

This year marks my 44th year of teaching and training youth to be their best both onstage and off. It goes without saying that many ups and downs have accompanied me along the way. Nevertheless, I continue to walk in my God-given calling and as always, the overwhelming situations that rise up during all the preparations, turn into overwhelming joy on opening night. This musical, these youth, are no exception. Together we have risen above major obstacles, come together as a team and have followed a lyric from "These Palace Walls" - "If you've a dream, then stand behind it."

My dream has always been to train up children in the way that they should go, showing them that God is on their side and that they will never "have a friend like" Him. I strive to open up "a whole new world" to those that participate in Bluffton Youth Theatre (BYT), where diversity is the norm and acceptance and love is experienced by all, no matter their physical, mental or emotional challenges.

In the opening number, "Arabian Nights", Genie declares, "It's not on the outside but what is inside that counts." Such truth permeates this musical and echos the foundation on which BYT stands. You, the audience, will experience the beauty and wonderment of weeks of practice. Some had even practiced for months a year ago (previous to the unprecedented Covid shut down). What you see on the outside is a reflection of the character that has been built on the inside of all of these youth.

This show is also one that will close a part of BYT that has been dear to my heart. My daughter, Jennifer, whom grew up performing in the countless shows I have directed, will be sprouting her wings and officially leaving the nest. Jennifer is moving to Nashville, a dream she has had for a long time, and is pursuing her career there. This is my Jenny's last show with me and BYT. Her hard work and dedication will be difficult to replace. Knowing this is her last show has been difficult for me to accept, but I am extremely happy that she will be able to share her talents with more of the world. My daughter has helped make BYT what it is today and I know the hundreds of students that have participated under her tutelage will miss her. Thank you, daughter, for walking this journey with me.

So, sit back, relax and let us take you into the magical world of Agrabah where "everybody sings", a princess finds her true love, a "street rat" who wants his mom to be proud of him rises up from poverty to become a Sultan, and a Genie gets his wish. "Who's up for a little high adventure?" I know the entire cast and crew of Aladdin Jr. is!!!

Cynthia Ford
Director and Founder of BYT

Over the years I have seen so many youth come through our theatre. I have had the privilege of not only teaching them skills within the theatre, but also to help them make lifelong friends, build their confidence, and so much more. I've seen what some may say is impossible from our cast and crew. Aladdin Jr, to me, may be the show that seemed most impossible. To pick up where we left off, it was a crazy whirlwind. Within three weeks, we brought this cast together attempting to pick up where we left off. During the day, all the focus was on teaching the new members, while helping the previous cast remember what they had learned over a year before. Once practice was over for the day, the focus turned to making sure the costumes, props, and scenery were ready; searching through bins and boxes to find my notes from so long before. Yet, here we are. I am so glad to have been able to see the BYT youth show me, once again, how incredible they can be. No one can tell me that what they have accomplished is anything short of amazing. Although my time with BYT may be ending, I will never forget every cast and crew member who have stepped foot in this theatre. Over my time here, I tried to teach everyone to have confidence in their abilities, because they can do anything they put their minds to, I have seen it happen over and over again. Even if I may not be here telling them that, I hope they never forget it. Working for BYT has given me some of the best memories that I will carry with me forever. Thank you to the Aladdin JR cast and crew for making this last show phenomenal!

Jennifer Ford
Stage Manager