

ALANIS MORISSETTE'S

jagged

little

pill

THE MUSICAL

STUDY GUIDE



THE  
NATIONAL THEATRE  
FOUNDATION

# ALANIS MORISSETTE'S jagged little pill THE MUSICAL



THE  
**NATIONAL THEATRE**  
FOUNDATION

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# DRAMATURGICAL ESSAY

It's June 13, 1995 and 21-year-old Canadian singer-songwriter Alanis Morissette has released her third studio album, *Jagged Little Pill*. The album marked a musical departure from the dance-pop sound of her first two albums, *Alanis* (1991) and *Now is the Time* (1992), which were only released nationally in Canada. Recorded from March 4, 1994, to April 1995, *Jagged Little Pill* garnered Morissette international attention. It became widely celebrated, receiving critical and commercial success. The album debuted at No. 117 on the Billboard Charts and eventually climbed to No. 1 and remained there for twelve weeks. It was the first album to sell twelve million copies and is still one of three albums to have sold at least fifteen million copies in the United States. The album was nominated for nine Grammy Awards and received five, including the coveted Album of the Year, for which Morissette, at 21, became the youngest artist to be a recipient. *Jagged Little Pill* is considered one of the most successful albums of the 1990s and, according to *Rolling Stone*, one of the 500 best albums of all time.

When one listens to *Jagged Little Pill*, it's no wonder it found such wide appeal. Opening with the harmonica-filled, grungy "All I Really Want" to the cautiously optimistic "Hand in My Pocket" to the grammatically contradictory yet emotionally captivating "Ironic," the album resonates on its emotion-forward, raw energy. "You Oughta Know," perhaps *Jagged Little Pill's* most recognizable single (though who can say when the album produced six of them?), still remains a staple of unfettered feminine rage, where a young woman is trying to make sense of the end of a relationship. Beneath the grunge, anger, intense lyricism, and matching instrumentation, *Jagged Little Pill's* enduring allure lies in Morissette's uncanny ability to capture the high highs and low lows of coming-of-age.

Almost twenty-five years later, *Jagged Little Pill* has reached a new kind of stage: the Broadway theatre. A musical nearly eleven years in the making, *Jagged Little Pill* completely transforms its original context and tells a completely different story. Morissette, in collaboration with



Jade McLeod and Lauren Chanel in the  
North American Tour of JAGGED LITTLE PILL

the Academy Award-winning book writer Diablo Cody and director Diane Paulus, worked to take the musical away from only telling Morissette's personal experience. *Jagged Little Pill* follows the journey of two women: Mary Jane (MJ) Healey and her daughter Frankie Healey. Each woman is going through her own personal crisis—MJ is addicted to the painkillers she received as a result of healing from her car crash and Frankie is the adopted Black daughter of two white parents. She is actively hiding her bisexuality, and is dating her best friend, Jo. Other members of the Healey family are also struggling as Steve, MJ's husband and Frankie's father, is addicted to pornography and Nick, their son and Frankie's brother, is crumbling beneath his parents' high expectations.

The musical also explores other heavy and difficult topics such as drug addiction, the opioid crisis, and sexual assault. *Jagged Little Pill*, with the success of its strong female creative team and the candor with which the musical illustrates a wide range of strong subject matter, garnered positive reception. *Jagged Little Pill* received fifteen Tony nominations for its Broadway production, with Diablo Cody winning one for Best Book of a Musical.

## DRAMATURGICAL ESSAY cont

An album that birthed an entire generation of female musicians was now a cutting-edge musical, helping to rethink the genre of the jukebox musical. To take what is the personal experience of one woman and transport it onto the experiences of two women with different ethnicities, races, sexual orientations, and more can reach an entirely new audience of people across the spectrum of womanhood, nonbinary and genderqueer identity, and AFAB (Assigned Female At Birth) people.

Take care of yourself when you watch *Jagged Little Pill*, as the topics do get heavy and can be hard to take in all at once. But the artful direction, the poetic and funny dialogue, and the ever-lasting music of Alanis Morissette are enough to make this story worth the watch. *Jagged Little Pill* is recommended for ages 14 and up.



photo by Matthew Murphy, Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade, 2022

Lauren Chanel and the company of the North American Tour of JAGGED LITTLE PILL

## Content Warnings

**Please note:** This production contains strong language, adult themes, drug use, and moments of sexual violence that some may find triggering. *Jagged Little Pill* addresses many topics of contemporary life, including sexual assault, opiate addiction, transracial adoption, gender and LGBTQIA+ identity, marriage struggles and mental health.

