

# REVIEWS

## THEATRE

# THE MAGIC OF ALLADIN

By Kamala Ramchandani

● **ALLADIN XTRAVAGANZA**, directed by Raell Padamsee, presented by the Little Actor's Club, at Sophia Bhabha Auditorium.

ALLADIN is certainly very much in the air these days. We have, of course, the Disney movie with the charismatic Robin Williams lending his voice to innumerable characters. And now Raell Padamsee's Little Actors Club has presented their own version of the tale, updated and turned on its head, so to speak, for the benefit of its young cast and audience.

The play begins with Abanazar (Call me Ab) the evil magician (Vrajesh Hirjee) determined to rule the world, and plotting the best way to achieve his ambition. He summons the Junior Genie of the Ring (Deeksha Gaur) who tells him that the only



■ Ambika, Vishal and Adwin in *Alladin Xtravaganza*.

person who can help him is the Senior Genie of the Lamp who lives in a Waxworks Museum in China.

In the twinkling of an eye, Genie and Magician travel to China, where they (and we) meet Alladin (Vishal Dhandhia), his friend Danny the MTV money (Advait Hazrat) and his mother Widow Twanky (Kavita Sahni). There's also Emperor Fat Haka Noodle Chow Mein (Kunal Vijaykar) and his daughter So Shy (Ambika Sanjana). The waxworks museum is guarded by a very sweet, not at all fierce Smokey the Golden Dragon (Kunal Roy Kapoor). And then — at last — we meet the Genie of the Lamp (Cyrus Broacha). The story tells us how the evil magician is defeated, and how Alladin marries So Shy and eventually gives the Genie of the Lamp his freedom.

There are plenty of other touches: at the waxworks museum, for exam-

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## The magic of Alladin

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ple, we meet a whole host of characters, from Sunjay Dutt to Madonna and Michael Jackson to WWF wrestlers, all played by young members of the Little Actors Club. In fact, with the exception of about four adults, the entire cast consisted of children, ranging from tiny tots to teenagers.

The play had a most impressive set, excellently designed by Mita Bhagat and executed by Rehmatali and Sameer of Showbiz, with revolving panels transporting us in a jiffy from a market scene in China to the Emperor's throne room to the Widow Twanky's laundry and many more places. Props whizzed in and out with clockwork precision. There was dramatic lighting and plenty of smoke to create a mysterious effect. There were some stimulating dances, choreographed by Veena Dhandhia and performed very well by the

children. And there was the Laundry Dance with fluorescent clothes and ultraviolet lights which was most unusual and very effective.

on their toes. But ultimately, the value of this show was the exposure it gave the young people involved in it, and the opportunity to appear in a major production on the profes-

## THE Aladdin Xtravaganza

But what was good to see in this show was the large cast of children. The adults (Vrajesh Hirjee, Cyrus Broacha, Kavita Sahni and Kunal Vijaykar) kept the audience well entertained, drawing out enthusiastic responses from the children in the auditorium and keeping them

on their toes. Such exposure makes a great difference on the professional stage. Such exposure makes a great difference to confidence and overall personality of the child, and the self-assured, enthusiastic kids we saw onstage were, in fact, the *raison d'être* of the show.

# Indian Express

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## 'The sky can also be purple'



I personally would like to bring a tortoise on to the stage, turn it into a race horse, then into a hat, a song, a dragon, and a fountain or water. One can dare anything in the theatre, and it is the place where one dares the least.

So wrote Ionesco, master of the absurd. For him, everything in theatre was permissible. His plays were 'composed' (rather than written) with full rein to imagination.

"The sky is blue, but it can also be purple." Indeed, in theatre, it can. "We try to decondition the children," Raell Padamsee, theatre director, who runs the Little Actors Club tells me. "It's geared to expand their perceptions," she adds.

With our education system throttling children, and television turning them into mindless zombies, theatre workshops provide the much needed respite like rays of sunshine in this dreary monsoon weather.

