



Alice In Wonderland



Adapted and directed by Terri Brabon. TheatreINQ. Anderson Gardens, Townsville, Queensland. 24 June to 9 July, 2017

Set against a lush background of raintrees and tropical rainforest, this production of *Alice in Wonderland* has been re-worked by director/adaptor Terri Brabon for a contemporary production which can only be described in these words – original, inventive and delightful.

With the audience moving from place to place using the geography of a corner of this beautiful (and underutilised park in Townsville) to excellent advantage, it remained true to the spirit of Lewis Carroll's nonsensical rhymes about a girl transported to a fantasy land peopled with odd characters. The result is not only creative and inventive but, as with all TheatreINQ productions, moves at a cracking pace. We all know that many children have limited attention spans (particularly in our digital world where instant visual gratification is expected); this

production had the family audience riveted and magically transported into this world of white rabbits, smoking caterpillars and grinning Cheshire Cats.

Of course, in any adaptation intelligent pruning is the order of the day and while I did miss some of the crazy characters such as the Mock Turtle, Brabon's adaptation retains key characters and scenes. The production did not try to be "English" but was comfortably Australian and as a result was fresh and funny.

Ukelele-strumming Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee (Michael Gleeson and Ron Pullman) opened the show with an infectious song to engage the audience as well as give some necessary instructions. We are then introduced to Alice (played by youthful Emma Smith) who gave a surprisingly mature performance in the pivotal character, and managed to hold her own against the colourful multitude of exaggerated characters around her.

One of the hallmarks of Brabon's productions is her excellent ensemble work – every actor plays his/her part with an individual stamp, and what emerges is a seductive and infectious energy which is also quite charming.

Another hallmark is her ability to bring out the best in her actors and just when you think you have "seen it all" she pops out another surprise – or three! Here was Caterpillar with an Irish brogue played by Brendan O'Connor (clearly having a whale of a time, but sadly without the traditional hookah!); Michael Gleeson's drag Duchess was fun as was Rita Neale's Cheshire Cat and Rachel Nutchey's White Rabbit.

The Mad Hatter's Tea Party had colourful performances from Ron Pullman (The Mad Hatter), Shai Regan (March Hare) and Paris Walsh as the Dormouse. The performance of the production was undoubtedly Arminelle Fleming's splendid turn as the Queen of Hearts complete with rotacism (inability to pronounce the letter 'r').

The script was peppered with contemporary references, and nowhere was this more evident than in the delightful "cheerleading" song and dance led by the Queen of Hearts. Special mention should also be made of the music (I suspect which was all original), the inventive make-up, creative costuming and splendid props (the glass teapot filled with giant liquorice allsorts was particularly fetching).

As with all TheatreINQ productions, it is a true community effort and the final word is that for the second successive time this year, TheatreINQ's production is sold out before it opened – so what does that say about the quality of this plucky little company's productions?

Trevor Keeling

Arminelle Fleming as the Queen of Hearts in TheatreINQ's production of *Alice in Wonderland*. Photographer: Chrissy Maguire.

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