Read on for some additional context that will help set the stage as you experience this Tony and Grammy Award-winning new musical. Please visit [www.jaggedlittlepill.com/resources](http://www.jaggedlittlepill.com/resources) to learn more about the show's partner organizations, who have countless resources that speak to the many topics covered in the show.

### SEXUAL ASSAULT

Central to the plot of *Jagged Little Pill* is an instance of sexual assault between two teenagers. While this production does not contain any nudity, please be aware that a simulated assault is briefly shown, and that this scene could be triggering for some audience members.

### ADDICTION

*Jagged Little Pill* includes a character who is struggling with an opioid addiction. Mary Jane is a seemingly perfect Connecticut mother and wife, who's consumed by her addiction to prescription pills. In one scene, she overdoses on opioids in her home and is found unconscious.

### RESOURCES:

**National Sexual Assault Hotline:** 1-800-656-4673

**National Sexual Assault Online Hotline:**  
[online.rainn.org](http://online.rainn.org)

**National Domestic Violence Hotline:**  
1-800-787-7233 or [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org)

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline:**  
1-800-662-HELP or [samhsa.gov/find-treatment](http://samhsa.gov/find-treatment)

# THE CREATIVE TEAM



### Alanis Morissette, Music and Lyrics

The composer and lyricist of the Tony Award-winning *Jagged Little Pill*. Alanis Morissette is a singer-songwriter. Her 1995 album, *Jagged Little Pill*, earned a Grammy Award for Album of the Year and is listed in *Rolling Stone's* 500 Greatest Albums of All Time. She currently holds the record for most number ones on the weekly Billboard Chart for any female soloist, group leader, or duo member.



### Glen Ballard, Music

The composer of the Tony Award-winning *Jagged Little Pill*. Glen Ballard is a composer, record producer, and lyricist. He is best known for co-writing and producing the 1995 album, *Jagged Little Pill*, for which he earned a Grammy. He has written songs for artists such as Michael Jackson, Evelyn King, Lea Salonga, and Paula Abdul. Ballard has also ventured more into musical theatre, providing music and lyrics for *Ghost: The Musical* (2011) and *Back to the Future: The Musical* (2020).



### Diablo Cody, Book

The book writer of the Tony Award-winning *Jagged Little Pill*. Diablo Cody is a writer and producer. Cody first gained recognition with her blog-turned-memoir, *Candy Girl: A Year in the Life of an Unlikely Stripper* (2005). Cody is the screenwriter of the 2008 hit film, *Juno*, which she received an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay, the BAFTA Award for Best Original Screenplay, the Independent Spirit Award for Best First Screenplay, and the Writers Guild of America Award for Best Original Screenplay. She has created and written other projects for the screen such as *United States of Tara* (SHOWTIME, 2009-2010); *Jennifer's Body* (2009); *Young Adult* (2011); *Ricki and the Flash* (2012); and *Tully* (2018). She won the Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical for *Jagged Little Pill*.



### Diane Paulus, Director

Originally directed the Broadway debut of *Jagged Little Pill*. Diane Paulus is a director and producer. She is the artistic director of the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Known for her progressive stagings of musicals, Paulus has directed shows such as *Hair*, *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*, *Pippin*, and *1776*. She has been nominated for the Tony Award for Best Direction of a Musical four times.



### Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Choreographer

The original choreographer of the Tony Award-winning *Jagged Little Pill*. Cherkaoui is a dancer, choreographer, and director. He has made over 50 choreographic pieces and received two Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Dance Production, three Ballet Tanz awards for best choreographer (2008, 2011, 2017), the KAIROS Prize (2009) and the Europe Prize Theatrical Realities (2018).

### Additional Creative Team:

Riccardo Hernandez, Set Design  
Emily Rebholz, Costume Design  
Justin Townsend, Lighting Design

Finn Ross, Video Design  
Bryan Perri, Musical Direction  
Tom Kitt, Arrangements

# WHAT IS A JUKEBOX MUSICAL?

A jukebox musical is a genre of musical theatre where all of the songs in the production have already existed somewhere else. Typically, the songs will be taken from popular music, usually dedicated to a single artist or group. In the 17th and 18th centuries, lots of opera and operettas would use popular songs for parody. Musical comedies and burlesques in the 19th century began to interpolate genres such as spirituals, minstrel songs, and other popular music into them.

Using a melody—or portions of a melody—from a previously recorded song but re-recording the melody instead of sampling it.

