

# Disney's "Aladdin Jr." is a delight from SVCT that sparkles and entertains

## Morgan Hill Life

by Camille Bounds, Sep 24, 2018



*Photo by Marty Check*

Jillian Puente, as Princess Jasmine, and Oliver Kaelin, as Aladdin, rehearse a scene for the upcoming SVCT musical "Aladdin, Jr."

What do you get when you put 48 kids ages seven to 14 with director Carol Harris? Only one of the best children's shows to hit our local stage ever. South Valley Civic Theatre's "Aladdin Jr." – based on the popular Disney animated film – takes the audience to a whole new world.

Throw in the original clever choreography of Jennifer Girfall and creative sets and special effects including a magic carpet by Richard Kauser and Roger Traverso with costumes by Jennifer Puente who is also producer of this show and you've got a production of "Aladdin" that sparkles for more than two hours with an amazing cast of kids that deliver 200 percent. Every one sings and dances with full vigor that makes up a chemistry that blends and makes this an entertainment you want to see again.

The musical tells the story of Aladdin, a street urchin who discovers a magical lamp. With the help of a genie, after many setbacks he wins the heart of the beautiful princess Jasmine, the daughter of the sultan. I haven't noted individuals since the cast is huge and all are super in their roles.

With music by Alan Menken with Book by Chad Begelin, "Aladdin Jr." is the first show of SVCT's 50th season. I can't wait to see the four more great productions this season. They were chosen as audience favorites.

As the old saying goes, grab the kids and "run, don't walk" for tickets to "Aladdin Jr." for a super fantastic theatrical experience.

## Chamber Mixer — Morgan's Cove



*Photo by Morgan Hill Life*

The monthly Morgan Hill Chamber of Commerce Mixer was held at Rich and Julie Firato's home. Morgan's Cove is a tribute to the days when pirates roamed the oceans. Country singer James Wesley performed a few songs and four actresses with the South Valley Civic Theater's "Aladdin Jr." sang a song from the musical show.

The show opened Sept. 21 and performances are at 7:30 p.m. Oct. 12, 19 & 20; 3:30 p.m. Oct. 13; and 2:30 p.m. Oct. 14. All shows are performed at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse, 17090 Monterey Road. Tickets are \$16 to \$15 and available at [www.svct.org](http://www.svct.org).

Want to join the Morgan Hill Chamber of Commerce or receive more information on what the Chamber can do for your business? Call Brittney Sherman at (408) 779-9444 or email her at [brittney@morganhill.org](mailto:brittney@morganhill.org).

# South Valley

## Little magic lamp

SVCT opens fall season with 'Aladdin Jr.'

September 12, 2018

by Susan Rife



**Seventy-two kids bring One Thousand and One Nights to life at South Valley Civic Theatre beginning Sept. 21.**

There's nothing like magic to appeal to kids, which may account for the 72 young people between 2nd and 8th grade who auditioned for the South Valley Civic Theatre production of Disney's "Aladdin Jr."

Director Carol Harris cast 49 young actors for the musical, which opens Sept. 21 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse.

"We called and they came," said Harris. "They wanted to see the magic, do the magic."

The play is a stage version of the 1992 Disney film, *Aladdin*, which in turn is based on a Middle Eastern folk tale from "The Book of One Thousand and One Nights." It tells the story of a street kid in Agrabah who falls in love with the sultan's daughter and what they must each do to escape the lives they seem preordained to live.

"Junior" versions of the Disney shows are shortened to a running time of about 70 minutes, which means the songs are quick and the action quicker. The biggest challenge for the director is keeping her large, youthful cast occupied during rehearsals.

"One of the tricks is you have to be prepared so you can keep them busy," said Harris. She splits up rehearsal time between herself and choreographer Jennifer Grifall so everyone is occupied.

The show stars 11-year-old Oliver Kaelin in the title role.

Oliver is a member of a Morgan Hill family which keeps busy on the community theater stage: his father, Michael, was recently seen in *Guys and Dolls*, which was directed by his mother, Myra. His sister Ginger also is cast in *Aladdin Jr.* and sister Lucy was in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*.

"I get to meet a lot of new people and make a lot of new friends," said Oliver.

The biggest challenge in playing Aladdin is that "he lies a lot," said Oliver. And then there's keeping a straight face when Aladdin is being chewed out by other characters. Another challenge: keeping his balance on a "magic carpet."

"The trick is to stay on it, especially with two people, and singing," he said.

Balanced on the magic carpet with Oliver is 12-year-old Jillian Puente. Princess Jasmine, Jillian said, is rightfully angry with her father the sultan's restrictions on her freedom.

"I can't blame her," she said. "I wouldn't want to be stuck in the palace your whole life."

P.J. Crocker makes his SVCT debut as the villainous Jafar, a fun role because "you get to mess with others on stage, be in power for a while and then get knocked off."

Crocker has appeared in four shows produced by the city of Gilroy.

