

## Aladdin ballet showcases magical talent

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Stop me if you've heard this story before: It involves a poor street urchin, a beautiful rich princess, a greedy magician, a kind genie or two. Oh, and a magic lamp.

Fortunately, no one stopped Nigel Burgoine, for he took the age-old folk tale and spun it into an engaging new theater piece that is a winning combination of smart, spirited choreography, a compelling score, plenty of visual dazzle, and a bit of dashing humor. Presented by his company, Ballet Theatre of Toledo, Aladdin had its world premiere yesterday in two showings at the Stranahan Theater. Before a combined audience of some 2,500 enthusiastic viewers, Burgoine pulled off a dance triumph. It should become an annual production locally and, one would expect, it will be presented by other companies of similar caliber to the BTT.

From the stars of this production - Tony Dandino (Aladdin), Maria Snell (Princess Adiva), Anne Marie Getz (Aladdin's mother), and Jake Spencer (Mustapha) - to crowd component groups such as odalisques, sultanas, marketplace girls, and children, all displayed the results of consistent attention to attitude, expression, and careful dancing.

Burgoine clearly knows his company as well as he knows how to express ideas through dance, for every moment was filled with intelligent action and position. Moreover, the steps and combinations were clearly within the capability of everyone on stage - even Aladdin's young friends who wowed with enthusiastic leaps and turns - yet the dancing never seemed simplistic.

Plus, showman that he is, Burgoine understands the power of freshening classical ballet with a modified bit of belly dance, gymnastics, and even a trace of the electric slide. His choreography says, "We are serious about classical dance, but enjoy this bit of colorful effect as well." How delightful to see Getz at work again, her authority and grace unchanged, her sassy side revealed in the character role. Dandino was confident and accomplished in his solos. He also provided fine partnering for the delicate athleticism Snell displayed, alone and in pas de deux. Her friends, Kelsey Carpenter (Alzena) and Jenny Yonkof (Jamela), were graceful and lithe. Excellent too were Kalina Hillard (Zarifa) and Mallory Pettee (ZaZa), daughters of the evil Mustapha - portrayed with sinister excellence by Spencer - and their angular moves also reflected the dark intent of that family. Supporting parts worthy of mention include Douglas Burkhardt (Genie of the Ring), and Eric Johanson and Lynn Ritter (Sultan and Queen). Scenery by Simon Pastukh was worthy of a pasha, as were costumes by Galina Solovyeva. David Lowry's lighting was superb.

Burgoine's own arrangement of music by Rimsky-Korsakov was effective, although perhaps less might have been more in some of the palace scenes. Altogether, however, the production sets a new benchmark for dance in the Toledo area.

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