

Magic Carpet Ride

Ballet Fantastique delivers a constrained Aladdin to a rock-and-roll score

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Natanael Leal as Aladdin

Ballet Fantastique's *Aladdin* takes the company's storytelling style on a new adventure, combining an ancient tale from the *Arabian Nights* with indelible music by Queen, played live by Satin Love Orchestra.

Choreographers Donna Marisa Bontrager and Hannah Bontrager find a gem in Natanael Leal as Aladdin. Leal's impish characterization, strong footwork and solid partnering provide youthful zip throughout the production. Princess Jasmine, danced with élan by Amanda Coleman, continually tempers Aladdin's untamed persona.

Gustavo Ramirez delights as Jafar, punching his menacing physicality through the space. Flanked by busy parrots Ashley

Bontrager and Leanne Mizzoni, Ramirez has fun as the resident baddie. Choreographically, this character could dial up the mean factor — showing us more weight, more strength and more sharpness — to balance Aladdin's charms.

Hannah Bontrager and Carolin Koepplin are both engaging movers as "Jeannie Babes." Bontrager, especially, has an integrated investment in each moment.

Costume designs by Donna Marisa Bontrager — jewel-toned and vibrant — cleverly reinforce a fantastical imagining of the past. But the turbans the "Street Babes" wear in Act I confused us. Are these turbans? (In 2017, we ought to at least have the conversation about what we're projecting when we choose to incorporate what *seems* like religious headwear into our non-religious effort. We accept men wearing turbans in all kinds of roles — Aladdin, Jafar, the Sultan — but should we?)

Lighting design by Caroline Barnes and Donna Marisa Bontrager takes us to a sun-drenched ancient city and deep inside the Cave of Wonders.

The libretto by the Bontragers, as well as Genevieve Speer and Deborah Speer, asks quite a lot of Jim Ballard, who does double-duty as the Narrator and Genie. BFan often employs a narrator to scaffold the story for the audience, and while Ballard is affable in this role, there's some theatrical artistry missing in the development of the words and their delivery.

A dramaturg might help to elevate the language of the narrative, which is serviceable but seems somewhat pedestrian in contrast to lyrics by Queen. And the narrator's pacing and dynamics could benefit from a theater director's input.

Choreographically, the ballet is most compelling in those moments when the movement explores the deep diagonals in the space, changing focal points and breaking from unison. Especially in counterpoint to its rock-'n'-roll score, BFan's continually symmetrical groupings (one main character in the center, one or two on either side, repeat) and forward-facing, presentational style, seem constrained.

Under musical direction by Jason Palmer, Satin Love Orchestra shines. Vocalists Matthew Larson, Shelley James and Rica Wright hit us in the sweet spot, taking iconic Queen riffs and making them their own. Guitarist Joe Weber, keyboardist Owen Wright, bassist

Callan Coleman and electrical percussionist Daren Kromarek round out this stellar musical effort.

Older students from BFan's dance program joined in the performance, adding to its overall liveliness.

[About the Author »](#)

Rachael Carnes

Rachael Carnes has written for *Eugene Weekly* as well as *The Stranger* in Seattle, since the mid-nineties. Covering dance, theater, performance art as well as human interest stories, Rachael enjoys meeting new people and seeing their creative process in action. As the founder of a local non profit, Sparkplug Dance, she teaches movement to kids in our community who juggle any number of risk factors.

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