



Beaches On Broadway-No Waves, Just Heart

BY: Robert Charles Jowaiszas



Beaches is a Broadway musical adapted from the 1988 Garry Marshall film starring Bette Midler and Barbara Hershey, based on the novel by Iris Rainer Dart. The story follows two lifelong friends, Cee Cee Bloom and Bertie (Hillary Whitney), as they move through fame, distance, personal growth, and loss while holding onto a complicated but enduring friendship.

Before the show

I went in already knowing the story, so I dressed a bit more formal than usual and even brought a pocket handkerchief—just in case. My mom always had a fondness for stories about female friendship in films and books like *Beaches*, *Thelma & Louise*, *Steel Magnolias*, and *Little Women*. As a young man, I probably saw them more simply than I should have. Later, I came to understand the depth behind that kind of bond—the importance of friendship, loyalty, and shared history.

It also connects in a quieter way to real life. My best friend moved to Florida last year after more than 20 years of knowing each other. We don't talk as much as we used to—he's busy, I'm busy—but we still stay in contact, and that connection doesn't really fade.

Coming out of Grand Central, I was running a little late. New York City was crowded as always, but I still managed to grab a hot dog with all the fixings on the way. Wearing a light collared dress shirt, I quickly learned I should've grabbed extra napkins.

Approaching the Majestic Theatre on 44th Street, a mellow but excited crowd was already building, everyone eager for the show. People were mostly talking about the movie and the lead actresses—couples and friends sharing that pre-show anticipation. I went solo. My girlfriend had to pull out last minute due to a family situation.

The Majestic Theatre itself has long been one of Broadway's landmark houses, known for hosting major musicals in the heart of the Theatre District. Inside, there's an old-Broadway feel—grand, steady, and built for big emotions.

Showtime

What stands out most is that this is a stage-driven piece, not an attempt to recreate the film. There is no real need to compare it to the 1988 movie version of *Beaches*. The production fully embraces theatre as its own form.

The production opens with Cee Cee Bloom already framed in the world of a television performer, setting up her identity as a performer before the story moves back into her earlier life with Bertie. From there, the show shifts through different stages their lives—childhood, young adulthood, and later years—almost like chapters unfolding on stage.



Jessica Vosk as Cee Cee

Rather than relying on elaborate sets, the staging is intentionally minimal and that choice supports the story telling. The use of the younger and older versions of Cee Cee and Bertie helps guide the audience through their shared and separate experiences.

Directors Lonny Price and Matt Cowart bring a complementary approach. Price (known for his work on productions like *Sweeney Todd*) leans into actor-driven storytelling, while Cowart (known for his work on productions like *Sunset Boulevard*) focuses on structure and clarity. Together, they shape *Beaches* into something intimate, where performance carries more weight than spectacle.

Once the show got going, the cast became the driving force on stage. Jessica Vosk brings powerful vocals to Cee Cee Bloom, along with sharp comedic timing. Her performance is brash and larger-than-life early on, but vulnerability gradually emerges as the story unfolds.



Kelli Barrett (Bertie) & Jessica Vosk

Kelli Barrett plays Bertie with a more solemn, steady presence. Her performance is grounded and reflective, offering an emotional balance to Cee Cee's expressive nature. The contrast between them keeps the friendship at the center of the show.

The younger versions, played by Samantha Schwartz and Zeya Grace, help establish that bond early. Samantha, clearly a crowd favorite, stands out with confidence and energy as young Cee Cee, while Zeya plays young Bertie with a quieter, more observant tone that carries into her later emotional arc.



Zeya Grace (Little Bertie) & Samantha Schwartz (Little Cee Cee)

The male supporting roles include Brett Theissen as John, who plays a role in Cee Cee's early career path, and Ben Jacoby as Michael, Bertie's husband. His presence reflects the more difficult pressures in Bertie's personal life. Both performances were solid but intentionally restrained, as the production keeps the focus firmly on Cee Cee and Bertie's friendship, which remains its strongest element.



Brent Thiessen (left) and Ben Jacoby (right). Credit to Marc J. Franklin

I spoke with a few audience members after the show. One woman wiping tears said, "It's so sad... but beautiful in a way. Friendship is complicated. I felt that." She introduced herself as Bernice from Astoria, Queens.

A man named Jacob from Connecticut added, "Definitely not the movie you know, but I could feel it."

Danielle, a woman who appeared to be in her early to mid 20's, from Riverdale New Jersey, "Seeing a Broadway show is always special. I've seen the movie, of course it's very emotional when you see it live."

A younger audience member, Connie, sat with her mother, visibly emotional and holding her hand. When I asked her reaction, her mother gently stepped in and said, "Can't you see?" and tapped my arm with a smile.

Overall, *Beaches on Broadway* delivers a heartfelt telling of a familiar story, carried by strong central performances and a clear emotional focus on friendship. The production keeps things simple, but that simplicity serves the storytelling, allowing the relationship between Cee Cee and Bertie to stay at the center throughout.

While some supporting elements could be expanded, the strength of the piece lies in its emotional clarity and how naturally it connects with the audience. It's not about spectacle—it's about feeling, and that's what lingers.



Schwartz, Ryon, Vosk Barrett, Ogea, Grace as CEE CEE and Bertie

After the show

After the show I took a selfie in front of the Majestic Theatre marquee with "Beaches" glowing behind me. I sent it to both my girlfriend and my best friend.

Soon after, my phone lit up. My best friend texted: "Dude... that beard, really?" followed by a hysterical meme.

I couldn't reply—I had 17 minutes to catch the Metro-North back home, moving through a crowded Time Square. When I was boarding the train, he texted me again "I miss you. Call me." That message stayed with me, echoing the show's theme of connection and distance in a way I didn't expect.