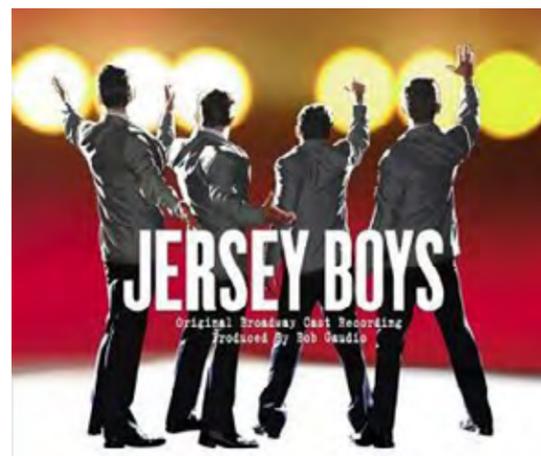
Some examples of jukebox musicals include:



*Ain't Misbehavin'* (1970), using the music of Fats Waller



*Mamma Mia!* (1999), based on the music of ABBA



*Jersey Boys* (2005), based on the music of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons



*American Idiot* (2009), based on the music of Green Day



*Summer: The Donna Summer Musical* (2017), based on the music of Donna Summer

# JUKEBOX MUSICAL ACTIVITY COMPARE & CONTRAST

Read the lyrics and context for each version of *You Oughta Know*. Highlight the changes you see and reflect on why each change was needed. What are the similarities? Do you feel like it keeps the same feeling for both versions?

## “You Oughta Know” (Original Version)

**CONTEXT:** The song is about the end of a relationship that Morissette experienced. Though she has not confirmed which of her former partners she specifically wrote the song about, many have claimed it is about them.

I want you to know, that I am happy for you  
I wish nothing but the best for you both

An older version of me  
Is she perverted like me?  
Would she go down on you in a theater?  
Does she speak eloquently  
And would she have your baby?  
I'm sure she'd make a really excellent mother

'Cause the love that you gave that we made  
Wasn't able to make it enough for you  
To be open wide, no  
And every time you speak her name  
Does she know how you told me  
You'd hold me until you died  
'Til you died, but you're still alive

And I'm here, to remind you  
Of the mess you left when you went away  
It's not fair, to deny me  
Of the cross I bear that you gave to me  
You, you, you oughta know

You seem very well, things look peaceful  
I'm not quite as well, I thought you should know  
Did you forget about me, Mr. Duplicity?  
I hate to bug you in the middle of dinner  
It was a slap in the face  
How quickly I was replaced  
And are you thinking of me when you fuck her?

## “You Oughta Know” (Musical Version)

**CONTEXT:** Frankie and Jo are best friends, but are also lovers. Frankie, unaware that their relationship is more than casual, falls in love with Phoenix, one of their classmates. After Frankie reveals this to Jo, Jo uses this song to end their relationship.

[JO]

I want you to know, that I am happy for you  
I wish nothing but the best for you both

The perfect version of me  
Is he perverted like me?  
Would he go down on you in a theater?  
So he speaks eloquently  
And you can have his baby?  
I'm sure you'd make a really excellent mother

'Cause the love that you gave that we made  
Wasn't able to make it enough for you  
To be open wide, no  
And every time you speak his name  
Does he know why you told me  
You'd be there until you died  
'Til you died, but you're still alive

And I'm here, to remind you  
Of the mess you left when you went away  
It's not fair, to deny me  
Of the cross I bear that you gave to me  
You, you, you oughta know

You seem very well, things look peaceful  
I'm not quite as well, I thought you should know  
Did you forget about me, Mrs. Duplicity?  
I hate to give him so much to live up to  
It was a slap in the face  
How quickly I was replaced  
And are you thinking of me when he fucks you?

(ORIGINAL VERSION) cont

'Cause the love that you gave that we made  
Wasn't able to make it enough for you  
To be open wide, no  
And every time you speak her name  
Does she know how you told me  
You'd hold me until you died  
'Til you died, but you're still alive

And I'm here, to remind you  
Of the mess you left when you went away  
It's not fair, to deny me  
Of the cross I bear that you gave to me  
You, you, you oughta know

'Cause the joke that you laid in the bed  
That was me and I'm not gonna fade  
As soon as you close your eyes, and you know it  
And every time I scratch my nails  
Down someone else's back I hope you feel it  
Well, can you feel it?

