

# PIONEER PRESS

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## CTC production brings animated 'Aladdin' to life

BY DOMINIC P. PAPTOLA  
Theater Critic

If you're trying to put the Disney film "Aladdin" on the stage, how do you compensate for the fact that you don't have Robin Williams or the limitless visual possibilities afforded by animation?

In the Children's Theatre Company production, director Matthew Howe offers a convincing solution: Super-strong character actors, a bevy of tap dancers and oodles of imagination.

The stage version of the Disney musical hews relatively close to the movie and was primarily written to be performed by middle school groups. Thus, the concessions and reductions (no Raja or Abu; no "diamond in the rough" sub-plot) are made mostly in the name of expediency and simplicity.

Too, the role of the Genie isn't quite the star-vehicle it is in the movie — his songs and shtick get spread out more to the ensemble and to a trio of "traveling mystics" (Roy Kallemeyn, Autumn Ness and Monica Scott, each so earthy you could grow produce on them) who narrate the show.

Which is not to say that the CTC production lacks star power when it comes to its magical mystery dude. Reed Sigmund conjures

scores of voices, poses and in-jokes and is a bundle of antic energy from the tips of his oversized blue ears to the toes of his jeweled red boots.

The music isn't written in his vocal register, and so Sigmund has to do some octave jumping. But he's as good at that as he is cracking wise, playing pouty or leading a giddily over-the-top, tap-dancing chorus through a version of "You Ain't Never Had a Friend Like Me" that apparently takes place on Agrabah's 42nd Street.

Providing a counterpoint to Sigmund's continual motion is Bradley Greenwald's steely-still Jafar, a bad guy who can communicate volumes with an arch of his eyebrow. Greenwald gets to use both his mighty baritone and his formidable comic chops to strike just the right balance: His Jafar is deliciously evil, but just cartoon-y enough to not scare the little ones.

The roles of Aladdin and Princess Jasmine don't call for Stanislavskian acting skill; they're tasked mainly to look good and sing pretty. Jorge E. Maldonado and Laurine Price both deliver handsomely, giving fine voice to their familiar tunes and managing to offer these cartoon cutouts a hint of a third dimension.

Maldonado endows Aladdin with a nice, pushmi-pullyu blend of confidence and insecurity; Price keeps Jasmine's girl-power attitude while injecting her with a giggly, welcome sense of whimsy.

CTC's backstage artisans, too, help make this "Aladdin" crackle and pop, finding innovative and eye-catching ways to conjure flying carpets, magical transformations and even an onstage elephant. The rousing 10-piece orchestra, under the baton of Andrew Cooke, pumps still more energy into the show, helping make CTC's holiday production a breathless romp.

Theater critic Dominic P. Papatola can be reached at [dpapatola@pioneerpress.com](mailto:dpapatola@pioneerpress.com) or at 651-228-2165.

**What:** "Disney's Aladdin, Jr."

**When:** Through Jan. 6, 2006

**Where:** Children's Theatre Company, 2400 Third Ave. S., Minneapolis.

**Tickets:** \$39-\$17; call 612-874-0400

**Capsule:** A magic carpet ride of music, dance and fun.