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# Disney's live-action Aladdin review: Remake or a whole new world?



by Victoria Davis 2 days ago

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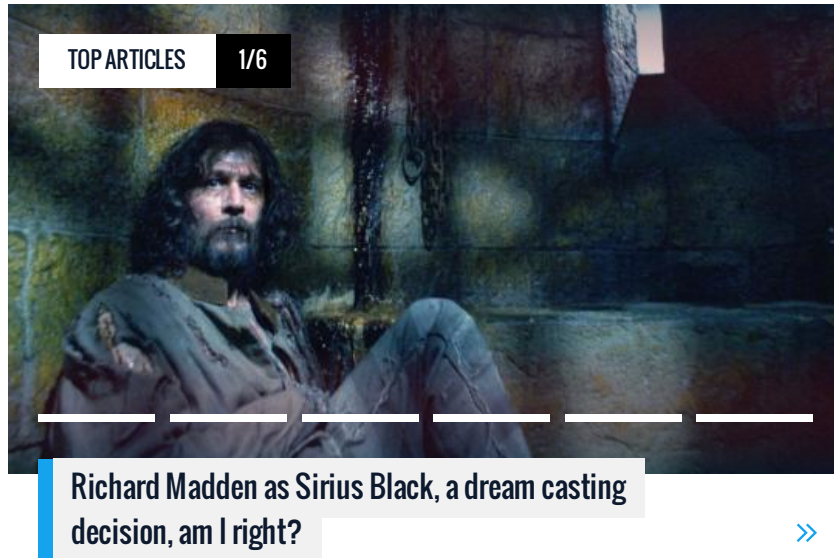
COMMENT

*Now that Disney's live-action Aladdin has finally released into theaters, should the film be viewed as a remake or a new story for a new generation?*

Since 2010, Hollywood has been on the fast track to bringing classic Disney films to life in a new way. *Alice in Wonderland* was the first live-action remake to hit the big screen, then came

*Maleficent*, then *Cinderella*, *The Jungle Book*, *Beauty and The Beast*, *Dumbo* and now *Aladdin*.

Thanks to CGI and the creative mind of director Guy Ritchie, Disney fans are getting the chance to fall in love all over again with the flamboyant genie, the strong-willed princess and the handsome street-rat. But should this “remake” be viewed as a live-action copy of the original, or a new story for a whole new world?



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Disney’s live-action *Aladdin* released into theaters this Friday and the movie has already been bombarded with **negative reviews** comparing the actors to their original animated characters. This shouldn’t be much of a surprise since the role of Genie has always been associated with the late, great Robin Williams. But the roles Jasmine, Aladdin, and Jafar are also in the hot seat. While the general consensus is that the re-imagining of Agrabah is eye-poppingly gorgeous—and it is—critics seem keen on scrutinizing characters for their lack of likeness to the original creations.

But perhaps comparing a Disney-animated film from 1992 to a 2019 live-action version of the same story is unfair. Sure, it’s got the same title, the same troupe of core characters, and the same narrative landmarks, but there are new themes, new lines, and new twists in this story to fit a new era of fairy tales.

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It's important to remember that *Aladdin*, and all the other Disney live-action films, are not just being created for those who grew up with the originals. They are also made for a new generation and should be looked at with fresh eyes.



So what does *Aladdin*, the 2019 edition, look like with a pair of unbiased peepers? First off, this film is unbelievably gorgeous!

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Granted, the filmmakers did have a great setting to work with. Agrabah was one of Disney's more glamorous creations with glittering palaces of gold and ivory, culture-rich street markets along a Mediterranean coast and vibrant, fantasy versions of saris and dastars of every color. The new live-action and CGI enriched Agrabah is truly a breath-taking site, even more so than the original. Still, it wasn't the scene that stole the show.





The Cave of Wonders was, of course, the scene that everyone was waiting for. It's not only the first time viewers meet Genie, but it's the setting for one of the showiest musical numbers in the whole film. "Friend Like Me" was a stunning number, with nearly all the same magical tricks and treats from the original. But there were some small, yet noticeable, changes made that did the new version a lot of favors.

