

## INVISIBLE NO MORE—*BEETLEJUICE* GIVES AUDIENCE THE FRIGHT OF THEIR LIVES

By Isabella Venanzi

Prepare for a crazy ride guided by an even crazier bio-exorcist with a craving for chaos. That beautiful sound of laughter echoes through Dreyfoos Hall on December 19, 2023 when the cast of *BEETLEJUICE* takes the stage in this witty, nonsensical, and unmistakably hilarious musical.

Beetlejuice takes on the role of leading newly-deads, Adam and Barbara Maitland, to the afterlife. He is soon challenged by the strange and unusual Lydia Deetz—who relates to his feeling of being invisible.

Walking into the Kravis Center, the audience encounters an immersive atmosphere detailed by spooky house music and a dazzling illuminated sign that anticipates the arrival of none other than the ghost host himself. The opening sequence that introduces the show got a clear audience reaction: gasps and smiles dawned on the faces of the satisfied audience as they experienced a beloved story come to life (or death, in this show) in mere moments.

After such a chilling hook, a rather grim setting—a funeral—is established. The set design (David Korins) perfectly encapsulates the original source material, pulling plenty of inspiration from Tim Burton’s signature style. Through both “Prologue: Invisible” and “The Whole ‘Being Dead’ Thing,” the ensemble convey such clear and engaging energy.

Not to mention the outstanding performance delivered by the enthralling Justin Collette (Beetlejuice). The moment the spotlight hit him as he sat on that closed casket, he commanded the space. His choices were candidly original, and he held this consistent ability to connect with the audience through various fourth wall breaks. With a good understanding of the crowd, Collette navigated complex comedic timing that suited what the audience reacted the best to. For instance, in the end of the second act, Collette delivered his punchline, then managed to drag out an uproar of laughter for around four minutes. He did not have to say a word. Just through his physical presence alone, Collette easily manipulated the show to best accommodate what his audience found the most appealing. Not to mention, Collette possesses extreme vocal flexibility. Of course, he upheld that raspy character voice for over two hours, but also flipped into these high ranges that were nothing less than impressive.

It is impossible to compliment the talent of the cast without mentioning Isabella Esler (Lydia). During her two power ballads, “Dead Mom” and “Home,” Esler flawlessly executes challenging vocal riffs and belts like there is no tomorrow. Aside from her

ungodly vocal skill, Esler incorporates many pivotal moments that flesh out Lydia. Her emotionally-driven choices make Lydia more compelling to watch, especially during “Home,” the climax of the second act. Her switch from hopelessness to triumph and perseverance gives the show a new tone and delivers a powerful punch.

Accompanied beside her are the fabulous Megan McGinnis (Barbara) and Will Burton (Adam). Their naive energy and comedic style are like no other character in the show and they play it extremely well. Their innocent nature vastly juxtaposes Beetlejuice’s absurd humor and creates this dynamic clash of personalities. While the pair were sufficiently funny, they were often overshadowed by Collette’s presence and did not elicit the same reaction from the audience as he did. Regardless, they were undeniably talented with sharp diction, especially during their patter sections in “Ready Set, Not Yet.” Burton himself made a tiny error that most likely flew over everyone’s head, when he repeated a lyric twice, but was quick to cover up the small mistake and make it seem like a natural choice the character would have made. Their relationship onstage with Lydia (Isabella Esler) was heartwarming and lovely to watch unfold. Similarly, the comedic legends, Sarah Litzsinger (Delia) and Jesse Sharp (Charles) had electric chemistry that brought so much life onto the stage. Both actors played off one another so effortlessly, it was hard to withhold a laugh whenever they exchanged dialogue.

The ensemble, as previously mentioned, set such a high standard for the rest of the show. Kris Roberts (Maxine Dean/Juno/Neighbor) was one featured actress that—on multiple occasions—got quite a laugh from the audience. The ensemble was amazingly flexible in their capabilities. Their dancing skills were not often utilized, so when they were (in “That Beautiful Sound” and “The Whole ‘Being Dead’ Thing, Part 2”) it was effective and stood out.

There were many gimmicks and tricks that added to the absurdness of the show. For instance, Barbara’s hand catches on fire, Beetlejuice sets off a false smoke bomb, and a full chorus emerges from the dusty attic in a dreamlike scenario. All of these simultaneously worked and made the show even more humorous. All of the sound effects (Peter Hylenski) effectively elevated the gags throughout, and the very functional set allowed the actors free reign over their use of the space.

There were moments when the actors were hard to hear over the booming power of the orchestra, nothing too distracting, but I am sure for those members of the audience who were not previously familiar with the show, some lyrics may have gotten lost.

The costume design was simply inspired (William Ivey Long) as it accurately characterized each actor on stage. Not to mention, they were absolutely stunning to look at. Overall, the direction of the show (Alex Timbers) was impactful and entertaining. The

audience that night was more than willing to express their love for the show after the final curtain fell.

If you love the strange and unusual, I could not recommend this show enough for you. BEETLEJUICE runs at the [Kravis Center](#) from December 19 to December 24, 2023 and will have you dying of laughter.