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## THE CULTUREBOT GUIDE TO EINSTEIN ON THE BEACH

The infamous **EINSTEIN ON THE BEACH** returns to BAM this month from September 14-23, 2012. The first fully staged production of this legendary opera in 20-plus years has the original collaborators at the helm: composer Philip Glass and director Robert Wilson are in charge, along with Lucinda Childs, who was a lead performer in the first 1976 version and went on to choreograph the 1984 and 1992 productions.

Descriptions like “landmark,” “unforgettable,” and “revelatory” are tossed around. Considering this opera can be witnessed with just slightly more frequency than Halley’s Comet, shows are already largely sold-out, [but presumably tickets can be finagled by the lucky few.](#)

Once you’ve scored your ticket, once catch remains: there are no scheduled pauses or intermissions during this four-and-a-half-hour, non-narrative marathon. The audience is supposed to make its own choices, but of course, if you’ve bartered your first child for a seat (or let’s be honest, here in NYC, your apartment), you might be paralyzed by the dilemma of when to stay and when to go.

**CULTUREBOT** managed to infiltrate the highly guarded compound where **EINSTEIN** is being resurrected and talk to an insider about how best to enjoy this legendary, but daunting, work. With no further ado, we present the concise, editorialized scene-by-scene analysis of **EINSTEIN**, down to the minute.

## A PREFATORY NOTE FROM THE INSIDER

As an insider, take my word for it: **EINSTEIN ON THE BEACH** is not intended to be viewed in one sitting. There are certainly some die-hard Philip Glass and/or Robert Wilson fans who can accomplish this feat but it is not recommended for the uninitiated. Unless you have chemical help, taking breaks is necessary. Naps, walks around the block, and cocktail/bathroom breaks are highly encouraged. **I also do recommend staying until the end.**

First off, the running time of Einstein is four and a half hours. Really. The curtain time at BAM is 7pm, which means the bows will start at 11:30, provided the show goes smoothly (not guaranteed). Generally, once a scene starts, it tends to continue in that vein for the duration. The opera is in four acts, separated by “Knee Plays,” which serve as the overture, entr’actes, and apotheosis, respectively. These “joints” of the opera run between six and ten minutes each and are performed in front of a downstage drop.

## THE INSIDER’S BREAKDOWN

The first **Knee Play** begins promptly at 7:00, after a prelude that starts when the house doors open.

Act One opens with **Train (23 minutes)**. Train sets the tone and pace of the show, as well as introduces the first musical theme. You’ll have a better idea after watching this scene of how your patience for **EINSTEIN** will hold up.

After a slow and substantial set change, the next scene and musical theme is **Trial (60 minutes)**. This is the longest and most repetitive portion of the evening, and is consequently the most salient to many. As with much of EINSTEIN, once the scene is going, not much changes, so it's a good time for your first bathroom or refreshment break. In fact, you may better notice the subtle differences onstage if you leave and come back 15 to 20 minutes later.

After another **Knee Play**, Act Two begins with the first **Field Dance (20 minutes)**. Don't miss it! Lucinda Childs' ever-shifting choreography matches the relentless repetition of Glass's score, sung by two sopranos; Robert Wilson's hand is evident only in the lighting; and a spaceship makes a cameo appearance.

**Night Train (20 minutes)** is a calmer variation of the first musical theme, sung by a male/female duo in the pit. It's some of my favorite music in the show. Onstage, there's a simple duet that rewards the patient and attentive viewer with some of the funniest material of the night. The less patient and attentive should grab another drink.

**Knee Play Three** is performed a cappella by the entire chorus.

**Trial/Prison (30 minutes)** starts identically to the first **Trial**, then changes drastically a few minutes in. The majority of this scene is dominated by the "Supermarket" speech, (originally performed by Childs), repeated 20-plus times and thus considered significant by some. If you had enough of Trial the first time around, skip this scene.

**Field Dance Two (20 minutes)** is sung by the full chorus with the violinist playing Einstein onstage. If you enjoyed the first **Field Dance**, you'll want to stick around for this one.

The ever-popular **Knee Play Four** is performed by the male choristers.

Act Four begins with **Building**, a virtuosic **15-minute** piece for saxophone. Friends of the sax will be delighted; enemies should have (another) drink. **Building** is the only glimpse of color in the production; all the other sets and costumes are black and white.

**Building** is followed by **Bed (20 minutes)**, which contains one of the most iconic images in EINSTEIN: the bar of light. It's the only actor onstage for this only aria in the opera, sung by a mezzo soprano.

The relative calm of the previous two scenes is violently broken by the climatic finale, **Spaceship (15 minutes)**. You'll want to be back in your seat for this essential and visually exciting scene, as the minimalism of the production is mercilessly and loudly beaten to death.

EINSTEIN then concludes with the surprisingly poignant **Knee Play Five**.

The patient and attentive will be rewarded, but know your limits and good luck!

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