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"Friend Like Me" is not just another song and dance, it's where Genie introduces himself and gives the rules of wish-making. It's really a platform for which the character says, "This is who I am." It's a personality piece and Will Smith made it his own, adding rap segments and beat-boxing notes that contrasted to Genie's original 1920s-style show tune.

There's no question that Ritchie knew this would be an emotional and touchy character introduction, but Smith nailed the contrast perfectly, keeping Genie's personality intact while also being careful to not imitate Williams' signature style. A copy-cat image was not an option.

On an even more personal note, not once does Smith's Genie call Aladdin's character, "Al." This was William's iconic nickname for his unconventional master. Smith doesn't even go there, calling Aladdin "kid" instead. It seemed like a sincere gesture from the cast and a way to tell audiences they understood that parts of Genie would only ever belong to Williams.



Of course, Genie's character was not the only role audiences anticipated for change. Jasmine was also a character that would require a bit of modern-day fine-tuning.

What most fans loved about Disney's original heroine was her iron will and stubbornness to adhere to societal norms in the palace. She refused to marry someone she didn't love, she refused to listen to commands from people she didn't trust, and she was aggressive in her believe that honesty is the best policy. Jasmine was one of the most apologetically out-spoken princesses in the Disney franchise and Naomi Scott took that one step further.

While nothing changes in Jasmine's personality for the live-action *Aladdin*, the execution of the values this character holds dear is much more "in your face." It's a tactic the original Jasmine would have probably been all for. Scott has her very own, brand new musical number "Speechless" that's powerful, soul-shaking and illustrates Jasmine's desire to not only have her voice heard, but her potential realized as the next future Sultan. Scott's portrayal of this ambitious princess is spunky, unrelenting and the reason we're falling for Jasmine all over again.



There are some wonderfully nostalgic moments in Disney's new *Aladdin*, such as Mena Massoud's charmingly boyish portrayal of the story's protagonist and the familiar notes of everyone's favorite love song, "A Whole New World." But this new take on an old tale is also saturated with fresh changes, like Aladdin's witty one-liners, a more serious leadership portrayal of Jasmine's father and a far-less humorous (and talkative) parrot.

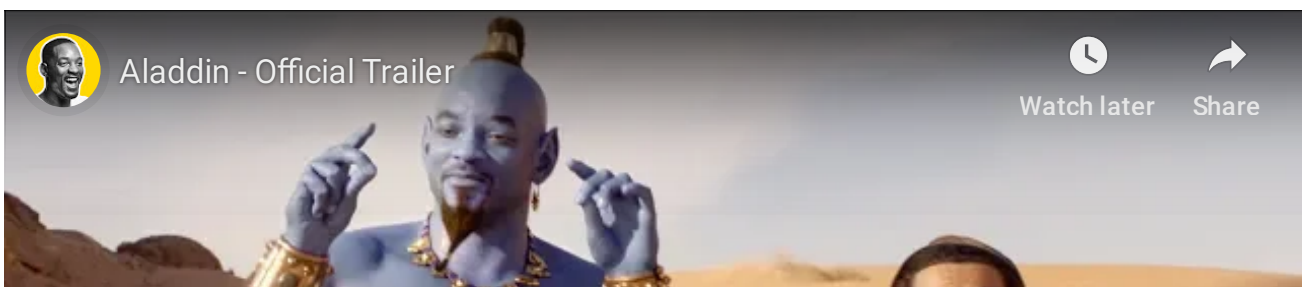


There's a mix of old a new in Ritchie's colorful, charismatic and contemporary *Aladdin*. It might not be all that viewers were expecting, but that's what keeps these films interesting. Simply remaking a classic, copying every line word for word and replicating every scene shot for shot, does not enrich the experience of seeing a favorite movie come to live-action life. If we want nostalgia, we can always see the original. If we want to see a story told with a fresh angle, that requires fresh and trusting eyes.



