

Review: Disney's Aladdin and the Promise of Another World!

BY IMOGEN A. ROSE | 11 April 2018



A child perched on the edge of his seat is a great endorsement for any stage production! I had the pleasure of my ten-year-old, nephew's company for the Australian production of Disney's *Aladdin*, currently on stage at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre.

The musical has an interesting history with its genesis in the hit 1992 Disney film *Aladdin*. Indeed, *Aladdin* was the most successful film of 1992 grossing over \$504 million worldwide. The film was a critical as well as commercial success, receiving much acclaim, including two **Academy Awards** for **Best Music, Original Score** and **Best Music, Original Song**.

Given the strength of the film's musical score, it is perhaps not surprising that the concept of a theatrical version should arise. The show contains the original songs of the film, songs that were cut from the film, and new compilations.

Proud of Your Boy is a song that was written for the film but eventually omitted due to story changes. The ballad provides a lovely moment early in the stage production that establishes the morality of Aladdin. Like many a hero, he is a flawed individual who is regretful of his past and determined to make good of himself and his life.

In 2011, the stage adaptation of *Aladdin* premiered at the 5th Avenue Theatre in Seattle. It subsequently had a number of US and international runs. In November 2013, it began its pre-Broadway production in **Toronto** before opening on Broadway in February 2014. The latter was nominated for five **Tony Awards** – winning one.

The Australian production is a consciously modern adaptation. It contains a number of references to other Disney properties. At times one yearns for a spark of something theatrically fresh and inventive for *Aladdin* is a story imbued with untold opportunity.

Despite the oft, inaccurately attributed, literary origins of the original story – the origins and authorship of *Aladdin and the Magical Lamp* have long been the subject of significant scholarly analysis – *Aladdin* as a narrative remains one of the most familiar and beloved texts in the literary canon. It is an inspired and universal story that has enjoyed multiple interpretations over hundreds of years throughout the world. Its fundamental themes of fate, deceit, treachery, honesty, loyalty, love, reward and honour ensure its timelessness.

Thus, there is great scope for a production that draws strength from such a strong literary lineage. Furthermore, the magic of the lamp, the carpet and the mythical landscape create a world of infinite possibility, imagination and creativity.

This is a lavish, lush production that remains in-keeping with the family-friendly philosophy of Disney.

It boasts an impressive cast of 34, starring Gareth Jacobs as the charismatic, energetic Genie, Ainsley Melham as Aladdin, whose physical and moral transformation is at the heart of the story, and Hiba Elchikhe as the independent and spirited Princess Jasmine. Adam Murphy plays the evil Jafar with Aljin Abella playing his wicked and subservient accomplice, Iago.

The splendid costumes and the vivid set-designs are a highlight of the show creating a spectacular world for audiences and offering a particular delight to children. It's worth noting that there are a remarkable 337 costumes featuring some 1,225 different fabrics, 712 different styles of beads and more than 500,000 Swarovski crystals.

The highly anticipated appearance of Aladdin's magic carpet does not disappoint as Aladdin and Princess Jasmine travel serenely through a beautiful night sky whilst performing the Oscar winning Best Original Song, *A Whole New World*.

It was wonderful to hear my nephew remark upon sight of the apparently gravity-defying carpet, "*It is real!*"

In terms of the narrative structure, many of the themes remain thinly developed leaving a sense of what *might* have been with such a perennial story.

Significantly, *Disney's Aladdin* delivers as a particularly entertaining, lively, fun, family oriented, fast-paced show with countless exceptional dance sequences that work beautifully with the material. The costumes are a kaleidoscope of colour and the remarkably seamless scenery and wardrobe changes showcase the talent on stage, as well as demonstrating the technical expertise required to realize such logistical harmony.

Disney's Aladdin embraces the world of magic and illusion, skilfully creating an atmosphere of fantasy and escape.

There is something about Disney franchises that continues to draw audiences. Certainly, Disney has the financial capacity to invest handsomely in its productions and associated marketing strategies. Furthermore, it knows how to target and exploit multiplatform content properties that entrance and entertain.

Fundamentally, Disney knows how to channel and communicate stories that celebrate many of the world's golden myths, stories and fables that have become subtly embedded within the very fabric of society.

The Disney Brand recognizes the need for humans to experience good triumphing over evil. Equally, it supports the quest of the hero and heroine to follow their hearts and fulfil their dreams through a process of physical and spiritual development.

Disney's Aladdin is thus very much about tapping into this transformative journey.

One may find oneself wistful, wistful for one's own inner desires and dreams.

Certainly, there is much to be said for that extraordinary well of desire within one to redeem oneself and realize one's full potential. It's a very personal, psychological and emotional thirst that sadly seems to dissipate with age. Yet it never truly evaporates. Indeed, sometimes an awakening occurs and that wonderful well of hope, a source of goodness and potential, may lead one's cup to overflow. It is in childhood when one's reservoir of hope is generally most confident, perhaps even competent, but one should never abandon this inner spring, for it is there within which lies the best of each of us!

The theatre is a tremendous trigger for the emotions that stimulate thought and inspire dreams.

Whether you are 10, 100 or anywhere in between, *Disney's Aladdin* will transport you into a rich and rewarding world of imagination and entertainment. *Disney's Aladdin* tempts its audience with the promise of a *whole new world!*

Disney's Aladdin runs at QPAC until June 3 2018.