

Alice in Wonderland

TREVOR KEELING

An original, inventive and colourful promenade production by TheatreiNQ.



Arminelle Fleming as the Queen of Hearts in TheatreiNQ's Alice in Wonderland. Photo by Chrissy Maguire.

Set against a lush background of rain trees and tropical rainforest in one of Townsville's under-utilised parks, this promenade production of *Alice in Wonderland* can only be described in three words – original, inventive and colourful.

It was with sheer delight that the audience shared this contemporary adaptation by TheatreiNQ director Terri Brabon. Townsville is indeed lucky to have such a creative force in our midst who regularly produces a diversity of work that in turn has

produced a strong and loyal fan base. With strong roots in this area, she and her partner Brendan O'Connor returned to the city several years ago to continue the tradition of the annual outdoor Shakespeare production and since then this plucky regional theatre company has gone from strength to strength.

Her productions cleverly combine talent drawn from professional and community actors, and are characterised by strong ensemble work and inventive originality, combined with a clear theatrical sense and the uncanny ability to draw amazing things from her actors – and all set to a cracking pace. The fact that every performance plays to packed houses should be proof enough of a successful company – regional at that.

This family production used the geography of a corner of this beautiful park to excellent advantage. The adaptation remained true to the spirit of Lewis Carroll's collection of nonsensical rhymes. The family audience was riveted and magically transported into the 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 and the Gryphon, this adaptation retained key characters and scenes. At the same time, it did not try to be "English" but was unquestionably Australian, fresh and funny.

Colourful costuming highlighted the exaggerated characters, drawing a sharp contrast to the comparative normality of Alice, played with maturity and assurance by Emma Smith.

Amongst these colourful characters was The Caterpillar, played by Brendan O'Connor with an Irish brogue – clearly enjoying himself hugely – as were Michael Gleeson as the Duchess and Rita Neale as Cheshire Cat.

Arguably the most famous scene is The Mad Hatter's Tea Party, and there were colourful performances from Ron Pullman (The Mad Hatter), Shai Regan (March Hare) and Paris Walsh as the Dormouse. However, it was the rhotacic (inability to pronounce the letter 'r') Queen of Hearts who stole the show thanks to Arminelle Fleming's hugely enjoyable turn in the role.

Like all the best pantomimes, the script was peppered with contemporary references, and particular mention should also be made of the mostly original music, inventive make-up, creative costuming and impressive props.

As with all TheatreiNQ productions, *Alice in Wonderland* 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?

4 ½ stars

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A TheatreiNQ production

Adapted and directed by Terri Brabon

Anderson Gardens, Townsville

24 June to 9 July

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