Films like *Christopher Robin*, *Maleficent*, and *Snow White and the Huntsman* had an advantage. Viewers didn't expect them to have the same story, they expected change and a new angle. With films like *Beauty and the Beast*, *Cinderella*, and *Aladdin*, it's much harder to get audiences to look at the same story from a new angle.

It's not an easy task, but *Aladdin* does it well. It's a film that honors the vision of the original, keeps the nonnegotiable songs and adds new flavor to characters that will serve as role models for a new generation. If viewers take the opportunity to be surprised by a new story, rather than spending an hour and a half comparing the old with the new, *Aladdin* has the chance to be just as magical of an experience as it was 27 years ago.





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Have you seen Disney's new live-action *Aladdin* yet? What did you think? What other Disney remakes are you most looking forward to seeing? Comment below!

***Aladdin* is now in theaters nationwide.**

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DISNEY MOVIES

# Shahadi Wright Joseph talks starring in *Us* and *The Lion King* remake



by Victoria Davis 2 months ago

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COMMENT

***Thirteen-year-old actress Shahadi Wright Joseph talks about her first Hollywood role in Jordan Peele's horror film *Us* and voicing young Nala in Disney's remake of *The Lion King*.***

At age nine, New York native Shahadi Wright Joseph landed her first role in the spotlight, starring as Young Nala in *The Lion King* on Broadway. Though she had a thriving theatre career appearing in *Hairspray* and *School of Rock*, Shahadi made history as the youngest actress to play the role of youth Nala on stage. Now, at age 13, she gets to revisit starring as the young lioness in Disney's new animated remake. Shahadi's voice will be heard alongside Seth Rogen, Beyonce, Donald Glover, James Earl Jones and others.

But before Jon Favreau's reimagined masterpiece hits theaters this summer, Shahadi can be seen starring as Zora Wilson in Jordan Peele's horror/thriller film *Us*. Also starring Lupita Nyong'o, Elisabeth Moss, and Winston Duke, the film follows a family who takes a seemingly harmless vacation to Santa Cruz, California, only to find themselves fighting for their lives against their psychotic doppelgängers. Shahadi's character Zora is the daughter to Gabe (Duke) and Adelaide (Nyong'o) and sister to Jason (Evan Alex).

Though still a young actress, Shahadi has already made a name for herself in the entertainment industry both on stage and in front of the camera for some of the most anticipated films of the year. Hidden Remote sat down with Shahadi to talk about diving into the horror scene, her favorite off-camera moments and what it was like to play Nala for a second time.



**Hidden Remote:** Thanks so much for taking the time to talk with us, Shahadi. Your acting portfolio is impressive for someone so early in their career. What was it that drew you to pursue acting? Starting out in musical theatre is something not often seen in young actors today.

**Shahadi Wright Joseph:** I live in New York, so of course I see a lot of Broadway and a lot of theater in general. But I think what really drew me to acting was that you could turn into this other person and also get paid for it. It doesn't even feel like work. That was something I really wanted to do as a kid.

**Hidden Remote:** You've had some amazing experiences on Broadway so far with *Hairspray*, *School of Rock* and *The Lion King*. Now you are starring in two Hollywood movies, one of which is a voice acting role. Did you have any idea you would have such a versatile range this soon in your career?

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**Wright Joseph:** No. I don't think that anybody really did. But this is my passion and I've been working on this for a pretty long time and I had no idea I would make it this far.

**Hidden Remote: Was it nerve-wracking going from theatre to Hollywood acting?**

**Wright Joseph:** It wasn't too hard but I actually think Broadway was a good training ground. We had to do eight shows a week, rehearsing all the time. But with film, it's a little easier. It was like a stamina practice back then.

**Hidden Remote: How did you get involved with the film *Us*? What stood out to you about the script?**

**Wright Joseph:** My agent sent me the slides for the audition last year and I saw that they were really dark and daunting. So the idea drew me into it right away. It was almost like reading a good book. Horror is one of my favorite genres. If I wasn't cast as Zora I would definitely go to see *Us* about a hundred times.



