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JOHN KRYK, Executive Entertainment Editor, 416-947-2118 john.kryk@tor.sunpub.com

It's Genie-us

Aladdin is more than what you could wish for

MOST GREAT children's entertainment — from Roald Dahl to Bugs Bunny to *The Simpsons* — aims high and low. Along with the broad gags, there's always stuff that should have a sign marked "You must be this tall to appreciate the joke." Why? Parents are the ones who ultimately

decide if the family should be there. And while it's not absolutely necessary for adults to have a good time, I think it sweetens the experience for kids to see their parents laughing.

Which brings us to *Aladdin: The Magical Family Musical*, the latest of Ross Petty's annual, blissfully over-the-top, "fractured fairy tale" Christmas pantos. This year's is one of the best, by accounts of some of the faithful regulars at Thursday's opening at the Elgin Theatre.

No Disney tale, this. In fact, Disney gets a razzberry at one point in the all-over-the-map barrage of gags. *Aladdin* takes its considerable liberties from the original tale as told

by Sheherazade (a vampish Jennifer Dale) of *Arabian Nights* fame.

That is about as classical as it gets. *Aladdin* (Adam Brazier, in doofus mode) is a skater boy (or sk8ter boi, as Avril would have it), addicted to lottery tickets. He falls for the Princess Jazuzzi (Rhoslyne Bugay), who's masquerading as an urchin, on the run from her father, Sultan Redundo II (Kyle Dadd, channelling Jim Backus). Ross Petty, as usual, courts copious

boos as the leering villain Abanazer, in a piece larded with jokes about his bad acting.

There are pratfalls, explosions, rimshots, spirited dance numbers, a flying carpet, puns and assorted baboonery. The latter was largely provided by Derek McGrath as the amorous Widow Bender (*Aladdin's* mom) and her sidekicks Weenie and Beans (Eddie Glen and Tyler Murree in a note-for-note Bob & Doug homage — characters that kids now might only recognize as those two hozer moose from a Disney movie).

There's a *Barenaked Ladies* spoof that proves *If I Had A Million Dollars* might be as deep in kid-consciousness these days as *Shinnamarink*. And, of course, there's Bret (The Hitman) Hart as the Genie, a gentle giant so kid-friendly he even tossed off an autographed pair of wraparound shades to a child on his way to the stage.

All this and more, from some winking grownup asides ("My husband Fender passed away on our wedding night," says Widow Bender. "There's quite a story there, but this is a family show.") to theatrical in-jokes, including a jibe at the bad year David Mirvish is having.

Later, when the "wedding ring" turns out to be a "wrestling ring" (yes, the Hitman gets to deliver a smackdown), it's explained that it's "metaphorically symbolic of the loving battlefield that is marriage."

In a production traditionally marked by a fun, free-associative atmosphere (a couple of the bigger laughs came from flubbed lines), director Ted Dykstra gets full marks for keeping a tight rein on the parts that need it.

The choreography — particularly the breakdancing and disco numbers — was rollicking and sharp on opening night. And the stagecraft, from the cave scenes to the palatial, was as good as anything serious this year.

Just go. And if you need to sweeten the invitation, just tell your kids *Aladdin* is as funny as *SpongeBob SquarePants*.



Jim
SLOTEK

■ **BRET (THE HITMAN) Hart** is the Genie of the Lamp in Ross Petty's yuletide panto *Aladdin: The Magical Family Musical*.



Aladdin: The Magical Family Musical

Director: Ted Dykstra

Stars: Adam Brazier,
Jennifer Dale,
Ross Petty,
Bret Hart

jim.slotek@tor.sunpub.com