* All statistics are approximate and sourced from data collected by the 2017 Prison Policy Initiative and The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

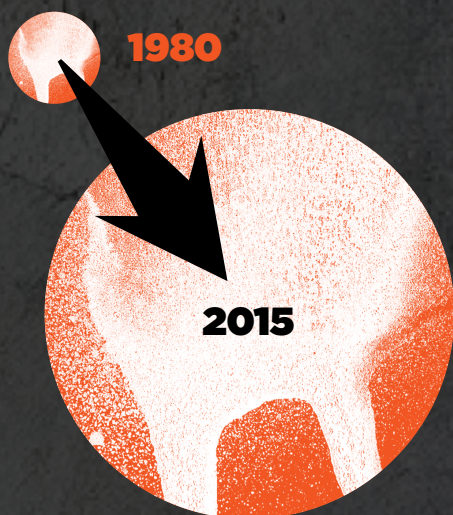
**2.3 million people are currently incarcerated in the United States. More people, per capita, than any other nation.**

### WHO IS IN OUR JAILS?

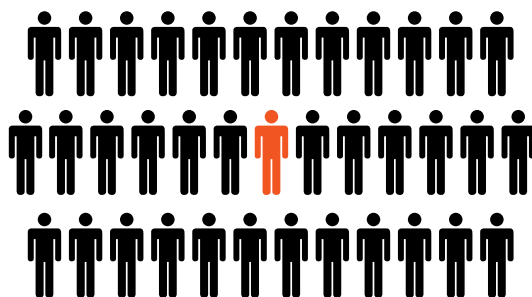


- 70% of people in local jails, about 443,000, are not convicted of any crime (pretrial detention).
- 99% of the total jail growth in the last 15 years was in pretrial detention.

**BETWEEN 1980 AND 2015, THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE INCARCERATED IN AMERICA INCREASED FROM ROUGHLY 500,000 TO OVER 2.2 MILLION**



**1 IN EVERY 37 ADULTS IN THE U.S., OR 2.7% OF THE ADULT POPULATION, IS UNDER SOME FORM OF CORRECTIONAL SUPERVISION.**



- More people are admitted to jail each year than live in the 11 smallest U.S. states combined.
- Today, the United States makes up about 5% of the world's population and has 21% of the world's prisoners.
- Confinement is just a portion of the U.S. Justice System, which controls nearly 7 million people, more than half of whom are on probation. Correctional Facilities and Parole account for the remainder.



## WHAT IS THEIR OFFENSE?

**1 IN 5 INMATES ARE  
INCARCERATED FOR A  
DRUG-RELATED OFFENSE.**

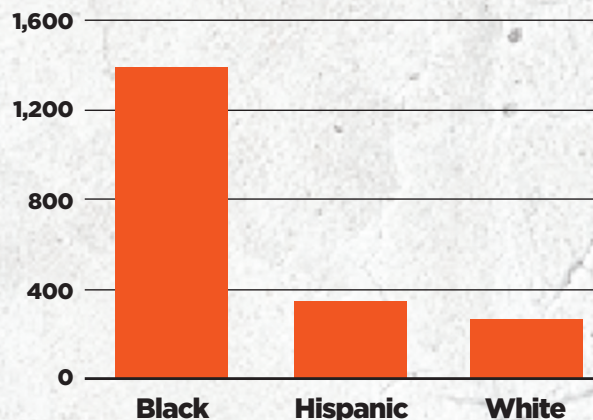


- Half of those incarcerated in Federal Prisons are there for drug-related offenses.
- Most incarcerated youth are locked up for nonviolent offenses.
- 57,000 people are incarcerated for immigration offenses.

## RACIAL DISPARITIES IN INCARCERATION

- Though African Americans and Hispanics make up approximately 32% of the US population, they comprised 56% of all incarcerated people in 2015.
- If African Americans and Hispanics were incarcerated at the same rates as whites, prison and jail populations would decline by almost 40%.
- African Americans are incarcerated at more than 5 times the rate of whites.
- The imprisonment rate for African American women is twice that of white women.
- Nationwide, African American children represent 32% of children who are arrested, 42% of children who are detained, and 52% of children whose cases are judicially waived to criminal court.
- African Americans and whites use drugs at similar rates, but the imprisonment rate of African Americans for drug charges is almost 6 times that of whites.

