



BA-DA-DA-BOMB: (from left) Adam Riegler, Jackie Hoffman, Bebe Neuwirth, Nathan Lane, Kevin Chamberlin, Krysta Rodriguez, Zachary James waste their talents in inept musical adaptation of *The Addams Family*. Photo: Joan Marcus

Theater Review

Neither creepy, kooky, ooky, or clever...

The Addams Family a major disappointment

The Addams Family

Book by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice

Music and lyrics by Andrew Lippa

Directed and designed by Phelim McDermott and Julian Crouch

Creative consultant, Jerry Zaks

The Lunt-Fontanne Theatre

205 West 46th Street

(877-250-2929), www.theaddamsfamilymusical.com

By David NouNou

There is nothing that excites a New York theatergoer more than reading about the arrival of a brand-new original musical on Broadway. It is hard to describe the feeling of anticipation that we may witness the coming of the next *Phantom*, *Rent* or *Wicked*, because nothing energizes and revitalizes Broadway more than to have a blockbuster and great word of mouth. Alas, *The Addams Family* isn't that musical. It falls in the category with Mel Brooks's recent, insipid musical adaptation of *Young Frankenstein* (hyped, bloated and dull) and *Carrie, The Musical* (minus the camp value and fun). It doesn't revitalize Broadway in a good way; it saps out whatever goodwill the season has already created. When it was announced that Nathan Lane was going to be in this show, I thought what a brilliant idea to have this macabre musical seen through the eyes of Uncle Fester. Unfortunately, it was noted that he was playing Gomez Addams, and here starts one of the many problems with the show.

One of the major flaws with *The Addams Family* is the lackluster book by Marshall Brickman and Rick Elice, or the lack thereof. Instead of extending the jet-black humor that Charles Addams created in his legendary New Yorker cartoons, they went off into their own tangent and came up with a lame storyline and cliché-ridden punch lines that are not so much as moan-inducing as much as simply painful to watch and not at all funny. If pain inducement was their goal, then they succeeded. The show is loaded with lines that even Borscht Belt comics would cringe at if they had to say them. The second glaring problem here is that every musical needs a solid score, but we are left with a middling one by Andrew Lippa. Instead of clever ditties or ghoulish delicious songs, we are forced to sit through an unmemorable score with random rhythm schemes. Production numbers like "Full Disclosure," in which the Addams family and their future in-laws, the Beinekes, sing about their true selves at a lavish dinner, are less funny and catchy than simply pointless. The closing number for the first act is so stultifying and inane, I was tempted to make a mad dash for the exit during intermission.

The storyline in a nutshell: Wednesday Addams (Krysta Rodriguez) is nearly grown up and wants to get married. She and her boyfriend, Lucas (Wesley Taylor) want their respective parents' approval, so they decide to arrange a meeting of the two families. Wednesday requests a "normal" night from her family without all their oddities and quirks. The boy's family is from Ohio (insert Ohio jokes here), so naturally

they are straight-laced and uptight, with the mother having a penchant for rhyming her sentences. Neither family is approving of the upcoming nuptials, but things have a way of working out in musical comedies.

Now the hard part: to have to comment on Broadway legends like two-time Tony winners Nathan Lane and Bebe Neuwirth. Lane as Gomez does a questionable Spanish accent that I'm still trying to decipher what part of Central or South America it is from. He not so much delivers his lines as much as attacks them like a voracious animal. He has command of the stage and knows that the audience is there for him, but instead of going for the macabre, he goes for his shtick: The delivery we are so familiar with.

Ms. Neuwirth, on the other hand, has all the glamour ghoul elements of *Morticia*, but the lack of material sabotages her. She is left with Mr. Lane's discarded scraps. She has one good moment near the end of act two where she lifts up her skirts and does an unabashed dance in "Tango de Amor," showing off her stocking-clad legs. Oh, those gorgeous gams. What is glaringly missing is the offbeat chemistry *Morticia* and Gomez are supposed to have with each other. In the TV show and feature films based on the series, *Morticia* and Gomez shared a creepy, winsome attraction and sexual sparks for each other, but it's totally nonexistent here.

The only other member of the cast that captures the essence of his character and gives it his all is Kevin Chamberlin as Uncle Fester. He inhabits his role, light bulb and all, and has a charming love song with his paramour, the moon, in "The Moon and Me." Jackie Hoffman isn't so much Grandmama as Mammy Yokum from *L'il Abner*. Why didn't "creative consultant" Jerry Zaks (who took over direction of the show) rein in this performance and give it some nuance? Two-time Tony Award nominees Terrance Mann and Carolee Carmello as the boy's parents, the Beinekes (from Ohio), give stock negligible caricature performances.

The shame of it is that *The Addams Family* had so much pedigree and came with such great expectations. The 1960s TV show, starring Carolyn Jones and John Astin, was cute and full of dry, one-of-a-kind gallows humor that gave it an edge, but it was also charming in a dark but innocuous way. This musical adaptation, instead of carrying us into blissful other worldly mirth, made me feel like I was being bludgeoned to death with a sledgehammer of old, hackneyed, trite, and stale material. It's a pity that such a witty icon of American pop culture like *The Addams Family* was adapted into such a moribund, hollow musical when the concept could have had such great comic potential.

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