

Ghost: The Musical at Temple Theatre Is a Very Satisfying and Deeply Moving Production

by MELANIE SIMMONS • OCTOBER 20, 2018



Hailey Best and Dave Toole star as Molly Jensen and Sam Wheat (photo by Melissa Gross)

Temple Theatre of Sanford is contributing to the Halloween spirit with an endearing production of ***Ghost: The Musical***, playing Thursday-Sunday, now through Nov. 4th. The musical was adapted from the popular 1990 film, starring Patrick Swayze, Demi Moore, and Whoopi Goldberg.

Adaptations can often suffer in comparison to its original work, and the first staging of ***Ghost: The Musical*** on Broadway struggled with an overabundance of cast and complication in its efforts to capture the magic of the original. Over time, the production was stripped down to a much smaller cast and simpler story line, with much better success.

The intimate staging by **Bill Saunders** at the Temple Theatre focuses on the intense emotional connections between the four main characters in a very satisfying and deeply moving production. The story follows the movie's plot point for point, so this review will proceed with some spoilers for anyone not familiar with the film.



La'Tonya Wiley stars as Oda Mae Brown (photo by Melissa Gross)

SPOILERS

Sculptor and potter Molly Jensen (played by **Hailey Best**) and New York City banker Sam Wheat (**Dave Toole**) are lovers bonded in an intensely passionate romance. Their world seems utterly charmed; indeed, the only problem that this couple seems to have is that Molly is happy to say “I love you,” whereas Sam is uncomfortable replying with anything but “Ditto.” Sam also fears that things are too good to be true and happiness will slip through his fingers, a foreshadowing that wastes no time coming true.

Sam and Molly encounter a mugger on their walk home from dinner, and Sam is fatally shot. But their bond transcends life and death; and Sam finds himself an anguished ghost, unable to leave the side of a grieving Molly. His search to find out who murdered him — and why —

fills the rest of the story with some remarkable plot twists and a satisfying blend of humor and emotional depth.

Dave Toole and Hailey Best play the leading lovers beautifully, and their strong vocals infuse the musical numbers with passion and heartache. Their chemistry in the opening scenes is palpable, although it seems to fade somewhat when Sam dies.



Andrew Wade (center) stars as Carl Bruner (photo by Melissa Gross)

Toole's Sam is more baffled and lost as a ghost than agonized by the injustice of his stolen life. Similarly, Best's Molly — at times — came across almost annoyed, instead of anguished, by Sam's death. Their chemistry reignited at the end of the show for an intensely moving finale, so with a few more performances under their belts, they are sure to smooth out the middle of the show.

Andrew Wade brought an admirable amount of charm to Carl Bruner, Sam's best friend and coworker who has more to do with Sam's tragic end than meets the eye. But it was **La'Tonya Wiley's** Oda Mae Brown that truly brought life (pun intended) to the production. A con woman with a practiced psychic-reader scam that Sam stumbles across, she — and Sam — are both shocked to find that she can actually hear ghosts.

Sam conscripts Oda Mae to speak on his behalf, warning Molly about the danger that she is in, while unraveling the mystery around his murder. La'Tonya Wiley doesn't let Whoopi Goldberg's Oscar®-winning performance daunt her, making the character her own without trying to reinvent her. **Thao Ngyuen** was captivating in several supporting roles, a standout in a strong ensemble cast.



Dave Toole (left), Hailey Best, and Andrew Wade star in Ghost: The Musical(photo by Melissa Gross)

END OF SPOILERS

The show has all the humor, heart, and passion of the original movie, with a bevy of new songs (and some beautiful treatments of the **Righteous Brothers'** haunting "Unchained Melody") and dance numbers cleverly choreographed by **Jacob Toth**. The set design is versatile enough to shift seamlessly from Brooklyn loft to NYC street to psychic parlor and everything in between.

David Castaneda's lighting design conjures up city skylines and supernatural elements beautifully, although some of the special effects used to achieve ghostly activities are well-conceived but needed some smoothing out during Thursday's 2 p.m. matinee opening performance. And **Temple Theatre** producing artistic director **Peggy Taphorn's** costume design is well-suited to the characters, and shone quite literally during Oda Mae's flashier numbers.

Whether you're a fan of the film or a newcomer to this delightful story, you will be swept away by this show. Come prepared to laugh a lot, cry even more, and bring lots of **Kleenex®**.