

Children's Theatre Company brings Disney film to life

Lisa Brock, Special To The Star Tribune

November 22, 2005

The concept of translating a two-dimensional animated film like Disney's 1992 blockbuster "Aladdin" to the stage might seem at first glance to be a little, well, flat. It might even inspire a "been there, done that" attitude in the minds of the younger set it targets. Banish that thought. The Children's Theatre Company's production of "Disney's Aladdin Jr." packs enough razzle-dazzle energy and warm-hearted appeal to fire even the most jaded imagination.

Director Matthew Howe employs an unabashedly theatrical vision in bringing this magical world to life, from a flying carpet that actually seems to soar on a puff of smoke to a tap-dancing Broadway Baby of a genie and a life-sized elephant. He's aided in this task by a talented design team. William Bloodgood's sets retain the bold outlines of their cartoon origins, while adding a smoky, atmospheric depth that softens their edges, and Helen Q. Huang's costumes give the stage a jewel-toned palette.

Against this glowing backdrop, Howe uses an outstanding cast to focus on the heartfelt human relationships at the core of the story. Three Traveling Mystics

(Roy Kallemeyn, Autumn Ness and Monica Scott) draw the audience in as they frame the narrative at the beginning of the play and then provide a jocular running commentary on the unfolding action. Jorge Maldonado's Aladdin is an engaging rascal, alternately smoothly conniving and endearingly gawky, while Laurine Price brings a lively spunkiness and soaring singing voice to the role of Jasmine. Together they make as pretty a stage couple as one could hope for and yet they retain a sense of giggling, awkward adolescence in their interactions with each other.

Bradley Greenwald is the sour to their sweetness and strikes a nice balance between sinister menace and comic pomposity as the villainous Jafar. He's a sight to behold in an over-sized purple headdress and swirling cape and is ably complemented by his servile, back-talking parrot, Iago, voiced by Steven B. Young.

Most impressive of all, however, is Reed Sigmund, who takes on the signature Robin Williams role of the Genie and makes it his own. Strutting, preening, posing and dashing off an antic patter in a dozen different voices, Sigmund is

a font of comic energy that never runs dry. He provides the show's highlight when he leads the chorus in a thunderous and infectious tap-dance rendition of "You Ain't Never Had A Friend Like Me."

Add the powerful presence of a live orchestra, conducted by Musical Director Andrew Cooke, and the energy and immediacy of CTC's production will buoy the audience on its own magic carpet.

Lisa Brock is a Minneapolis writer.