

James Monroe Iglehart

By Iris Wiener

Best Performance by an Actor in a Featured Role in a Musical, *Aladdin*

“A lot of Genie is me,” Iglehart says of his beloved take on the whimsical character he embodies in *Aladdin*. “If you look at Genie and me, he’s me with the volume turned up to about 15. He does all the things that I think about doing in real life that you technically can’t do because we’re supposed to be respectable, normal people in public! You’re not supposed to jump around and break out into song and you’re not supposed to just grab things off the wall and use them as props. That’s so me.”

Iglehart finally gets to show every bit of his goofy, heartfelt self in the Disney classic adapted from the 1992 film. However, this is not to say that he didn’t wear his heart on his sleeve as Bobby in *Memphis*, a performance that put him on the map. However, in *Aladdin* he continually gets the rare mid-show standing ovation after his show-stopping rendition of “Friend Like Me,” leaving audiences talking Tony at intermission.

Iglehart considers how he made the character a new Broadway treasure. “I was originally doing a lot of Robin Williams, but as we left the Seattle production, [director/choreographer] Casey Nicholaw said, ‘I want more of you in this. I want to see the James Monroe Iglehart genie. What does that look like?’” he recalls. “So I looked at videos of Cab Calloway, Fats Waller and Duke Ellington and I said, ‘What was it that made them so cool?’ There was a smoothness and a confidence that they had from the moment that they walked in the room, and the audience was theirs. Once I started emulating that, I was like, ‘Oh, Genie is mine now.’”

A man of many talents, Iglehart also raps with the freestyle hip-hop troupe Freestyle Love Supreme and is currently writing himself a one-man show based on stupid things he’s done in his own life (like being beaten up at a young age by an older girl and her gang, or trying to pick up a girl by singing Michigan J. Frog). However, one talent he only recently picked up was tap dancing, a skill with which he has become incredibly proficient throughout the process of becoming Genie. “Most of the people who tap on Broadway have been tapping since they were six,” he exclaims. “Learning how to look like I knew what I was doing within a year before we got to Broadway was quite the challenge.”

Receiving his first Tony nomination has not gone to Iglehart’s head. “My cat meows at me immediately when I get home as if to say, ‘Daddy, you’ve been gone all day, I don’t care who cheered for you, feed me now,’ he laughs. “My wonderful and beautiful wife also keeps me grounded. She’s like, ‘You’re Tony nominated! There’s still dishes in the sink.’ Well, we’ve crumpled that real quick!” But Iglehart does like to consider what he would like to do now that he has conquered his dream of being a Disney character on Broadway. “I would love to go to London to see theater but more importantly I want to go to the Tokyo Dome in Japan, eat sushi and watch professional wrestling,” he says of his own fantasy destination, à la Genie’s dream of visiting Hawaii. “Plus, they do have a Japanese Disney. I’d love to go there!”

