

Wrestling up a new kind of genie

Aladdin: The Magical Family Musical will feature WWFer Brett (The Hitman) Hart

For the sake of show business, Ross Petty is willing to risk being on the business end of a zodiac crunch. Considering who might be delivering it, we can only hope Petty's affairs are in order.

The preternaturally pernicious Petty is eagerly returning to a villainous role in his forthcoming Christmas pantomime of *Aladdin: The Magical Family Musical*, coming for 36 performances Dec. 2-31 at Toronto's Elgin Theatre.

Being the boss, he's awarding himself dark powers as an evil magician. But while he's not giving away anything about the script, there's surely at least a chance of his character having an unfriendly encounter with the Genie of the story.

That would be the Genie being portrayed on the Elgin stage by — wait for it — Brett (The Hitman) Hart, Canada's long-time wrestling champion and a man capable of delivering a zodiac crunch that could make a bulldozer see stars.

"I think we're going to have a blast with Brett," says Petty, producer of these annual December pantomimes that borrow from the English music hall tradition. "We have an audience that cheers the hero, boos the villain and is up on their feet."

With MasterCard and Pizza Pizza coming on as associate sponsors, the show is being rewritten from the Petty pantomime of *Aladdin* seen six years ago. As ever, fresh talent is also coming forward. Petty's long-standing connections across the breadth of Canadian film, television and theatre always draw the producer excellent support, in this case including Ted Dykstra (*2 Pianos 4 Hands*) directing and Jennifer Dale, Derek McGrath and Adam Brazier joining him and Hart.

"Ted and I worked on a film about Bach in the Czech republic 10 years ago and we've been good friends since," Petty relates.

As Scheherazade, Dale "will actually be giving her sister Cynthia a run for her money in the musical



From left: Ross Petty, Jennifer Dale, Brett (The Hitman) Hart.

direction," says Petty, alluding to what have become Cynthia's annual starring appearances in Stratford Festival musical productions.

Brazier as the Prince will be just coming off the Shaw Festival's presentation of *Pal Joey* while McGrath, most familiar playing opposite Billy Ray Cyrus on TV's *Doc*, will take on the part of Aladdin's poor widowed mother.

Yes, that's a part in drag for this family show, and don't expect Petty to sound remorseful about it.

"I think we've been a bit conservative in the last two years," he defiantly declares. "We need to bring back more of the wackiness."

Bringing in Brett Hart is clearly an ambitious start. Petty's even considering asking Hart to sing. Asking nicely.

"I'm not going to twist his arm

because he might twist my arm back," allows Petty. Actually, Hart proved "the most soft-spoken gentleman I had encountered in a while. He was very happy to be involved, wanting to have that new experience."

Hart may in turn give something of a new experience for Petty's production in terms of audience.

"Normally, our audience is for children from age three to 12 and there's the adults who come with them," he remarks, "but we always seem to be missing out on that group of in-between young people in their teens and 20s."

Petty doesn't see why everyone in town shouldn't be showing up. He's so audacious, outrageous and determined, the World Wrestling Federation could be scoring a coup by hiring him.