"I find acting relaxing," says young Vishal, "though my father disapproves and keeps asking: will you be an actor or a businessman?" Vishal, who is playing Alladin in Padamsee's new production, *Alladin Strikes Again*, has made forays into the ad world, having acted in TV commercials for Zap watches.

"I play the monkey who's always hungry. Alladin is after the lamp, and I'm after the food," little Advait Hazrat tells me, his eyes twinkling. "I play the bride," chirps Rhea anxious to get a word in. By now, I'm surrounded by a cluster of children — including some very chatty girls — who are part of the Little Actors Club and

now stars in this new play which incidentally is a sequel to *Alladin Extravaganza*. No jitters here. The children seemed relaxed, perhaps more relaxed than I had expected. For them it is simply, good fun. But what if they forget their lines? "We simply ad lib," says Vishal. "If you ad lib too many lines, she throttles you," adds another youngster.

The battle axe — who they obviously revere — is Raell. As I talk with the children, I hear her blowing the whistle, reminding me of ball game practice. "Pay attention," she shouts, "why the chatter here?" Play practice is hard enough with adults, with children you need infinite patience. Unless you love what you do — as Raell obviously does.

The Little Actor's Club (for 4-14 year old) covers mime, song, dance, improvisations, even poetry (see box). These days, when teachers seldom encourage poetry writing, such clubs provide creative outlets. For those interested in children's poetry, 'Six of the Best: A Puffin Sextet of Poets' is recommended. It has poetry by prestigious writers like George Barker and Brian Lee. "To stimulate the imagination, we expose kids to whacky ideas sometimes — to show them how bizarre things can be," says Raell.

Occasionally, the 'bizarre' comes from the children. In *Alladin Strikes Again*, many scenes were suggested by children, the film scene — where Alladin, in search of the lamp, lands in a film set — is a case in point. 8-years-old Miloni especially enjoys it. "It's like a movie with hero, heroine and dances," she remarks. The play is enlivened with spoofs and adventures. Alladin eventually finds his lamp, rubs it and the Genie comes out to grant three boons.

Anju Makhija on *Alladin strikes again*, a play by the Little Actor's Club



Expanding their horizons...the Little Actor's Club

A 'Young Actors Club' (for 15-21 years olds) has also been set up by Padamsee. Their efforts will bear fruit shortly. By September, we may see a platform performance at NCPA at Prithvi. As I leave Raell's troupe, a thought occurs: wouldn't it be a marvellous if our underprivileged children could avail of such opportunities. CRY has organised some theatre workshop in the past and the BMC has dabbled with education via theatre with

Marathi state actors. But such experiments have been few and far between.

### Newspaper workshop

Demystifying media for children is a good idea; more so in times when propaganda machines are at work. Children are often victims of the media — especially television — which, as innumerable studies have shown, shapes attitudes and often contributes to stereotypes. At the time of the

Gulf War, children in UK were playing 'cops and Saddam Hussein' instead of 'cops and robbers,' such was the influence of TV. One may argue that children are less likely to be influenced by newspapers, but older children do read headlines, often, entire articles.

This children's newspaper/magazine workshop is on at the Nehru Centre. Draupadi Rohra, one of the organisers, informs that the workshop will result in a 4-page printed supplement manifesting children's ideas in concrete form. Meanwhile, they are getting plenty of inputs from writers, cartoonists and photographers.

In our city, where anxious parents enroll children in learning institutions even before they are out of diapers, creative workshops are likely to be in demand. Luckily, many of them are run by dedicated professionals.

### Impalable leaps of my gloomy mind...

I feel so inferior,  
Help me oh lord;  
I feel so much fear,  
Help me Oh God.  
The World has changed and the earth's crust.  
Like the day changes from down to dusk,  
Will we see our glowing satellite?  
Or will we bear another fight?

Will people live or will they die?  
Will souls return to the sky?  
Do we wait for the day of doom?  
Or wait for blossoms to bloom?  
Will walls be set up again?  
Will blood pour down the streets in rain?

— Poem by Siddhartha Arya (Little Actor's Club)