Well I'm here, to remind you  
Of the mess you left when you went away  
It's not fair, to deny me  
Of the cross I bear that you gave to me  
You, you, you oughta know  
Well I'm here, to remind you  
Of the mess you left when you went away  
It's not fair, to deny me  
Of the cross I bear that you gave to me

You, you, you oughta know

(MUSICAL VERSION) cont

'Cause the love that you gave that we made  
Wasn't able to make it enough for you  
To be open wide, no  
And every time you speak his name  
Does he know why you told me  
You'd be there until you died  
'Til you died, but you're still alive

And I'm here, to remind you  
Of the mess you left when you went away  
It's not fair, to deny me  
Of the cross I bear that you gave to me  
You, you, you oughta know

[JO & COMPANY]  
Ohh...

'Cause the joke that you laid in the bed, that was me  
And I'm not gonna fade as soon as you close your eyes  
And you know it (and you know it)  
And every time I scratch my nails  
Down someone else's back, I hope you feel it  
Well, can you feel it?

And I'm here, to remind you  
Of the mess you left when you went away  
It's not fair (it's not fair), to deny me  
Of the cross I bear that you gave to me  
You (you), you (you), you (you) oughta know  
And I'm here, to remind you  
Of the mess you left when you went away  
It's not fair, to deny me  
Of the cross I bear that you gave to me

[JO]  
You, you, you oughta know

Think of your favorite album that you have ever listened to.  
What if you were asked to adapt that album into a musical?  
How would you do so? Use the space below to dream of that.

COULD YOU  
HAVE YOUR OWN



# A BRIEF GUIDE TO LGBTQIA+ IDENTITIES

Courtesy of The Anne E. Casey Foundation

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION:** An enduring emotional and/or physical attraction (or non-attraction) to other people. Sexual orientation is fluid and encompasses a variety of labels, including gay, lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual, pansexual and asexual.



**LESBIAN:** A woman who is attracted, emotionally and/or physically, to other women.



**BISEXUAL:** A person who is attracted to people, regardless of gender identity.



**GAY:** A person who is attracted, emotionally and/or physically, to someone of the same gender. The term can be used by men, women or individuals who identify as nonbinary.



**TRANSGENDER:** A person whose gender identity and/or gender expression do not match their assigned sex at birth. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer.



**QUEER:** An adjective used by some people, particularly younger people, whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual. Queer was once used a pejorative term and has been reclaimed by some—but not all—members of the LGBTQ community.



**INTERSEX:** A person born with sex characteristics that are not typical for male or female bodies. Sex characteristics are physical features relating to sex—including chromosomes, genitals, hormones and other reproductive anatomy—as well as secondary features that emerge from puberty. Intersex is an umbrella term, and intersex characteristics and traits are not always apparent or identified at birth.



**ASEXUAL:** A person who is not sexually attracted others and has no desire to engage in sexual behavior. Asexuality differs from celibacy in that a person who is celibate is sexually attracted to others but chooses to abstain from sex.

## Gender Identity Guide

**GENDER IDENTITY** is a person's internal identification as male, female, something in between or something other than the two conventional gender options. A person's gender identity is not visible to others and can match or differ from their assigned sex at birth.

**CISGENDER:** A person whose gender identity matches the sex—male or female—originally identified on their birth certificate (i.e., people who are not transgender). Cisgender, which is pronounced sis-gender, describes only a person's gender identity—not their sexual or romantic attractions.

**ENBY:** A person who does not identify as exclusively male or exclusively female and usually prefers "they" as a pronoun. Enby is the phonetic pronunciation of "NB," which stands for nonbinary. Not all nonbinary individuals prefer or use this term.

**GENDER NONCONFORMING:** A person who does not adhere to the traditional expectations—in terms of their appearance or behavior—of their assigned gender. Some of these individuals identify as transgender but others, for example, masculine lesbians, do not.

**GENDER FLUID:** A person whose gender expression or gender identity—or both—changes over time. Not everyone whose gender identity or expression changes identifies as gender fluid.

**REMEMBER:**

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY ARE NOT ALWAYS THE SAME THING.** 😊

# THE CONTROVERSY OF

## ALANIS MORISSETTE'S jagged little pill

THE MUSICAL

Though *Jagged Little Pill* is a feat for a musical and explores a lot of topics related to mental health, queer identity, transracial adoption, drug addiction, sexual assault, and more, sometimes that does not always translate behind the scenes. The following article details some of the controversy surrounding *Jagged Little Pill*, especially as it relates to nonbinary identity.

### Actors' Equity to Investigate 'Jagged Little Pill' for Workplace Safety Issues

by Diep Tran Originally printed on Backstage.com | October 1, 2021

"Jagged Little Pill" may have won two Tony Awards but it has also become the site of multiple controversies around workplace safety and allegations of harm against its trans and nonbinary artists. As a result, four actors have left the production, and the show is currently under investigation by Actors' Equity Association.

