

**POPCORN**

*Aladdin*  
Wishful Thinking  
3 popcorns

One Popcorn, Poor — Two Popcorns, Fair — Three Popcorns, Good — Four Popcorns, Excellent

By Michael S. Goldberg  
film critic

Three wishes. It sure seems like a lot. One would think you could solve all the world's problems, as well as a few of your own, if a genie granted them to you. But, after mulling director Guy Ritchie's adaptation of the "One Thousand and One Nights" Arabian folktale Disney first treated us to in 1992, I'm still not certain how I'd proceed. Are you sure you can't wish for more wishes? Yeah, I know, I know. That's the way it has to be. You see, it's all part of a built-in lesson about hopes, aspirations and the human condition, brought to the silver screen here in fine fettle.

Rated PG and boasting a bevy of positive beliefs, with special emphasis on the leadership roles it passionately affirms are rightfully waiting for the fairer sex to assume, it's just the sort of film I'd want to take my daughter, Erin, to when she was little. Surrounding and intertwining the ennobling messages with engaging music, several wittily conveyed performances and bedazzling art direction, it all makes for a fulfilling experience at the Bijou. Plus, for folks like me who are always looking for parodic jabs at our current powers that be, replete with a happy path to extrication from their besmirching of all that is good and decent, like the commercials for Pregro proudly asserted, it's in there, too.

Fact is, this age-old tale, with roots speculated to emanate from both Chinese and Arabian cultures, brims with political science theory that, alas and alack, never grows old. In this permutation, the elderly Sultan (David Negabhan) bemoans having no male heir to his throne. Thus, he falls vulnerable to the evil, inveigling spell of his Grand Vizier, Jafar (Marwan Kenzari), who not only wants the old dude's job, but the hand of his comely daughter, Jasmine, effectively portrayed by Naomi Scott. Making no bones about it, not just yet, except in melodic soliloquy, which essentially intones "I am woman, hear me roar," Jasmine is confident she'd be a sultan extraordinaire and a goddess to the good citizens of Agrabah.

Of course, this Grand Vizier doing his Rasputin/Sherriff of Nottingham riff on government overthrow just won't do...not if Jasmine and Aladdin, a clever street urchin masquerading as a prince courtesy of one rub of the magic lamp, have anything to say about it. Though at first led to believe that the apple of his eye is but her majesty's handmaiden, our title hero, invigoratively played by Mena Massoud, soon agrees with the princess that she isn't just chopped liver, and that there's no reason why the royal succession should shun her. But, as the Sultan reminds, the constitution says it's a no-no. While you have to give His Majesty credit for revering the document before then convincing him to amend the chauvinist rule for the good of his kingdom, we can't help but re-

flect on how our own grand document is being marginalized.

Whereas *Aladdin* has a brilliantly astute genie to intercede and direct wishful traffic, it occurs that we in the 50 states might benefit from some wise and altruistic intervention. And truth be told, I'd be all for Will Smith, who plays the genie with scene-stealing aplomb, to step from the screen, "Purple Rose of Cairo"-style, and give us a bit of a hand out here...perhaps toss his hat in the ring, and then, at an opportune moment during the Big Debate, flourish some of his genie powers. That'd give 'em what for.

Such is how my mind wandered as I watched *Aladdin*'s richly filled treasure chest of enlightened dreams...each scene in one way or another aimed at convincing us that hope prevails. The idea is, once people make up their minds to do the righteous thing, it's only a matter of time before they're on the road to realizing their profound potential.

Note that history has been perennially punctuated with fables of every stripe to remind us of our inalienable rights, just in case some narcissist comes along and tries to convince us that we exist only to adulate him. The would-be oppressor invariably promises a great future as only he and he alone can provide, right then and there quashing any thoughts of a glorious destiny courtesy of our own self-determination. It is a dark part of human nature that must be battled regularly.

Hence, a cheery, uplifting illumination like *Aladdin*, both spiritually beneficial and a reminder of our civic responsibility, should be seen at least twice a year, or every 5,000 negative thoughts...whichever comes first. A knowledgeable populace with the commonweal at heart, appearing en masse at the polls, is ostensibly as powerful as any genie's lamp. And there, as all tyrants fear, is the rub.

*Aladdin*, rated PG, is a Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures release directed by Guy Ritchie and stars Will Smith, Mena Massoud and Naomi Scott. Running time: 128 minutes.

**Register for NJPAC Youth Programs**

AREA -- Registration closes Monday, June 10, for New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) summer youth programs for children ages 10-18. Classes are offered in dance, acting, musical theater, jazz and hip hop. Classes are taught by professional artists and provide students the opportunity to immerse themselves in a supportive and engaging learning environment at NJPAC's Center for Arts Education or in residence at Rutgers University's Newark campus. NJPAC is located at One Center Street, Newark. Log on to [www.njpac.org](http://www.njpac.org) or call (888) GONJAC (888-466-5722) for more information.

