

WHY SCI VARIETY SHOW

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A live audience, music, dancing and high energy are all very rock 'n' roll - but are refraction, adolescent earth, and the Cardiff Giant? On Tuesday, October 21st at the Majestic Theater in Madison, the first ever Why Sci Variety Show proved that when music, art, and science collide, the result is a show full of facts and fun times.



Beesly rocking out with the house band, David Hecht and the Who Dat! (Ueda Photography)

Eric Wilcotts, Dean of the College of Letters & Science at UW-Madison, kicked off the show with a celebratory acknowledgment of the Wisconsin Science Festival's 15 years of curiosity and creative events, as well as a shout-out to the UW-Madison Division of the Arts, the show's coproducer, and festival sponsors. He then turned it over to Ben Rush, local Madison scientist and emcee extraordinaire, who welcomed Haddie McLean from the Wonders of Physics.



Haddie McClean dazzles the crowd with the Wonders of Physics. (Ueda Photography)

Wonders of Physics has been showcasing science across Wisconsin since 1984, and Haddie's presentation was no exception, as she gave an insightful index of refraction demo. Next up was AJ Juarez & Barrio Dance. AJ, founder and director, grew up in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he was surrounded by incredible dance and tight-knit neighborhoods where everyone looked out for one another. This kind of community that inspired the name Barrio, which means "neighborhood." They brought this rhythm and spirit to the stage in Madison, the city AJ and Barrio Dance now call home.



Barrio Dance brings the energy to the Majestic Theatre. (Ueda Photography)

After Barrio's energetic and moving performance, Ben brought out Annie Bauer, an assistant professor in the UW-Madison Department of Geoscience. Her research group studies the oldest rocks and minerals on Earth to decipher how the earliest continents formed, and also study how the Earth's atmosphere became oxygenated over the past 2.5 billion years. Bauer's research goal is to study how the Earth became a habitable planet, from deciphering the tectonic processes contributing to the earliest continents to precisely tracking the incremental rise of oxygen in the atmosphere, which boils down into the concept of Adolescent Earth and its first billion years. Annie's talk reflected on her research, which is as innovative as it is insightful.



Annie Bauer presents on the adolescence of Earth. (Ueda Photography)

A jam-packed first half of the variety show led to an intermission, but not before the Wisconsin Science Festival's much beloved mascot, Beesly the honey bee, gave a showstopping dance performance. During the break, presenters could catch their breath and attendees could grab a drink, snap a picture, or mingle with other science-lovers.



Haley Briel chats before taking to the stage to share the story of the Cardiff Giant. (Ueda Photography)

Barrio Dance returned to lead everyone into the second half of the show, with an electrifying performance that fused style, storytelling, and serious energy! After the dance, the audience met Haley Briel, a College of Engineering instructional designer who arrived at the Majestic fired up to discuss the Cardiff Giant, a famous archaeological hoax. Haley took the audience on a journey, describing the various twists and turns of the unbelievable story, which includes appearances from famed showman P. T. Barnum.



Haley Briel talks to a rapt audience. (Ueda Photography)

The show wrapped up in the most Wisconsin Science Festival way possible, mixing curiosity, fun, and free swag! Guests got to ask questions, and those who were brave enough to engage with science got a t-shirt as a reward. The mixture of science, the arts, and live performances made the Why Sci Variety Show a festival fan favorite this year. As the night drew to a close, guests left the theater laughing, smiling, and feeling more closely connected with the science and creativity in their own community.

Join us in 2026 for more variety - blending science and the arts, live on stage! Visit wiscifest.org to stay in the loop!