

Marjorie Prime.

Notes for those considering auditioning.

1. The play

(NB These notes are for audition purposes only and aren't suitable for use in publicity material such as the brochure and web site, nor in the programme, as they give away too much of the story.)

Written in 2016 by American Jordan Harrison, Marjorie Prime gives a glimpse into a possible future development and use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Robotics, and Materials Technology. Quite soon into the play we start to understand that a 'Prime' is an artificial being created to a client's specification. It looks and sounds completely human and its AI allows it to learn and remember information, and then to use that to interact with real humans and even other Primes.

At the beginning, Marjorie is in her mid 80s and has reached an age when she starts to forget things occasionally and sometimes needs to be encouraged to look after herself properly. She is in conversation with a much younger man (Walter) who, we quite soon realise, is in fact a Prime and has been created at Marjorie's request to be like her dead husband as he was many years ago.

Marjorie's daughter Tess is uncomfortable with this and sometimes has to be shown by her husband Jon that Walter is actually helping Marjorie. Jon encourages Tess not only to accept Walter, but also to talk to it so that it learns more about Marjorie and can therefore help her more.

As the play progresses, we become aware that Marjorie has grandchildren and that there has been a family tragedy which isn't really talked about.

At the beginning of Part 2, we realise that Marjorie has died and has herself been replaced by a Prime. Much later on, we become aware of deep sadness in Tess's life and in Part 2 Sc 4 we find that she also has been replaced by a Prime because she has committed suicide. Jon is therefore the only human in the household. In the last scene the three Primes (Walter, Marjorie and Tess) are conversing and Jon is not there. None of the three Primes knows where he is. And that's how it finishes.

As you will see, the play has some sadness and there are few laughs. However, the mood is never mawkish and because the Primes don't feel emotions – they merely represent them and behave as if they do feel them – the characters generally don't wallow.

The concept is very intriguing and every day we hear on the news and read in the papers that we seem to have taken a step towards the underlying thesis of this play. I hope that reality won't beat us to it.

2. Characters

(See 'Presentation' for notes about Primes)

Marjorie: Mid 80s. On stage for 59 of 64 pages. Pleasant, occasionally forgetful, has probably been quite playful and skittish in her youth, may even flirt with Walter (Prime). By the beginning of Part 2 she has died and has been replaced by a Prime.

Walter: 30s-40s? On stage all the time (64 pages) A Prime from the start.

Tess: 50s. Marjorie's daughter. On stage for 45/64 pages. A woman with sadness in her life. Has a struggle accepting Walter, sometimes referring to him as 'it' and sometimes as 'him'. She's not a hard woman, but her sadness and her feelings of responsibility for her mother sometimes make her speak and behave a little less sensitively than one would be comfortable with. She is eventually replaced by a Prime.

Jon: 50s. Tess's husband. On stage for 33/64 pages. A good man who, being slightly less emotionally entangled with Marjorie, is able to have more understanding of, and empathy with, his mother-in-law.

3. Audition pieces: NB These don't need to be learned off by heart; they're to give me an idea of how voices fit together. The auditions will also give me a chance to see people together. The PDFs are a bit messy in places, but don't worry about it. You may also notice the occasional oblique slash in a line. This is where the author wants the next piece of dialogue to start so that speeches overlap. Don't worry about it for the auditions; we'll sort it out during rehearsals.

Marjorie and Walter: Pages 7 - 10½; 10½ - 13.

Tess and John: pp 14 – 17; 44 – 48½

Tess and Marjorie: pp 35 – 39½

Tess, Walter and Marjorie: pp 59 - 64

4. Presentation

Staging: Those who know the Headgate will be aware that sight lines are a problem, especially if characters are sitting, so I propose to use the staging to raise the acting area by 400mm. Whilst I'm generally not in favour of box sets, I think we're going to have something more than just black tabs.

Primes: The author suggests that the Primes are holographic projections – a technology that is already with us. However, this would mean that they could not physically interact with things around them, or even realistically sit on a chair. So I'm going to present them as appearing as 'human' as possible. They will look and sound completely normal, with only the occasional '*I don't have that information*' to give the game away. However, they cannot feel emotion, so human characters around them realise that any apparent emotion is a clever use of AI. They are never 'robotic'.

They are going to be on stage all the time, but if they are not engaged in any action or conversation, they will sit quietly on the fringe of the action, waiting until they are needed again. As they have no emotions, they will merely sit and wait, aware of what is going on around them, but not part of it and not reacting to it.

Language: There are a few 'Americanisms' and references to products which we don't have, so I shall aim to convert these to 'Britishisms' (is there such a word?)

Costumes & makeup: Clothes are ordinary wear with just the odd change to indicate that time has passed. The only concession to a character becoming a Prime is the possible use of a mild form of the make-up that TV newsreaders wear - not that ghastly orange, but enough to suggest that their skin is perfect.

5. Dates

Auditions: Monday 14th & Thursday 17th May 2018 at 7.30pm at The Headgate.

CASTING: I hope to get it cast by the end of May.

Between then and the end of July (the beginning of the summer holiday season) I would like to have a couple of read-throughs (reads-through?) so that everybody is familiar with the whole play and how their character fits into it.

As you will see from the next few paragraphs, the rehearsal period is very tight and won't allow people the luxury of learning their lines during rehearsals. People will therefore need to have at least most, if not all, of their lines learnt by the time we start rehearsing.

Rehearsals: At this stage, all I can say is that we shall need to rehearse a couple of times a week from the beginning of September. Which days that will be is going to depend on the availability of the people involved and of a suitable venue – which by default will be the Headgate.

Performance week:

Get-in: Sunday 11th November.

Technical rehearsal: Monday 12th, starting as early as key people can make it

Dress rehearsal: Tuesday 13th. 7.45pm

Performances: Wednesday 14th – Saturday 17th at 7.45pm. Possible matinée on Saturday at 2.30pm.

6. My approach

My attitude to a play is that we are all servants of the author and our job is to present his work to the audience as completely as possible. In my view, a play is not an opportunity for a director, designer etc to show off in order to impress the audience with how clever and imaginative they are. I realise that this is old-fashioned and not in line with some contemporary thinking, but that is how I am.

My approach to rehearsing is (in order to save time) to give guidance about where people should enter, move etc, but then to allow characters to develop during rehearsals, with only minor tweaks on the tiller from me.

I hope that these notes help to give you an idea of what you might be letting yourself in for if you decide to audition for a part. You can contact me on kimmance@tiscali.co.uk. You will see that there are sections of the play reproduced for audition purposes, but if you would like to read the whole play, it is on <https://www.dropbox.com/s/05xxxc5uo80quja/Marjorie%20Prime.pdf?dl=0>

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