

Proctors Theatre. Schenectady, NY

Aladdin, book by Chad Beguelin, Music by Alan Menkin, lyrics by Howard Ashman, Tim Rice and Chad Beguelin. Directed and choreographed by Casey Nicholaw. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“Well,, for a million miles away.”

Classic Disney plot: a princess is abused and threatened, then ascends to the romantic heights through the love of a savior, a prince with a great kiss and a song hit to boot. Now, along comes Aladdin; major changes: a princess threatened with marriage to a villainous “trustee” is rescued by a “*street rat, a riff-raff*” disguised as a prince with a great kiss. Set the whole thing in Arabia, add elements of the plot of Kismet, some great songs that might have been written in the 1930s, enough tap dancing mixed up with ethnic dance and, for Dads, belly-dancing and a very charming genie magician who quickly performs some classic magic tricks/illusions and a magic carpet (“*I can fly,*” says Wendy to Peter Pan) and the classic Disney confection formula is completely resurrected. Well guess what? **Aladdin**, the musical, is perfectly wonderful in a Disney sort of way. It cannot miss when the talents involved are so remarkable. It’s formulaic to the Disney recipe, but you don’t care if it is, just as long as the handsome Prince gets the lovely girl and the villain gets his due.



Senzel Ahmady; Photo by Deen van Meer. © Disney

In the touring production of Aladdin, beginning its journey at Proctors Theatre in Schenectady, the stunningly beautiful princess is played to perfection by Senzel Ahmady who sings like a young Florence Henderson, moves like a star of the New York City Ballet, and

charms the audience as well as the other characters. She is just what the Disney recipe calls for. When she and her “Prince” ride through the gorgeous stage-set sky on his magic carpet and duet on the film and show’s hit song, “A Whole New World” you can tell immediately that she means every word, every note of it. Of course her Ali, or Aladdin, played by the handsome and romantic Adi Roy who is just what the Disney producers could want for the role. Tall, slender, good-looking, a fine singer and dancer who can make minor villainy into something sweet and charming without half-trying, Roy is every girl’s dream man, and every man’s idol. This is great casting.



Adi Roy; Photo by Deen van Meer. © Disney

Add into the mixture, that human yeast which makes the whole show rise into the perfect confection, Marcus M. Martin could easily steal any show he appears in, but his spectacularly



Marcus M. Martin; Photo by Deen van Meer. © Disney

talented Genie threatens to do so. Instead he is one of the chief ingredients in what comes across as the perfect wedding cake, a present to this great bride and groom. He is funny, graceful, a good singer and actor and he moves into the picture and stays there where he obviously belongs. Martin is the certain Disney/perfect man for the job. I can almost guarantee you will fall under his spell for the entire two house and thirty minutes you are in the theater.

The villain, Jafar, is played to a nasty sneer by the talented Anand Nagraj and his buddy, or assistant, by the comic Aaron Choi. Jasmine's father who cannot see the bad in any man, the Sultan, is well played by Sorab Wadia. Aladdin's trio of enablers are sung, danced, acted and acrobatted by Jake Letts (Babkak), Ben Chavez (Omar), and Colt Prattes (Kassim). The large company of dancers and singers keep the stage vitally alive. One voice-only animated effect here is the cave, regally portrayed by Colt Prattes once again and he is magnificent.

Director and choreographer Casey Nicholaw never lets up for a moment keeping the show one of the most visually active in history. His talents mesh with the design teams' equally excellent work. The scenic design by Bob Crowley is stunningly cartoon yet amazingly real. The costumes designed by Gregg Barnes is classically beautiful and Natasha Katz has lit the show with a very certain eye for its magic. They more than do justice to the Disney cake, icing and adorning it beautifully while James Dodgson brings forth lush, beautiful music from the pit.



Like the wedding figures on top of that traditional cake Ahmady and Roy are the perfect couple in a show that amuses, thrills and delights us in a "Whole New World" of theatrical joys.

+ 10/16/2022 +

Aladdin continues at Proctors through October 23. For information and tickets go to:
www.proctorscollaborative.org.

Adi Roy & Senzel Ahmady;
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