**'War Heroes' Premiere at VFW in Cranford Sunday**

CRANFORD -- A screening of documentary TV series "War Heroes," hosted by Benghazi hero Kris Paronto will be presented at the Cranford VFW Post 335 on Sunday, June 9, at 479 South Avenue East, Cranford from 4 to 6 p.m. The event is free of charge, but seating is limited. Light refreshments will be served.

"War Heroes" personalizes American soldiers by telling their real-life stories at home and abroad. Each

episode will profile an individual service member or veteran up close and personal, detailing their unique lives, service, and sacrifice.

Assemblyman Jon Bramnick is to present the pilot episode of "War Heroes." The pilot episode focuses on Sgt. Ryan E. Doltz from Mine Hill, N.J., who lost his life in Baghdad, Iraq on June 5, 2004. Ryan was a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute and served in the New Jersey National Guard.

**Celebrate Cranford Event to Take Place on June 9**

CRANFORD -- In November 2018, Downtown Cranford was chosen as the Number One Downtown in New Jersey by NJ.com. On Sunday, June 9, from 1 to 5 p.m., local organizations will come together in a day of celebration -- Celebrate Cranford. The activities that day will include music, Cranford Fit Fest, Kid Zone with games and a rock-climbing wall, and a Sloppy Joe Eating Contest, sponsored by Mr. J's Deli. Celebrate Cranford will take place at Eastman Clock Plaza, as well as on North Union Avenue from Alden Street to Springfield Avenue.

Celebrate Cranford is a collaborative effort among numerous Cranford organizations including Downtown Cranford, Cranford Community Connection, Cranford Jaycees, Cranford Area Chamber of Commerce, Hanson Park Conservancy, Cranford PBA Local 52, Cranford FMBA Local 37, Cranford Newcomers Club, and Cranford Municipal Alliance.

In addition, a number of local busi-

nesses and groups will have tables set up at the event. This includes Mindful Embodiment, Exercise Outside the Box, Think D'sign Print, Fit Body Boot Camp, Tovah Yoga, New Jersey Blood Services, Bella Organici, Cranford Public Library, Cranford Fire Department, and Historical Preservation Advisory Board and Cranford Historical Society.

There are a number of demonstrations scheduled during the event from local groups and businesses including Cranford Community Center Seniors Program, F45, King Strength & Performance, Home Power Yoga, HD Wellness, Hands of Life MMA, Exercise Outside the Box, Fit Body Boot Camp, and Alluem Yoga.

"Winning the designation of top downtown in New Jersey is something we're extremely proud of," said Downtown Cranford Director Gabe Bailer. "The Celebrate Cranford event is a recognition of all of the people, organizations, and businesses that made this award possible."

**Pre-Register for 'Chasing the Moon' Preview, Discussion**

SCOTCH PLAINS -- "Chasing the Moon," a new six-hour documentary series about the space race, will premiere July 8-10 on PBS. Through a partnership with PBS, the Scotch Plains Public Library will host the screening of a preview clip, followed by a discussion, on Thursday, June 27, at 7 p.m.

Chasing the Moon, an American Experience film by Robert Stone, thoroughly reimagines the race to the moon for a new generation, upending much of the conventional mythology surrounding the effort. The three-part series recasts the Space Age as a fascinating stew of scientific innovation and PR-savvy, political calculation and media spectacle, visionary impulses and personal drama.

The film reveals how the drive to land a man on the moon was fueled as much by politics as it was by technology and was a controversial undertaking during a volatile time. The Library preview will bring us back to 1968. In the midst of social upheaval

in the U.S., pressure from the Soviet space program, and the tragedy of Apollo 1, NASA pushes forward in its efforts.

Registration is strongly recommended for this special event, which is part of the Library's summer reading program, A Universe of Stories. For more information or to register, go to [www.scotlib.org](http://www.scotlib.org) or call (908) 322-5007, ext. 204. The Scotch Plains Public Library is located at 1927 Bartle Avenue, one block from Park Avenue in the center of town.

**Single Jewish Friends To Hold Luncheon**

AREA -- Circle of Single Jewish Friends 50s-plus will hold a Meet and Eat Luncheon, Sunday, June 23, at noon, at the Olive Garden Restaurant, located at 510 Woodbridge Center Drive, Woodbridge. Cost is price of the menu/tip and \$3. Please join us. RSVP Roberta (908) 668-8450 or [roger678@optonline.net](mailto:roger678@optonline.net).



Photo courtesy Joanie Schwartz photography  
A SUCCESSFUL SHOW...Over \$5,000 was raised (and still going) for the Runway of Dreams Foundation and over 550 people were in attendance at the Westfield High School (WHS) Runway of Dreams Club first-ever "WHS Rocks the Runway of Dreams" held last Friday at the WHS auditorium. The student-run fashion show highlights adaptive clothing for people with cognitive and physical disabilities, as well as incorporates student designs and on-trend clothing from local stores. Pictured are models who were in the fashion show with students Jillian Laconti and Charlotte Cohen who produced the show, and Runway of Dreams Foundation Founder Mindy Sheier.

