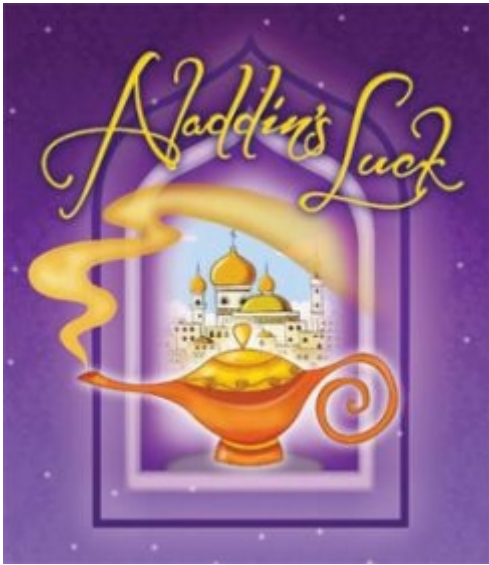


# Los Angeles/Regional Theater Review: ALADDIN'S LUCK (Lewis Family Playhouse)

by [Grant Barnes](#) on February 19, 2013

in [Theater-Los Angeles](#), [Theater-Regional](#)



## ALL YOUR WISHES ARE GRANTED

The production values of MainStreet Theatre Company's 70-minute performance of *Aladdin's Luck* at the Lewis Family Playhouse in Rancho Cucamonga were among the best I've seen in mid-size regional theaters in both Europe and America. The very reasonably priced tickets (\$16 full-priced adult, with various opportunities for discounts) couldn't have made much of a dent in covering the obviously high production costs. All in all, the show was one of the best values I've had in theater.

First, for those who haven't been to the Playhouse, the state of the art venue contains a huge apron stage, deep wings, high gridiron, top quality lighting and sound system, and two ranks of seats on the ground floor and one in a full balcony, all with excellent sightlines. Consistent with the adjective "Family" in its name, perhaps half of the audience were rapt children, and the rest were equally enthralled adults of various ages.



Janet Stanford's new play, *Aladdin's Luck*, is intended for three virtuosic actors, a woman, a young man and an older man. Amielyn Abellera played Aladdin's mother, the boy Omar (Aladdin's best friend), and Leilah (a princess, and both daughter of the Sultan and Aladdin's wife); Michael Stone Forrest played Mustapha (a baker), a servant, Al Zarnati (an unscrupulous magician) and the Sultan. Both Abellera and Forrest had to make some of the quickest costume and character changes I've seen; imagine going from a young street urchin to a black hijab-wearing mother to a princess with diaphanous flowing silks in a moment. While Abellera triumphed as Omar in particular, she showed an enormous range of accomplishment in each of her manifestations, all the while either swaggering, manipulating a soccer ball, dancing elaborate choreography, and wielding a sword.



Wide-ranging leading and character actor Wyatt Fenner, one of L.A.'s hardest working actors – capable in the classics as well as comedy and hard-hitting drama – played the street urchin Aladdin as a [Felix Krull](#)-type confidence man. Whether plotting with Omar, falling head over heels in love with the Sultan's daughter, haggling with the magician, becoming master of the genie (consumed by his own power like Ibsen's [John Gabriel Borkman](#)), or embodying Aladdin's hard-won self-awareness and – assurance with a mix of Prospero and Lord Rama, Fenner controlled the stage at each key transition. I've seen Fenner in at least a dozen plays since his time at USC, and he continues to impress in his intelligence and complete control over the nuances, depth and raw power of each character. He is an actor I'm always happy to travel to South Coast Rep or now, Rancho Cucamonga, to see perform.



This is not the Disneyfication of *Aladdin*. The tale is too good and too embedded in such different cultures that it can and should be told in different ways. Like the Greek myths (which exist in many versions), a tale from the *1001 Nights* can be created with different emphases. Aladdin's turn from a clever boy to one with hubris, addictive evil, arrogance, and love of power and riches may have pushed the play into a very dark space, but in Stanford's vision, Aladdin is a metaphor for teaching both self-protection and self-control. This play elucidates how easily absolute power and bedazzlement by a Sultan's wealth, especially when you've had none, can destroy both honesty in an intimate relationship and loyalty to one's own family and friends. Since Aladdin tells lies and becomes abusive and domineering when trying to show deep and undivided love, it is a cautionary tale for children and underscores the need to do right in the face of great temptation to do wrong.

The production team perfectly embraced the capabilities of the venue. Director Robert Castro, a colleague of Peter Sellars and active nationally, not only used the entire stage with a keen eye, but also allowed for the recruitment of young members of the audience to be marketplace customers or wedding party members. The set and video projection designer, Victoria Petrovich – known in opera and theater nationally – created a rich environment using fabric in exciting ways to suggest different moods and locations; in particular, the projection of the genie was quite effective. Light Designer Ben Zamora, similarly a collaborator with Sellars, also used the fabric with frequent cues that were a banquet of sensations fit for a Sultan. Even though actors were miked (inconspicuously), John Zalewski's unobtrusive sound design ensured the text of the play was consistently clear. Fight Coordinator Brian Danner and Stage Manager Nate Genung also added magical creativity to this beautiful production.

The brief two-week run has ended, but you should plan for the March 30 opening of *The Phantom Tollbooth*, directed by Jessica Kubzansky. For those who are skittish about the location, try the Metrolink to Rancho Cucamonga (just over one hour from Union Station) and a \$10 cab ride to the brand new Victoria Gardens shopping complex, created as if it were the center of a small town. It may not be as simple as rubbing a lamp, but there are veritable riches in store for those who make the journey.

photos by Ed Krieger

### *Aladdin's Luck*

MainStreet Theatre Company at the Lewis Family Playhouse

Victoria Gardens Cultural Center in Rancho Cucamonga

ended on February 10, 2013

for upcoming shows and tickets, call 909.477.2752 or visit <http://www.LewisFamilyPlayhouse.com>



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