Jillian's mother, Jennifer Puente, is the show's producer, a position she describes as filling in for every job as needed, from helping with costumes to handling the show's expenses.

"We're fortunate to have the support of the community," she said.

# Entertainment – Musical “Aladdin, Jr.” based on Disney film kicks off SVCT’s 50th season

“Aladdin, Jr.” opens Sept. 21 at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse

by Marty Cheek Sep 11, 2018



*Photo by Marty Cheek*

Jillian Puente, as Princess Jasmine, and Oliver Kaelin, as Aladdin, rehearse a scene for the upcoming SVCT musical “Aladdin, Jr.”

PJ Crocker, is the Grand vizier of the Sultan, played by Landon Sepulveda. With his parrot Iago, played by Max Brown, Jafar seeks the magical lamp hidden within the Cave of Wonders but learns that only a “diamond in the rough” may be allowed entrance. He realizes Aladdin fits that description. Princess Jasmine, who refuses to marry a suitor, disguises herself as a commoner and escapes the palace into the streets, where she meets Aladdin.

A sixth-grader at Valley Christian School in San Jose, Kaelin describes the character he plays as a trickster with a heart of gold.

“He’s a liar. He’s not really a conman, he’s just really good at lying,” he said at a rehearsal. “But he’s not into big lies, he just lies when he steals food and needs to cover up for himself.”

Eventually, as the adventure based on an Arabian Nights story proceeds, Aladdin starts to act like a prince and he and Jasmine fall in love with a little help from Genie.

“Even though he’s just a guy from the streets, he’s someone that she likes,” Kaelin said.

A seventh-grader at Brownell Middle School in Gilroy, Puente enjoys the magic of staged musicals and has performed in several SVCT productions including “Mary Poppins,” “The Little Mermaid,” “Willie Wonka,” “Annie,” and “Mulan.” She and Kaelin have been doing SVCT shows together for three years. For both of them, the best part of doing shows is getting to make new friends. Both of them said they haven’t watched the animated film version of the show because they wanted to develop their characters without the influence of the movie.

Wishes come true for a street urchin smitten by a spirited princess, and the pair step into a whole new world of comedy and romance in South Valley Civic Theatre’s musical “Aladdin, Jr.” With a cast of 48 actors, performances at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse start Sept. 21.

The children’s show opens the theater group’s 50th season. It stars Oliver Kaelin as the mischievous Aladdin who with the help of Genie, played by Angelina Villafranca, befriends Princess Jasmine, played by Jillian Puente.

The story is based on the 1991 Disney film and is set in the Arabian city of Agrabah. The villainous Jafar, played by

Preparing for her role as Jasmine, Puente said “I’ve been practicing my lines.”  
Why does Jasmine like Aladdin?

“Jasmine probably likes him because he’s nice,” Puente said. “He’s a liar, but she doesn’t know it yet.”  
The show has special effects to bring the audience into the magical world of Arabia. When Genie appears, the jinn is accompanied by a lot of strobe lights to create a mystical aura. For the famous magic carpet ride scene, Kaelin and Puente step on a rug fashioned to an electric skateboard guided around the stage with a remote control.

“I control it and I sing and I have to try and not make (Jasmine) fall and get run over by somebody,” Kaelin said of the magic carpet.

Puente encourages families from throughout the South Valley to enjoy the show.

“I like musicals more than just straight acting, because musicals are more fun and you get to sing and dance instead of just talking,” she said. “Acting is fun, too.”

It’s a good show for families to take their children to, Kaelin said, although he warns the story has a dark side.

“There are some evil parts, and that’s what makes it kind of creepy,” he said.

Jasmine added: “But there are evil parts, like, in every story.”

Jennifer Puente, Jillian’s mother, serves as the producer of “Aladdin, Jr.” It is her first time putting a show on stage.

“It’s been a really interesting experience,” she said. “I just recently joined the board of directors, which is how got roped into it.”

Jillian got the acting bug when she saw the SVCT teen “Shrek, Jr.” several years ago.

“She saw it with my mom and she loved it so much,” Jennifer said. “And she came home and said, ‘Mom, I want to do shows there. That’s where I want to do it. I don’t want to go anywhere else.’”  
She tried out for “Mulan, Jr.” and got a part. Jennifer was a volunteer on the building the set. When SVCT did “Mary Poppins,” Jillian convinced her mother to try out for a role. Jennifer played the “bird woman” and had a scene with Kaelin, who played the role of Michael Banks, the mischievous boy. The musical theater is becoming a family affair. Jennifer’s son Jarrett is performing in “Aladdin, Jr.” as his first time in a SVCT production.

“It was a really fun experience to be on stage with Jillian,” she said. “And then we were in ‘Willy Wonka’ where she was Violet Beauregarde and I was Mrs. Bucket. So, I got more and more involved in it the more she got involved in it and then they asked me to help produce this one. I’m kind of a sucker for Disney, so it makes it easier.”