**Average rate of incarceration by race and ethnicity, per 100,000 population**



Data source: United States Department of Justice. Office of Justice Programs. Bureau of Justice Statistics. National Prisoner Statistics, 1978-2014. Bibliographic Citation: ICPSR36281-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2015-10-09; U.S. Census Bureau (2013). 2013 Population Estimates. Annual estimates of resident population by sex, race, and Hispanic origin for the United States, states and counties: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2013. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

## EFFECTS OF INCARCERATION

- A criminal record can reduce the likelihood of a callback or job offer by nearly 50 percent. The negative impact of a criminal record is twice as large for African American applicants.
- Infectious diseases are highly concentrated in corrections facilities: 15% of jail inmates and 22% of prisoners – compared to 5% of the general population – reported ever having tuberculosis, Hepatitis B and C, HIV/AIDS, or other STDs.
- In 2012 alone, the United States spent nearly \$81 billion on corrections.
- Spending on prisons and jails has increased at triple the rate of spending on Pre-K-12 public education in the last thirty years.



# INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR STEPHANIE DIMAGGIO



## **How did you get your start as an actor?**

I did some school plays and realized that I loved the rush of live performance. I didn't see my first professional play (non-musical) until I was 17, on a school trip to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. It was a game changer. Seeing a play in a tiny black box, with the actors so close you could touch them, had a profound effect on me. The next year I

won a Shakespeare monologue contest (that still exists) called The English-Speaking Union, and the prize was a trip to NYC to take part in the finals at Lincoln Center. It was my first time in NYC, and I fell in love. Funny enough, exactly ten years later I made my Broadway debut on that same stage I competed on in High School. I took that as a sign to keep going!

## **You've worked both on stage and screen, what are some of the differences between mediums as an actor?**

The creative intentions are the same, but the physical tools you use are different. On stage, something is repeated 8 shows a week, but on camera, once they've got the shot, you move on from the moment forever. In theatre, you have to learn to repeat, to fill it each time, over and over. Similarly, plays are always in the moment (no matter the outcome), whereas on film, a moment can be crafted and re-crafted by a director and editor to achieve a certain result. To me, both mediums are equally challenging, just in different ways.

## **When you first read *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train*, what drew you towards the role of Mary Jane? Once cast, what was your process like preparing for the part?**

I was lucky enough to have seen the original production when I was a freshman in college. I was so moved that I wrote a paper about it for my theatre history class and in it remarked how I wanted to play Mary Jane one day. So, I guess you could say I've been drawn to the part for 17 years! The thing that thrills me most are the high stakes, epic language and the big questions that Stephen gives us to ponder. For this play, I made it a point to learn all my lines before rehearsals started, so that I had the language in my body once we got on our feet. I also did a fair amount of research on the life of a public defender - watching documentaries, interviews, etc.

## **Mary Jane has a line where she says, "One man's neurotic is another man's hero, and who, ultimately, can see which one's which with any real certainty at all?" What is your interpretation of why Mary Jane defends Angel, and has this influenced your perceptions of justice and/or morality?**

Public Defenders have an impossible case load, but when she meets Angel, Mary Jane is immediately reminded of her father,

who had a similar spirit and passion for fighting for his beliefs. When he sets that fire in her, I think she knows she has to do everything she can to save him, and in many ways, that's connected to being a kind of daughter her father would be proud of.

The play has definitely influenced my perceptions of justice and morality because it has forced me to ask questions that I might not normally ask. For example, what are my opinions on the prison system and what is my own connection to religion and faith? Living in questions, I find, is much more difficult than operating from assumptions - and this play asks many of them!

## **You're on faculty at Fordham University. How does your work with students influence your work as an actor? Knowing that there are some theatre makers in the audience, are there exercises or tips you share with your classes that you can share with us?**

One of the best parts about being a teacher is that you are constantly having to ask yourself "am I practicing what I'm preaching?" I always tell my students to "lead with joy" - which is another way of saying - approach the work with a sense of play and not with self-criticism. When I manage to do that, the work is illuminated so much faster. They constantly remind me to hold on to the passion and curiosity we all have when we are just beginning to pursue our passions. I love being around that energy of possibility and discovery. Here are a few tips I give consistently to students: Spend as much time each week reading (for fun - plays, books, papers) as you spend on social media. Reading is a huge part of being an actor and having a nimble mind that can approach language is key for the theatre. Find some place to train, whether it's classes or a college or gathering with friends and working through exercises in books. You have to train to improve. And lastly, don't be afraid to put yourself out there. Apply to programs like The Apprentice Program at Williamstown or internships at local theatres. You have to take risks to grow. Dive in!



top: Stephanie DiMaggio, photo by Gregory Costanzo. above: Stephanie DiMaggio and Sean Carvajal, photo by Joan Marcus.



