

BELLA Magazine

LIFE IS BELLA!

By Jessica Licciardello

The best way I can describe it is—feeling unlimited child-like curiosity, and having the freedom to pursue it relentlessly. As the days roll on since I experienced Sleep No More, the more each moment replays in my mind like a tape on repeat, and the more I wish I could have been in five places at once. But you can only be in one, and that is the magic draw of this incredible production that sits inconspicuously amongst art galleries and industrial architecture in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan.

Before the show, I dined at the rooftop wonderland also known as Gallow Green, where although still in the dimension of normal reality, the mood seamlessly lends itself to the mysterious noir vibe that resonates throughout the McKittrick Hotel. In the elevator, I was able to take postcards advertising each attraction at the Hotel, which were designed in a vintage style and beautifully printed. I asked the elevator operator how many floors the hotel is, and he replied, “It’s a mystery!” I chuckled, and then realized the ride I was in for.

Once in Gallow Green, I was able to enjoy seasonal cuisine and signature cocktails, including the “Sleep No More” which is a beautifully mixed elixir of vodka, elderflower, butterfly-pea flowers, citrus, and cider. I was able to sit with the hotel’s Publicity Envoy, whose enthusiasm for the space and productions held there was truly inspiring. She, like the entire crew, fiercely guards the show’s secrets. But it is this mystery that pulls us to want to know even more. After my amazing meal which included salmon, butternut squash, and key lime pie—and maybe another cocktail... I was ready for showtime.

This satiated and slightly spirited state I was now in was the perfect transition to the Sleep No More experience. I took the advice of the publicist and wore comfortable clothes, and shoes, which is a must, as you are walking up and down stairways and exploring rooms. I also recommend dressing in layers, as there were times I wanted to cool off and others where I wanted long sleeves.

There are some moments you are completely alone in a room exploring its intricacies, and then you will see a scene playing out down the hall which you can choose to follow or not. The Shakespearean-esque tagline is, “Fortune Favors the Bold,” and it is indeed true. I had the treat of interacting with an actor during a scene once I garnered the courage to stand close to him during his performance. I must say, I now feel part of the “club” and wish to guard the secrets just as much as everyone else, but I will tell you that if you surrender to it, it is truly an unforgettable and thought-provoking experience that will leave you wanting more.

After the performance (approximately 2.5 hours after I went into the space, which felt like too short even though I was somewhat sweaty and tired from wanting to run in five directions at once) I relaxed and regrouped at the Manderley Bar, which is a Jazz-age vibe cocktail bar with live music that runs during the entirety of the show and afterwards (in which it’s open to the public!) Here I was soothed by the sounds of Julia Haltigan and the accompanying Maximilian Martell Trio, who were impeccable in both performance and atmosphere.

In closing, I would highly recommend the experience of the shows at the McKittrick Hotel, as well as dining at Gallow Green. I am already planning my next visit to Sleep No More so I can explore even more! Be sure to visit [their website](https://mckittrickhotel.com)(<https://mckittrickhotel.com>) to see all the events happening, and let me know what you think!

BONUS INTERVIEW:

I had the privilege of asking the amazing jazz singer and professional musician Julia Haltigan some questions about her experience with the show:



*Julia Haltigan and the Maximilian Martell Trio at Manderley Bar –
Photography by Jessica Licciardello*

The Sleep No More experience feels, to me as an audience member, like an alternate universe where the actors and musicians live there on a ghostly loop of performance. How do you feel approaching the performance in this space, and what is the experience like for you?

Yes, that's a great depiction of the show! I've seen the show a number of times and, honestly, it feels that way to perform in it as much as it does to experience it as an audience member. The show does such a great job of creating an all-encompassing environment that takes over your senses for the length of your stay at The McKittrick. When I slip into my dress and exit the dressing room I feel like I become an alternate version of myself who exists, like you said, in the ghostly loop that is McKittrick.

Part of the magic of the show is the clothing and film-noir vintage vibe of the performers. How do you go about picking the dresses and attire worn on stage for a performance here?

We have an amazing wardrobe team at the McKittrick, lead by Lauren Cordes and the twins, Juli and Alex Abene. These ladies are fierce and

have impeccable taste. They know exactly the right vibe and cut for each of the cast members, needless to say, my dress fits like a glove and sparkles like a diamond. I never want to take it off! As a performer, I think one of the coolest things about Sleep No More is the hugely talented teams that are behind each aspect of the show. Costumes, choreography, performance, music, installation; each department incorporates so many genres of art and creativity to create this magical experience. There's an amazing and diverse community of artists in that building and it feels really special to be a part of it.

How did you get involved with the Sleep No More production, and how has this experience shaped your music career outside of the show?

I was asked to be a jazz singer in the Manderley Bar years ago and eagerly said yes. I had already seen the show a couple of times and was honored that they had asked me. Coming from a rock background (which I'm not sure I disclosed when saying yes to the role of jazz singer), I was a bit overwhelmed learning both the world of jazz and the world of theater at the same time. However, once I got the hang of it, it became one of my favorite things to do! Getting to sing those old standards on a regular basis really allows you to explore and get familiar with your own voice. It's helped me to become more comfortable taking risks vocally because once you become so familiar with how a song goes, you're able to start pushing boundaries and putting your own spin on it. My experience working within Sleep No More has also made me realize how much I love being a part of a larger production. I love playing a role in a diverse show made up of many moving parts to create one giant, epic experience.

Can you tell us about the band you perform with? They are all amazing musicians!

What's cool about our band (and singers) is that there are multiple players for each instrument so we rotate shifts and get to play with a different grouping of musicians every night, keeping the performance new and fresh for every audience. Performing together so often, we've all become really familiar with each other's musical sensibilities and we can play off of the subtle differences in the way each musician approaches the tunes. It's really fun to work with such talented musicians.

Are there any favorite nuances of the show for you that you can share with

our readers? Or any “easter egg” type clues they should look out for if they do visit?

I personally don't like to give out any clues because I think it's better to go into the show knowing absolutely nothing. It's much more exciting that way than being consumed with what you're "supposed to" know or experience and feeling worried that you're missing out on something. The show is designed so that no matter where you are or what you're doing, you're on a unique and personal journey. They advise that its best if you separate from your friends and go your own way and I agree, even though I was too scared to do so myself the first time I saw the show... hahaha! But be brave! Nothing is going to pop out from under a bed and get you.

What do you hope people can take away from their experience at Sleep No More?

I hope people come away from it feeling like they left reality for a short period of time. It's a big playground in there and there's so much to see and experience. You're stepping into a whole other universe so try to relax and allow yourself to enjoy all the nuances, all the magical performances going on, all the cool rooms and installations and don't be too concerned about what you're not seeing. Explore! How cool is it to go to a show where multiple performances are happening at the same time and that they intertwine and cross paths. It always amazes me how the choreography spans multiple scenes and rooms and floors of the building—How they time that all out so perfectly. It's a special show for sure!

You can follow Julia on her

[Instagram\(https://www.instagram.com/juliahaltigan/\)](https://www.instagram.com/juliahaltigan/)

and see more about her music and

performance schedule on her

[website\(http://www.juliahaltigan.com\)](http://www.juliahaltigan.com).