
review

CORRUGATED IRON YOUTH THEATRE N.T.

Aladdin And The Magic Lamp by the company

Directors: Tessa Pauling and Maggie Miles • Adaptation: Neil Cameron and Alex Cutts with script assistance by Tom Pauling and Ken Conway • Designers: Eddie Stonard, Tessa Pauling and Colin Holt • Costume Designer: Joanna Barkman • Music: Tony Joyce, Rob Hoad and Trevor Vivian • Lighting: Matthew James • Sound: Bob Gosford • Producer: Alex Cutts and the Marrara Indoor Stadium • Cast: Rachel O'Shea, Tom Pauling, Ken Conway, Patrick Mitchell, John Spellman, Peter Morgan, Kay Brown, Jon Tippett, Richard Coates, Emma Mansfield, Fred Pauling, members of Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre, members of the NT Calisthenics Association, members of The Marrara Gymnastic Association, The Tahaya Belly Dancers, A Machete Juggler, A Fire Dancer and A Bagpipe Player

TO MY KNOWLEDGE *ALADDIN And The Magic Lamp* is the first pantomime ever staged in Darwin; it is also the first pantomime I have ever seen anywhere and to finalise my declaration of interest, I should state that my nine year old son along with a large swag of the Darwin populace had a small but unforgettable role in it - as a carpet seller in the market



scene. I was enchanted....

Since late Victorian times pantomimes have been a traditional Christmas family entertainment in English speaking cultures. Derived from Commedia dell'Arte grafted onto English Music Hall, pantomime freely ransacks fairytales or popular children's stories for its narratives. They are signified by the convention of cross sex casting - the principal boy role, to wit, Aladdin, is played by a young woman, while the part of the Dame in this case, Fartoomuch, the magician's wife, is taken by a male actor in drag. Graeme Bond's Aunty Jack popularised the form for Australian TV literate children. Importing specialty acts to create a hotchpotch of incongruous elements is the other significant feature of the pantomime. In this *Aladdin* all that was lacking was the Darwin Roller Skating Mob who were envisaged in the initial scheme but withdrew when they realised they could not do *Aladdin On Skates* but would have to share the stadium with so many, many others.

Aladdin And The Magic Lamp was the dream of Alex Cutts, the venue manager at Marrara Indoor Sporting Stadium which is normally the site of basketball, netball and martial arts tournaments and not suprisingly that is what it has been designed for - to accommodate upwards of a thousand spectators well protected from the melee on the floor below. It was not designed to enhance vocal and musical acoustics nor to bring the audience close to the individual

performers. So Alex's dream was bold and ambitious, and in practical terms madness on wheels without a gargantuan technical budget. Fortunately however, the town is populated by crazed visionaries like Neil Cameron and Tessa Pauling. Naturally there was not a humungous technical budget; it could just run to radio miking the main performers but had to hand mike the rest which created inherent pitfalls, most of which were ironed out by opening night. *Aladdin* was a show ideally suited to the superb technical facilities of the Darwin Performing Arts Centre but they didn't dream of it so it was held at Marrara, with everyone coping splendidly. The CIYT kids learnt lessons that will stand them in good stead if the Company is ever able to afford to perform in DPAC.

The strengths of this production were mammoth in keeping with the generous vision that inspired it. The script was fast and furious, witty and appropriately local and topical. It cleverly wended a zany path between keeping the adults in fits of laughter at the dangerous double entendres which were so subtle and sophisticated that the kids had no idea what we were laughing at because they were too busy laughing themselves silly at the ostensible level on which the jokes were operating. The repartee between the Evil Magician and his grasping wife which turned on the possibility of her granting or withholding her sexual favours was a perfect case in point. The sexual conceit was cast in terms of exotic

oral gratification from sweatmeats to upside down cakes.

"Don't think you'll get anything from my tea trolley tonight!" - and it all made perfect silly sense to the kids in the audience who know all about cupboard love themselves.

To coin an incongruous phrase, this show was community camp entertainment at its best- never prurient or sexist but raunchy and hilarious. It exploited adult knowingness and children's naivety in a way that celebrated social diversity and acknowledged individual sexual identity with a sparkling and light touch.

