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/ June 26, 2017

NO WONDER ALICE SOLD OUT

by Sarah Mathiesen(<http://huxley.press/author/sarah-mathiesen/>)



What a wonderful thing it was to see hordes of people streaming into Anderson Gardens on a Sunday morning; among them excited children, enthused parents and eager grandparents.

While it's rare for the Gardens to see such an assembly for anything other than a wedding, this crowd had not amassed to witness an exchange of rings. Instead, they were there for a

TheatreINQ's modern adaptation of the classic *Alice in Wonderland*, which invited the audience to fall down the rabbit hole and follow Alice on her adventure through five performance spaces that had well -and -truly been transformed into Wonderland.

As we sat waiting for the show to begin, a girl in a turquoise tutu and a boy with a cheeky grin arrived with their parents and began exploring – they investigated every rustle in the bushes, successfully piquing the curiosity of the rest of us, and we started to wonder whether those noises might be the Mad Hatter sneaking through the trees. Before long, two brightly dressed figures appeared in the distance, strumming ukuleles, chattering incessantly between themselves, and heading straight for us.

It was Tweedledum and Tweedledee!

The strange pair kept the audience rapt as they laid down the rules for the show before disappearing into the trees as Alice, played by Emma Smith, and her two sisters, played by Elise Phelan and Rachel Webb, came skipping down the path.

Director Terri Brabon has once again done an amazing job putting together this adaptation of a well -loved story. Not only did she get every iconic character into the 90 -minute retelling; but she also managed to harness the magic and whimsy of Anderson Gardens by having the audience follow Alice and the incredibly high -strung (though highly love -able) White Rabbit, brought to life by Rachel Nutchey, through the Gardens as they encountered the odd assortment of characters on Alice's journey. And while there were breaks to walk between each scene, the theatrics never stopped – as we strolled eagerly to each location, exclams of delight rang out as people spied giant clocks, playing cards, and morsels labelled 'eat me' peppered along the path. It truly did feel like we were falling down the rabbit hole, passing curious and curiouser objects as we went.

This show had all the colour and hilarity you would expect from a piece of children's theatre presented by TheatreiNQ, although *Alice* is a performance that you will enjoy regardless of your age: Nathan's grandmother joined us for the show, and she laughed and cheered as much as the six-year-old girl sitting on the picnic blanket in front of us. From Brendan O'Connor's cool Caterpillar and the truly scary Duchess played by Michael Gleeson to the mind-boggling logic of The Mad Hatter (Ron Pulmam), March Hare (Shai Regan) and Doormouse (Paris Walsh) – the fast-speaking, larger than life characters pack plenty of punch, and there's some great humour thrown in for the grown-ups, too.

Emma Smith was the perfect Alice – equal parts curious and precocious. This is a big show to carry and Emma did it with aplomb – a testament to the work of TheatreiNQ's The Bridge Project, which aims to nurture Townsville's emerging talent. I also particularly loved Arminelle Fleming as the entitled Queen of Hearts and Michael Gleeson and Ron Pulmam pulling double-duty as Tweedledee and Tweedledum (though I do wish we'd seen more of them!)

The entire ensemble should be commended for their work writing and performing the original music for this show – from a fun little ukulele ditty to protest rock, a wide array of genres were covered, resulting in an outrageously catchy soundtrack – I heard one poor audience member remark twice as we moved from scene-to-scene *"Oh no! Now I have that song stuck in my head"* and another lady turned to her friend at the end of the show, tears in her eyes, to say *"That last song was just lovely"* (And I had to agree, because I had also shed a tear under my sunglasses)

Special mention should be made to Kathy Brabon, for her wonderful costumes – I've never seen a finer looking Cheshire Cat (played by Rita Neale); nor a stranger babe-in-arms – and to the Make Up Design Team – the characters looked sensational from our places at the back of the audience, but I was even more

impressed when we had the chance to see them up-close at the end of the show.

I was very disappointed that Alice should have to wake up, and the show come to an end (though not quite so, if you heed the final song).

If you have secured tickets to TheatreINQ's sold out *Alice in Wonderland* you'll be very happy that you did and if you haven't – don't lose hope, we hear some extra places may come available now that the show has been road-tested. Register for the ticket waiting list at [theatreinq.com](http://www.theatreinq.com/)(<http://www.theatreinq.com/>)