**Hidden Remote: That's admirable that you weren't intimidated at all by a horror script!**

**Wright Joseph:** Oh I was a little bit. I'd never done anything like this before so I was like, "Oh my god, I really want to get this but I have no idea where to even start!" So my family helped me out with it and now we're here.

**Hidden Remote: How did your family help you?**

**Wright Joseph:** My dad and my mom, we went over lines together and we just went through the process step-by-step with each line. We were wondering what would Zora do in each situation and how she would walk and stand. That really helped a lot and getting a call-back where I got to meet Jordan was probably the most exciting feeling ever.

**Hidden Remote: What was it like meeting Jordan Peele for the first time?**

**Wright Joseph:** He was actually sick the first time I met him so I couldn't hug him, but I really wanted to. I thought that he would be really intimidating because he's this amazing director but he was so nice about telling me what he wanted for each scene and what he wanted to create for Zora. He made it really easy for me to connect with Zora as a character. It was my favorite audition yet.

**Hidden Remote: With being in such high intensity moments throughout most of the film, how do you begin getting into the mind space of a horror film character like Zora?**

**Wright Joseph:** Usually I would be in my trailer for about 20 minutes before we had to go to set and I would start thinking in the ways of Zora, or as my doppelganger. I would say some of the things that she would or I would think the way she would about her parents and what's going on in the scene we were doing.

It was really difficult sometimes because we would be shooting these scenes for a couple of days where we'd switch back and forth between acting as the doppelgangers and then back to acting as the Wilsons. We had to cry for like three days and for 12 hours each day, so we were super dehydrated. But it's always a lot of fun.

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**Hidden Remote: I can't even imagine. Do you have any favorite moments from set? I can imagine there would be a lot since it's your first Hollywood film experience.**

**Wright Joseph:** Yeah there was. I think the most memorable behind the scenes moments were taking place in the hair and makeup trailer. It was our opportunities to switch from the Wilsons into us as individuals. Plus, there was always really good music playing all the time so it was kind of like a party whenever we walked in there.

**Hidden Remote: Switching gears a bit, let's talk about your role in the new, computer animated rendition of The Lion King. This is your second time playing Nala, but in a different medium.**

**What are you most excited about with revisiting her character in this way?**

**Wright Joseph:** I'm most excited about creating a new personality for her. On Broadway, we're told how to be Nala. But this is going to be really fun having so much more freedom to be creative with her. And Nala will probably have a different mindset as Shahadi the 13-year-old, going into high school. Plus, with the CGI, you can really feel the realness come through with these animals and it's a totally new energy. I can't wait for people to see it.

**Hidden Remote: So how did it go voice acting for the first time?**

**Wright Joseph:** It was a totally different energy and a totally different technology. It was a lot of fun seeing the behind the scenes art work and the animation. I also had a lot of fun working with JD McCrary who plays young Simba. It was cool seeing Jon Favreau work because I've seen basically all his movies and it was unreal feeling getting to work with them.

**Hidden Remote: I know that with some voice acting it can be difficult to dive into a scene or a character if you're in the recording studio alone. But it sounds like you and JD were together for most of the recordings. Did you find that to be helpful?**

**Wright Joseph:** Yeah it was easier having another kid there with me and not being so alone trying to take on the energy of young Nala just by herself. Young Simba and young Nala, they're

the best of friends, so I think young Nala wouldn't be her if she didn't have young Simba with her.

**Hidden Remote: So with all these experiences that you've had at this point in your acting endeavors, what are some of the most important lessons that you feel you've learned as a young actress?**

**Wright Joseph:** I think that one of the lessons I've learned is to really listen and to watch these great actors that I've been working with for the past year. Jordan Peele, Lupita Nyong'o... They've learned so much in this business and you can learn so much from them just by being around them.

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*Us* will make its official premiere at the 2019 South by Southwest (SXSW) festival on March 8, with a national theatrical release March 22. Shahadi can be seen as Young Nala in Walt Disney Pictures' CGI animated *The Lion King* July 19.

**What movies are you most looking forward to this year? Leave your thoughts in the comments below.**



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