The key to it all was inspired casting. The show brought together the outrageous gay restaurateur, John Spellman, the proprietor of the local Cajun eatery *The Mississippi Queen*, as the baroquely silver body-painted Genie of the Lamp (and the monumental girth reminiscent of an Adonised Buddha or Leo McKern in *Help*) as the goodie pitted against NT Solicitor General Tom Pauling as the magician who is nefarious and incompetent as only the truly greedy are. Ken Conway, Director Of Browns Mart, played the Dame Fartoomuch who had a ruby in her belly almost as big as Texas and certainly almost as flashy as those worn somewhat more alluringly by the bevy of belly dancers which included a local magistrate's wife. Fartoomuch was attended by clouds of Johnsons Baby Powder supplied with a flick of the fair wrist of the divine and delightfully sexually ambiguous Sun silk-hairdresser by appointment, played exquisitely by Darwin's well-known Queen Mother Peter Morgan. Even the reputed straights like Darwin Theatre Company's Artistic Director Patrick Mitchell as the jive talking Rap King Genie of the Ring, and local lawyers Coates and Tippet as the leather bondage Goon Eunuchs looking like a cross between Toshiro Mifune and punk bikies turned in crazed campy fabulously over the top performances. The licence of theatre is amazing. It ought to be encouraged - don't you think? This was truly a Festival of Fairy Lights and nothing was hidden under a bushel.

The innocent performances were a well placed foil to all this worldliness and excess. Rachel O'Shea's delicately shaded performance as

Aladdin was matched by the assertive modern girl Princess of fourteen year old Emma Mansfield, and the pop star heroics of fifteen year old Fred Pauling who finally turned the tables on his evil master (and his real life Dad, Tom). As Aladdin's Mum, veteran performer Kay Brown was a source of sense and sanity and the chantuese of the two show stopping romantic ballads penned by Tom Pauling and Tony Joyce.

Directors Tessa Pauling and Maggie Miles not only honed and held in check the zanies and the leading innocents but developed wonderfully tight clowning routines with the Corrugated kids and placed precisely the other self-generated skills and talents of the Calisthenics girls; the death-defying acrobats, the scintillating belly dancers as well as ensuring the fire dancer didn't get burnt, the machete juggler didn't get cut and the bagpiper didn't run out of wind! And among, behind and all around it was a catchy and eclectic original musical score played by veteran rock guitarist Tony Joyce, percussionist extraordinaire Trevor Vivian as well as the versatile musicianship of Rob Hoad playing

keyboard and wielding flying machetes with equal aplomb.

Transforming the Marrara Stadium into a Persian Casbah is difficult, making it look enchanting even harder, so the design focused on a painted set and lavish props masterfully wrought by artists Colin Holt, Faridah Whyte and Bihla Smith which set off stunningly the jewel coloured, silky, satiny, shiny, sequiny, smooth, svelte, slippery, sparkling, shimmering, shamelessly sheer, sensuous costumes superbly sewn by Joanna Barkman.


To bring it all together so swiftly and seamlessly was the triumph of art over logistics, generosity over greed. And an enchanting and memorable evening was had by all... and not just the mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, sons, daughters and legal and restaurant clients of the sixty or so cast members, nor any other members of the Pauling family who weren't on the stage.

Suzanne Spinner

SUZANNE SPUNNER is a Darwin Playwright and mother of two. She has written two plays for CIYT, in 1991 SPILT MILK and RADIO FOR HELP this year. She also writes plays for bigger people who think they know more.

CORRUGATED IRON YOUTH THEATRE
1993 WORKSHOP PROGRAM

PALMERSTON WORKSHOPS
THEATRE FOR BEGINNERS
THEATRE/VIDEO PROJECT



CROSS CULTURAL W-SHOPS
STREET PERFORMANCE TROUPE


APPROACHING A CHARACTER

CIRCUS SKILLS

CREATIVE WRITING FOR THEATRE

IMPROVISATION

MASK DESIGN AND PERFORMANCE



ETC...

PHYSICAL THEATRE

ABORIGINAL YOUTH W-SHOPS

LOOKOUT 1993!