MARY: The Birth of Frankenstein

Relaxed Performance Show Information

# Show Information

MARY is an intense Gothic thriller that reimagines the stormy night in 1816 when Mary Shelley conceived her masterpiece, *Frankenstein*. Set in Lord Byron's Villa Diodati during the "Year Without a Summer," the play follows five historical figures - Mary Shelley, her husband Percy Shelley, her stepsister Claire Clairmont, the infamous Lord Byron, and his companion Dr. John Polidori - as they gather for an evening of ghost stories and dangerous experimentation. What begins as intellectual sparring and drug-fuelled storytelling escalates into betrayal, violence, and a terrifying experiment in reanimation using Byron's maid, Marta.

This production contains adult themes including drug use, sexual content, violence, and murder. The show features loud sound effects (thunder, crashes, screams), bright flashing lights including strobe and lasers, complete blackouts, haze/smoke effects, smell effects, and physical violence.

There are plot twists throughout, particularly in Act Two when the reanimated Marta becomes a vengeful creature. The production includes one moment where the Monster runs through the theatre.

**Performance Style:** This production is contemporary theatre with extensive dialogue and character development before the dramatic climax. The rhythm and style differs from traditional horror adaptations or film versions of *Frankenstein*. Expect significant talking and storytelling before action sequences begin.

More detailed content warnings and specific plot spoilers can be provided upon request via email or at the venue during the pre-show demonstration.

If any of the themes are triggering to you, we suggest phoning or texting **1737** reaching out to services listed on: <https://mentalhealth.org.nz/helplines>

This document includes spoilers. If you don’t want to know details about the show, don’t read any further.

You can watch the full show via this link:

[https://youtu.be/1SOEoYb65Rg]( https://youtu.be/1SOEoYb65Rg)

# Key Details

**Location:** ASB Waterfront Theatre, 138 Halsey Street, Auckland Central, Auckland 1010. Entry through the glass doors on Halsey Street.

Step free access, and wheelchair accessible seating and toilets available.

[ASB Waterfront Theatre’s “Know Before You Go” page with arrival info](https://www.atc.co.nz/asb-waterfront-theatre/know-before-you-go).

**Time:** 2 hours, 5 minutes, with a 20-minute interval.

**Date:** The relaxed performance on Tuesday 2 September at **7pm**. For the relaxed performance there is no lockout policy, and the internal theatre doors will remain open for the whole show.

# Pre-show Demonstration

Before the show starts on Tuesday 2 September, we will have a pre-show demonstration on stage at **6.30pm**. Please meet at the Breakout Room on Level One, and we will travel into the theatre together. The demo will introduce the lighting, sound, special effects, surprises, and characters, and we will talk about what the show will be like. We will also talk about how the relaxed show will work.

This document will give you even more details about the show.

# Relaxed show features

During the relaxed performance, the audience may come and go, move around, visit breakout spaces, and use comfort and fidget items. If you need to leave during the show and then come back, please return to your same seat. Please don't go onto the stage with the performers.

For this performance, **the doors will remain closed but unlocked**.

You can leave the theatre at any time. To come back into the theatre, an usher will let you in when it's okay to return. You might have to wait outside the closed external doors for a moment. If you'd like assistance to come and go, please let theatre staff know.

If you need to use devices for accessibility, please put them on silent.

For this performance, there won’t be an announcement about the relaxed performance, but there will be enhanced signage. Reminding the whole audience that during the relaxed performance it’s ok for the audience to be themselves.

# Content Warnings

This production contains the following potentially distressing content:

**Medical Trauma and Restraint:**

* Scenes of forced medical treatment and restraint
* Experimentation on a vulnerable person (Marta)
* Themes that may connect to historical medical experimentation on disabled people

**Pregnancy Loss:**

* Discussion of infant death

**Ghost/Supernatural Elements:**

* Supernatural themes including reanimation from death
* May be triggering for those with a history of psychosis

**Violence and Murder:**

* Multiple on-stage deaths including strangulation and neck-breaking
* Elder abuse in the treatment of Marta
* Extensive use of blood effects in Act Two

**Other Adult Content:**

* Drug use and sexual content
* Mental health crises and psychological breakdowns

# **Story Overview**

**Act One**

* The play begins in 1816 at Byron’s house, during the “year without a summer.” The housekeeper Marta works silently. Byron, John Polidori, Claire, Percy, and Mary arrive.
* The group drink and take drugs. Byron challenges them to write ghost stories. They fight, tease, and argue. Mary defends herself and Claire from Byron’s cruelty.
* Claire reveals she is pregnant with Byron’s child. Byron rejects her.
* Mary tells her ghost story about a scientist who makes a monster. The others laugh, but then decide to try the experiment for real.
* They kill Marta to use her body.

**Act Two**

* Marta’s body is strapped to a machine. Lightning and strobe lights flash as they try to bring her back.
* The Monster awakens in the dark. It begins attacking the guests.
* Mary and Claire argue. The Monster kills Claire. Mary feels disturbingly calm.
* One by one, the Monster (sometimes with Mary’s help) kills John, Byron, and Percy.
* At the end, the bodies form a creature. Mary stands smiling, declaring: *“How wonderfully frightful.”*

# Lighting

The show uses extensive and intense lighting effects throughout. House lights will be off during most of the performance, but the aisle and handrail lights are kept on at a low intensity. There are several complete blackouts in Act Two where all lights, including exit and stairwell lights, will be turned off for dramatic effect - these moments last 30 seconds to 2 minutes (approx.).

