

Musical 'Aladdin' makes world debut; local theater company one of the first to perform

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Chris Riley



Antonio Silva, playing the evil Jafar, laughs after finding the magic lamp during dress rehearsals for South Valley Civic Theatre's production of 'Aladdin.'

Thirteen years ago, children and adults alike were whisked away on a majestic carpet ride to follow Aladdin as he fought the evil doings of Jafar and rescued Princess Jasmine when The Walt Disney Co. released "Aladdin" in movie theaters.

Four months ago, the company finally decided to release the rights to the film's script and music, and Morgan Hill-based South Valley Civic Theatre is one of the first production companies to get its hands on the goods.

"I'd estimate we were probably second on the list," said musical director Colleen Chipman, who said she has been pursuing the movie's music and script for about a year.

The show, which includes actors from Gilroy, Morgan Hill and Hollister, will run for 11 performances throughout June at the Morgan Hill Playhouse.

"This is pretty exciting for us," said Kim Kehrer, the show's assistant producer. "The actors are going to be flying through the air on magic carpets, and there will be a lot of stage movement. We'll be utilizing the whole theater, not just the stage, and there will be a lot of interaction with the audience."

The musical tells the story of Aladdin, a street urchin who discovers a magical lamp and, with the help of a genie, wins the heart of the beautiful Princess Jasmine.

But the tale twists when an evil magician obtains the lamp and instructs the genie to bring the princess to his palace. Desperate to reunite with his one true love, Aladdin must try to rescue Princess Jasmine.

The show features favorite kids' tunes from the movie such as "A Whole New World" and "Friend Like Me," songs that Chipman said are one of the movie's biggest draws.

"Ever since the Disney movie came out, I've wanted to do this show," Chipman said. "It's my favorite Disney movie, and I want to make the play just as good as the movie."

Other elements that producers are hoping will make the musical shine are the special effects and enthusiastic cast members. "Aladdin" will feature one of the largest recent casts the theater company has presented, with 42 kids ranging in age from 8 to 14 – except for 18-year-old Antonio Silva, who plays antagonist Jafar.

By coincidence, several of the show's stars have physical features that strongly resemble their characters, Lehrer said.

"It's amazing. Jafar really looks like Jafar," she said. "And the girl playing Princess Jasmine has that long, dark hair. The actors really fit their roles for what you'd envision the characters to look like."

Rehearsals for the show started in early March, and Lehrer said everything has gone smoothly – almost.

One cast member came down with the chicken pox and had to stay home until recovery. And Aladdin, played by Jonathon Borgia from Morgan Hill, fell and broke his collar bone jumping hurdles at school.

"He's all healed up now. He has the medical clearance to be able to fly," Lehrer said.

If you go...

"Aladdin" will play at the Morgan Hill Playhouse, 17000 Monterey Road, on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays in June. For more information including specific times and dates, call (408) 842-SHOW or go online at www.svct.org. Tickets – \$15 for adults and \$10 for seniors and students – can be purchased at BookSmart, 17415 Monterey Road, the Morgan Hill Community and Cultural Center at 17000 Monterey Road, the Gilroy Visitors Bureau at 7780 Monterey Road or online at www.svct.org. Call (408) 842-7469. Tickets will be sold at the door only if the show is not sold out.