"Jagged Little Pill," written by Diablo Cody and featuring the music of Alanis Morissette, features characters struggling with opioid addiction, sexual assault, and sexual identity.

Last week, an actor on "Jagged Little Pill," Nora Schell, posted on Twitter about why they left the show: "During previews for the Broadway run of 'Jagged Little Pill' I was intimidated, coerced and forced by multiple higher ups to put off CRITICAL AND NECESSARY [sic] surgery to remove growths from my vagina that were making me anemic. Surgery my doctor told me was urgent."

Schell wrote that they told the stage manager, company manager, and the creative team they needed surgery for their polycystic ovary syndrome: "I was struggling with on again off again anemia due to the amount of blood loss my PCOS was causing." They also wrote that they were coerced by the team at "Jagged Little Pill" to continue performing, even when they were "going in and out of consciousness," and collapsed backstage.

"I pleaded with the higher up who insisted I stay, and I begged for permission to go home and contact my doctor for an emergency appointment," they wrote. "I was told to push through."

Schell also alleged that one of the people who coerced them into performing was stage manager, Ira Mont, who is also an Equity member and vice president of Equity's national council. "This SM allowed me to be intimidated into performing when I was clearly not well," wrote Schell.

In response, Equity has said they have hired New York labor attorney Micah Wissinger to "conduct an independent review of the workplace at 'Jagged Little Pill' on Broadway," said the union in a statement. "A partner at Levy Ratner, Wissinger has extensive experience in labor and employment law, including conducting workplace investigations and representing transgender and gender non-conforming individuals." Schell is non-binary.

The producers of "Jagged Little Pill" also announced that they are launching an investigation. They have hired lawyer Jay Hewlin, of the Hewlin Group. Said producers Vivek J. Tiwary, Arvind Ethan David, and Eva Price in a joint statement: "We are deeply troubled by the recent claims that have been made by a former cast member. We met with our cast and members of our core creative team today to let them know we take this matter very seriously, and to share with them the actions we are taking in response."

Two actors in "Jagged Little Pill" also issued their own responses to Schell's statements. Celia Rose Gooding, who was Tony-nominated for the show but is now leaving it for "Star Trek: Strange New Worlds," posted on Twitter: "This is unacceptable. Nobody should have to put off necessary medical treatment for a show, ever."

Another cast member, Anthony Cipriano, also announced that they were not returning to the show, citing "the harm that many trans + non-binary and all marginalized folks on-stage cast members and off have endured throughout the years." He also wrote, "Representation, mental and physical health are extremely important. I'm hopeful for a more equitable future where the right changes and protection are put into action."

This is not the only controversy "Jagged Little Pill" has dealt with recently. The musical was also criticized for erasing non-binary narratives. In the pre-Broadway run of "Jagged Little Pill" in Boston, the character of Jo (played by Tony winner Lauren Patten) was perceived by many to be non-binary, using they/them pronouns. Yet when the show came to Broadway, Jo presented as a cis woman and the creative team denied that Jo was ever non-binary.

The producers released a statement clarifying they had sought to portray Jo as a character "on a gender expansive journey without a known outcome." They admitted they "made mistakes" in how they handled the character's evolution from Boston to Broadway. "In a process designed to clarify and streamline, many of the lines that signaled Jo as gender non-conforming, and with them, something vital and integral, got removed from Jo's character journey. Compounding our mistake, we then stated publicly and categorically that Jo was never written or conceived as non-binary. That discounted and dismissed what people saw and felt in this character's journey. We should not have done that."

Patten acknowledged the controversy around her character during her Tony Award acceptance speech for best featured actress. "I want to thank my trans and nonbinary friends and colleagues who have engaged with me in difficult conversations [and] that have joined me in dialogue about my character Jo."

In a Twitter post, Gooding referenced multiple issues the show's faced: "I cannot ignore the harm 'Jagged' has done to the trans and nonbinary community, including cast members on stage, off stage, and behind the scenes in the production-making process. They are owed a space to exist and perform free of transphobia, and the opportunity to tell their own stories."



Jade McLeod and the North American Touring Company of JAGGED LITTLE PILL.

FURTHER THINGS  
“YOU OUGHTA KNOW” (AND WATCH!)  
ABOUT

ALANIS MORISSETTE'S  
**jagged little pill**  
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Watch some of the original music videos for  
JAGGED LITTLE PILL!

 YOU OUGHTA KNOW



HAND IN MY POCKET 



Watch the  
 JAGGED LITTLE PILL  
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