**WHS Runway of Dreams Raises over \$5,000**

WESTFIELD -- The first ever Westfield High School (WHS) Runway of Dreams Fashion Show rocked the WHS auditorium on May 31, raising over \$5,000 to support the Runway of Dreams Foundation, whose founder, Mindy Sheier, spoke at the show.

The show was completely student run, produced by Charlotte Cohen, a freshman, and Jillian Laconti, a junior. Over 550 people filled the auditorium, and Ethan Berman and EJB Entertainment brought down the house. The talents of WHS students were seen in every aspect of the production.

"Working on the fashion show opened our eyes even more to how difficult it is to navigate our own school for students with disabilities. We hope to help make change to this and look forward to working with the Westfield town council to help them with their inclusivity efforts, starting with their town-wide fashion show in

September," commented Charlotte and Jillian.

The show featured adaptive clothing for people with disabilities, as well as Jillian's and Charlotte's own designs and those of other students - LanguagesNJ, Cosmic Clothes and Styled N Strut. Local retailers - Athleta, the Gap, Look Twice/Look Again, Lord and Taylor and South Moon Under lent clothing to round out the show.

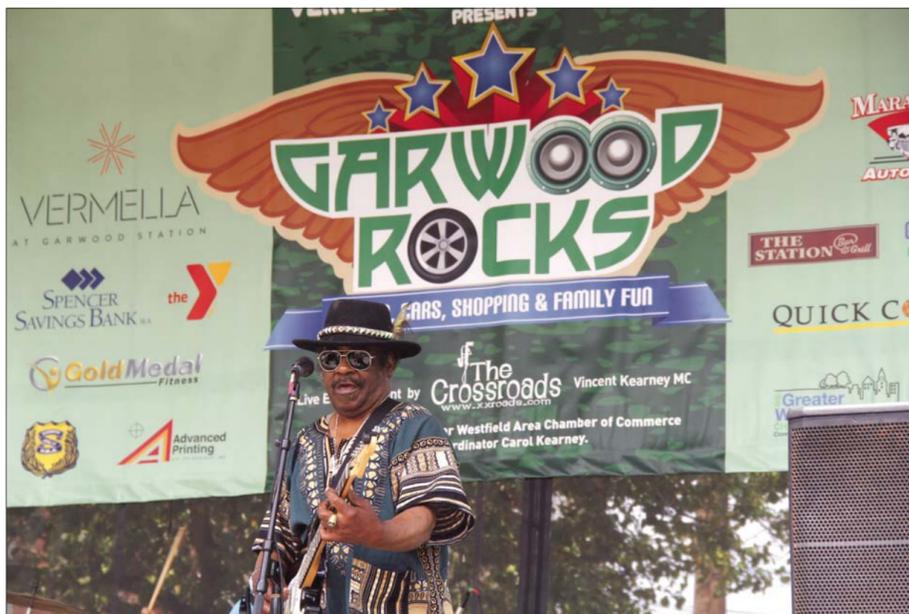
What's adaptive fashion? Fashionable and functional clothing that make getting dressed easier for those with mobility, sensory or other disabilities. Some modifications featured in the show included hidden magnetic closures that look like buttons, tagless, seamless and sensory-friendly fabrics, easy-on zippered and stability-enhancing sneakers, wheelchair-friendly jeans with a higher rise in the back and jeans that fit over prosthetic legs and braces, as well as shirts with easy-open necklines.

**Photographic Abstraction Exhibit Opens June 13**

AREA -- The New Jersey Photography Forum continues the celebration of its 25th Anniversary with "The Changing World of Photographic Abstraction" exhibit at the County College of Morris Art Gallery from Thursday, June 13 through August 27. The Gallery is in the Sherman H. Masten Learning Resource Center on the college's Randolph campus, located at 214 Center Grove Road. Hours are Mondays and Wednesdays, noon to 5 p.m.; Tuesdays and Thursdays, noon to 8 p.m.; Fridays, noon to 4 p.m.; and the first Saturday of the month from noon to 3 p.m. The public is invited to a free reception to meet the artists at

the gallery on June 20, from 5 to 7 p.m.

Charles Miller, the curator of the show said, "The exhibit explores the differences between abstraction and extraction in photographic art. Abstract photography is non-representational and several images may be combined in a collage form, or manipulated with software to restructure the original image. Extraction in photography is the cropping or separation of a part of an image from a whole subject in order to focus on the design of just a few elements and emphasize the beauty in the details and the essence of the original image."



GARWOOD ROCKS...The Barry Blues Band take to the Garwood Rocks stage Sunday. The Garwood Rocks Street Fair was held Sunday, June 2, along Center Street, and is sponsored by the Greater Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce. The annual music festival and street fair features live entertainment presented by Crossroads, hundreds of vendors, classic car show, delicious festival food, beer garden, activities for kids at the Kids Zone, and much more.

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Join us for a reception after the concert to meet the artists  
Additional information: [musicalclubofwestfield.org](http://musicalclubofwestfield.org) 908-654-1036