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Review: Alice Through the Looking Glass, TheatreiNQ (QLD)

TheatreiNQ's cheerful, vibrant and original adaptation of Carroll classic.



A highlight of the production: Brendan O'Connor as Humpty Dumpty. Photo credit: Chrissy Maguire.

It is original, inventive, colourful, witty, engaging and above all entertaining. And it is TheatreiNQ's take on the lesser known of Lewis Carroll's 'Alice' stories – *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*.

No patronising piece of pantomimic theatre here – it is a cheerful, vibrant and energetic promenade piece which builds perfectly on to the success of the same company's 2017 production, *Alice in Wonderland*.


Of course, adapting something which is so undeniably 'English' presents a challenge for any Australian theatre-maker. But director Terri Brabon can never be accused of a faint heart. Her talents leave me in awe. She is a creator of seemingly limitless talent – not only is she a theatre director and a writer, but for this production she has again written the engaging contemporary music and amusing lyrics which cleverly augment Carroll's nonsensical rhymes.

Brabon has made this Victorian nonsense tale into a bright and engaging piece of family theatre which has plenty to entertain the littlest children, and is loaded with sufficient contemporary references to amuse even the most cynical of grown-ups. (After all, Lewis Carroll had never heard of Instagram or email links!) But it all works – cheerfully and with characteristic high energy.

The location is again the lush, tropical rainforest of Townsville's Anderson Park, and the geography of a corner of the park has again been utilised to full advantage. After the first scene, the audience is invited to enter through the looking-glass and is guided through this fantastical world where all sorts of 'wonderland'

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surprises await and amuse – ranging from gaudily coloured toadstools to strange street signs to the table for the Mad Hatter's tea party tucked under a tree.

While the characters of *Looking Glass* may not be as familiar as *Wonderland* (where everyone is 'nothing but a pack of cards'), here we enter the world of chess, where everything happens backwards.

Alice is now a troublesome teen (played with suitable exaggeration and eye-rolling by Elyse Phelan), but we also discover the youthful Alice of the past (Hollie Sams). In between all the mayhem are the playfully larger-than-life characters that people the world behind the looking-glass.

We have the antics of ukulele-strumming clowns Tweedledum and Tweedledee (Michael Gleeson and Ron Pulman reprising their *Wonderland* roles); then there's Arminelle Fleming, this time as a rhotacic (inability to pronounce the letter 'r') Red Queen and Kellie Esling as the absent-minded White Queen, who remembers future events before they happen.

Brendan O'Connor's Northern-accented Humpty Dumpty was a particular highlight of the production. He transforms guise (and accent) in the end, and his distinctive comic timing is perfect.

Then there are the talking flowers, the German-accented Daisy (Rita Neale in a delightful performance), Lily (Emma Benson) and Rose (Gemma Shield).

The entire production – which once again is a unique blend of community and professional theatre – has creative costumes all with a contemporary twist, designed and executed by Kathy Brabon.

An uplifting production which plays to a sold out run.

4 ½ stars: ★★★★★☆

[Alice Through the Looking Glass \(https://www.theatreinq.com/html/productions/past-productions/2019/2019-through-the-looking-glass.html\)](https://www.theatreinq.com/html/productions/past-productions/2019/2019-through-the-looking-glass.html)

A TheatreiNQ production

Written, directed with original music and lyrics by Terri Brabon

Anderson Gardens, Townsville

29 June to 14 July

All tickets \$20

TREVOR KEELING

Tuesday 9 July, 2019

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Trevor Keeling has been involved in the arts and creative industries for 40 years in Australia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. He has been an actor, theatre director, journalist and critic, publisher, broadcaster, music festival director, event manager and arts administrator.

Since coming to Australia in 1991, he appeared in numerous productions in Adelaide, and was Festival Director of the Glenelg Jazz Festival for six years. He was General Manager of Dancenorth in Townsville (2005-2006 and 2011-2014) and for three years was CEO of Mirndiyan Gunana Aboriginal Corporation, which included managing the world-renowned Indigenous Mornington Island Dancers.

He has worked in urban, regional and remote environments in Australia and has a particular focus on regional arts and the connection to community.

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