Specific high-sensory lighting moments include:

* **Lightning effects:** Over 20 bright white strobe lightning flashes throughout both acts, designed to startle
* **Act One:** Red lightning on opening, multiple strobe sequences during the drug-taking dance, spotlights that suddenly illuminate characters, yellow lights during Mary's ghost story
* **Act Two:** Extremely bright laser effects from electrical equipment that fill the entire theatre, extended strobe sequences with lasers, lights that shine directly into the front audience sections, purple/blue shadow effects
* **Colour washes:** Stage floods with red during violent moments, blue lighting during dances and supernatural sequences
* **Moving lights:** Lights sweep across the audience during storm sequences

During the pre-show demonstration, we will show examples of the lightning strobes,

# Sound

The production features extremely loud and sudden sound effects designed to startle:

* **Thunder:** Over 30 thunder cracks throughout, ranging from sudden sharp cracks to extended 10-second rumbles. The opening thunder is particularly loud and startling
* **Pre-show:** Atmospheric sounds fill the auditorium before the show begins
* **Music:** Harpsichord underscores emotional scenes, dance music with heavy bass during drug sequences, scratching violin strings during horror moments, low cello music for tension
* **Sound effects:** Loud crashes, objects dropping from multiple locations around the theatre, the Monster's roar, screams, echoing voices
* **Interval/Post-show:** "Kill of the Night" by Gin Wigmore plays at interval

The sound design uses surround speakers, so effects come from all directions.

During the pre-show demonstration, we will play examples of the loudest thunder effects and the Monster's roar at the volume they'll be during the show.

# Special Effects

The production includes several special effects and staged combat:

* **Haze/Smoke:** Continuous haze throughout creating atmosphere, with heavier smoke during supernatural sequences
* **Scent effects:** Oak smell in Act One, moss smell during interval and Act Two
* **Fight choreography:** Multiple violent sequences including head-slamming, strangulation, neck-snapping. All violence is carefully choreographed with trained fight directors. Performers use stage combat techniques to ensure safety while creating realistic effects
* **Physical effects:** At the finale, the bookshelf falls forward with books spilling, lighting fixtures falling toward stage, pipes descending, entire stage floor tilting upward

All stage combat is performed by trained actors following strict safety protocols. Weapons are theatrical props designed for stage use.

# Audience Interaction

**The Monster enters the audience:** In Act Two, the performer playing the reanimated Marta/Monster runs through the theatre stalls between the mid and front sections while shouting. This happens suddenly and is meant to be frightening.

* Performers will NOT touch or speak directly to audience members
* No audience members will be asked to come on stage
* The Monster only runs through the aisles

**Opt-out option:** If you prefer to avoid the Monster's path, we recommend sitting in the back stalls or circle sections. Ushers can help you find seats away from the aisle if you request this when arriving.

# Triggers

This show contains multiple potentially distressing themes and moments:

**Pregnancy and Abandonment:** Claire discusses being pregnant and abandoned by Byron

**Violence and Murder:**

* Act One ends with the murder of Marta
* Act Two features multiple on-stage deaths including strangulation and neck-breaking
* The treatment of Marta includes examples of elder abuse.
* Blood effects are used extensively in Act Two

**Drug Use:** Characters take and discuss experimental drugs in Act One

**Sexual Content:**

* Discussion of sexual relationships and infidelity
* Unwanted sexual advances (Byron to Mary)
* Brief groping (Claire grabs Mary's breasts)

**Mental Health:** Characters experience psychological breakdowns and manic episodes

**Death of Family:** Mary discusses her mother's death in childbirth and her baby's death

The show maintains a dark, intense atmosphere throughout with few moments of relief. Support services information is available at the box office. Please speak to front-of-house staff if you need assistance during or after the performance.

**Support Resources:**

* Front of house staff are available to discuss content in more detail
* Quiet breakout spaces are available if you need to take a break. They are located on the “Air Bridge” on Level 1, and inside the Villa Maria Gallery on Level 2. You can see where the Breakout Rooms are by viewing the ASB Waterfront Theatre Visual Guide on our website here: <https://www.atc.co.nz/ticketing-info/accessible-theatre>.
* If any of the themes are triggering to you, we suggest phoning or texting **1737** reaching out to services listed on: <https://mentalhealth.org.nz/helplines>

Remember you can leave and return at any time during this relaxed performance if you need a break.

# Want to know more?

Reach out to Sam Phillips, Auckland Theatre Company’s Head of Learning and Participation, on [sam@atc.co.nz](mailto:sam@atc.co.nz). Sam will also be at the ASB Waterfront Theatre and will present the pre-show demonstration.

This show information by Auckland Theatre Company used a template designed and provided by [Arts Access Aotearoa](https://artsaccess.org.nz/).