

The Valdosta Daily Times – Thursday, 6-12-08

A Magic Carpet Ride

Peach State opens play based on Disney's 'Aladdin'

By Dean Poling

VALDOSTA – Following Robin Williams is no easy thing, so Peach State Summer Theatre has been coming up with one-liners and gags of its own for Genie in “Disney’s Aladdin,” which opens tonight in Sawyer Theatre.

“We’ve updated the references so Genie mentions things like Hannah Montana,” and other more recent cultural touchstones, says Matthew McGee, who is making his first Peach State appearance as a director, with the live adaptation of the 1992 Disney animated film that featured Robin Williams’ voice as Genie.

Given his comedic talents as a performer in past PSST seasons in shows like “A year with Frog and Toad,” “Chicago,” “Seussical” and “Cabaret,” one might have expected McGee to play the Genie rather than working with actor Jon Allen Biles to develop the character’s comedy routines.

From the look of a Wednesday evening photo shoot, PSST! Has adapted the Disney film into a bright and beautiful live version. Stephanie Hawks’ costumes evoke the film while creating an Arabian Nights aura of their own from the wardrobe of Princess Jasmine to the blue body of Genie to the turbaned head of the Sultan. Jason Courson’s set design does the same thing by keeping the scenes simple and mobile. Keith Kirkland’s lighting design captures the Arabian Nights and days.

Donna M. Scheer is the guest choreographer for “Disney’s Aladdin.” Coming from New Mexico, this is her first PSST! Show, but she is no stranger in working with McGee and PSST organizers having worked a few seasons with them when the company spent summers performing on Jekyll Island.

The secret for a production like “Disney’s Aladdin.” Scheer says, is to remember it is a show aimed at children as much as adults. The secret of a successful children’s show, she says, is to keep everything moving. The live version of “Disney’s Aladdin” also keeps it short, perfectly timed for youngsters’ attention spans at about one hour. Keep everything bright and moving, so they enjoy the show, Scheer says, and might return for more adult shows when they are older.

If Matt McGee’s directing style for a show is anything like his directing style for a photo shoot, “Aladdin” should be a show that never stops moving and should keep the audience laughing, as he keeps the cast and crew chuckling as he arranges each scene. Robin Williams look out.

THE CAST: Lindsay Roberts, Jimmy Houlihan, Phillip Edward Jones, Darrick L. Penny, Steve Zimmerman, Carla Olivar, Michael Lasris, John Allen Biles, Trenton Dunn, Patrick

Pevehouse, Antony Russell, Shelby Nichols, Allison Nock, Chauntae Pink, Kandis Wean, Megan Wheeler.

DIRECTION, PRODUCTION: Matthew McGee, director; Donna M. Scheer, choreographer; Jason Courson, set design director; Keith Kirkland, lighting design; Stephanie Hawks, costume design; Marty Lynch, technical director; Michael Elliott, vocal director; Ed Barr, musical director; April Brown, stage manager.

SHOWTIME

Peach State Summer Theatre presents “Disney’s Aladdin.”

When: Show plays 7:30 p.m. today and Saturday; 2 p.m., June 21, 25, 28; 2 p.m., July 2, 4, 5, 9, 12.

Where: Sawyer Theatre, VSU Fine Arts Building, corner of Oak and Brookwood.