# ACTIVITIES

## Individual Activities

- Imagine you have been brought on to defend Angel Cruz. What would you offer as his defense? Write an opening statement (the first statement a lawyer delivers to present a case to the jury) laying out your case as to why Angel is innocent.
- What makes someone a hero? Think about a moment of heroism you've encountered. Why was the act heroic? What are the characteristics of the person who acted heroically? Write a brief short story or scene inspired by this person.

Sean Carvajal,  
photo by Joan Marcus.

## Group Activities

- The characters in this play are brought together due to a shared set of circumstances: either they have been incarcerated or they work within the judicial system. Can you think of a location where two strangers could meet and end up having an intimate conversation? Write or improvise a brief two-minute scene between these characters for two of your classmates to perform.
- Think about a time you or someone you know did something others may consider "wrong" but you consider "right." Write down a few words describing this person or situation without revealing the entire story. With your group, write a brief performance piece where each sentence starts with one of your descriptive words.

## Signature Activity

- Share your thoughts with us! What followed you out of the theatre? A line of dialogue, a design element, a philosophical question? Share a photograph, drawing, line of dialogue, or your own writing with us that was inspired by your experience at the play.



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# GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND EXPRESSIONS

## **MANHATTAN CORRECTIONAL CENTER, "THE TOMBS."**

A federal prison in Manhattan, New York, which holds male and female prisoners of all security levels. Most are serving brief sentences or are held temporarily, pending trial.

**CORRECTIONS OFFICER** A person responsible for the supervision, safety, and security of prisoners.

**RECIDIVIST FELON** A convicted criminal who reoffends, often repeatedly going back to jail.

**SUBORNING PERJURY** Perjury is the swearing of a false oath to tell the truth in a legal proceeding, be it spoken or written. Suborning perjury is the crime of persuading someone to commit perjury.

**PUBLIC DEFENDER** A lawyer appointed by a court to represent a defendant who cannot afford to hire an attorney.

**D.A.** A District Attorney, who represents the state government in the prosecution of criminal offenders.

**PLEA-BARGAIN** An agreement between the prosecutor and defendant whereby the defendant agrees to plead guilty to a particular charge in return for some concession from the prosecutor.

**DISBARRED** A disbarred lawyer is expelled from the Bar - the legal profession - and no longer has the right to practice law. Mary Jane is disbarred for defending Angel despite knowing, due to his confession in their first encounter, that he shot the Reverend Kim.

**PAROLE** The release of a prisoner before the completion of a sentence.

**EXTRADITION** The process by which an inmate is transferred from one legal jurisdiction to another, for protection or punishment. In this case, Lucius is talking about his possible extradition to Florida, where the death penalty can be carried out.

**ANNULMENT** When members of a jury vote a defendant not guilty if they do not support a government's law, do not believe it is constitutional or humane, or do not support a possible punishment for breaking a government's law.

**OPEN-AND-SHUT CASE** Legal slang for a case that is easy to prove because the facts are very clear.

**A.C.L.U.** The American Civil Liberties Union, a non-profit organization whose stated mission is "to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to every person in this country by the Constitution and laws of the United States." They ensure prisoners are given yard-time, hence Lucius' taunting Valdez with them.



Edi Gathegi, photo by Joan Marcus.



# ABOUT SIGNATURE

**Signature Theatre celebrates playwrights and gives them an artistic home.**



The Pershing Square Signature Center. Photo © David Sundberg / Esto.

Founded in 1991 by James Houghton, Signature makes an extended commitment to a playwright's body of work. In 2014, Signature became the first New York City theatre to receive the Regional Theatre Tony Award®.

Signature serves its mission at The Pershing Square Signature Center, a three-theatre facility on West 42nd Street designed by Frank Gehry Architects. At the Center, Signature continues its founding Playwright-in-Residence model as Residency One, a year-long

intensive exploration of a single writer's body of work. Residency Five, the only program of its kind, supports multiple playwrights by guaranteeing each writer three productions over a five-year period. The Legacy Program invites writers from both residencies back for productions of premiere or earlier plays.

Through the Signature Ticket Initiative: A Generation of Access, Signature is also committed to making its productions accessible by underwriting the cost of initial run tickets, currently priced at \$30.

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