



[Aladdin](#) by Birmingham Royal Ballet
at Lowry Theatre
Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) September 2017

Birmingham Royal Ballet have done it again, and produced a piece of magical theatrical entertainment which is suitable for young and old alike. This time they have chosen the well-loved story of **Aladdin**.

When one thinks of Aladdin one either immediately thinks of pantomime or the wonderful Disney cartoon film; but there are other variations on the same theme out there too, all telling a very similar story with the odd difference here and there. One of these is the ballet score by the talented and wonderful contemporary composer **Carl Davis**, whose score for Aladdin is simply magical.

In this production Davis's music is done full justice by **Paul Murphy** conducting the Royal Ballet Sinfonia, and on stage itself these sweeping chords and lyrical melodies are equally complemented by a simple but expertly designed set by

Dick Bird

. When lit by

Mark Jonathan

's creative design it was highly effective, evocative and simply stark and beautiful.

And so the stage is set, all we need now are the dancers to come on and tell us the story. Which, dressed in colourful and quasi-authentic garb, they did. Unfortunately one or two of the costumes (**Sue Blane**) inhibited and got in the way a bit. I am thinking especially of the long flowing garments worn by The Mahgrib and The Sultan, and the poor genie's head mask didn't look too comfortable either. However, the dancing, choreographed by **David Bintley**

, was top-notch with some absolutely spectacular picture endings. The finale of all the jewels in the cave was a favourite moment, as well as the chorus ending of the genie's solo in act two. However, the most impressive dance of the evening came in the form of something which in actual fact seemed wholly out of place in an Arabian story - the inclusion of a Chinese dragon!

However the two dancers performing this routine were utterly excellent. It was simply the best dragon dance I have ever seen.

Classical ballet isn't really my thing, so I tend to veer away from the Giselles and Coppelias, but thought I might give Aladdin a go, and am indeed extremely thankful I did. The 'traditional ballet' element was not as evident as I thought it might have been, although I still don't understand or like the soloists bowing and coming out of character for mini-curtain calls mid ballet, and since it is a story with which I was familiar I could sit back, relax and enjoy the techniques, skill and indeed pageantry all the more.

It would be wrong of me to try and criticise the soloists since I am not versed in the knowledge of their training. For me, all the dancing was superb! All I can do is to say from my perspective, whether or not they were portraying believably realistic characters in order to tell the story. I think this is an area where both ballet and opera fail, since most of the performers are so steeped in their technique that 'acting' is either secondary or non-existent, and when they do 'act' they overact to try and compensate for this. I didn't notice this happening too much here, but some of the miming was very 'obvious', and the caricature of Aladdin's mother (**Marion Tait**) fell completely flat for me.

This is, nevertheless, a very colourful and vivid production with great attention to detail, which certainly pays dividends. A very enjoyable evening in the hands of some highly talented dancers and creatives.