Adventures with Alice // Theatre Eddys

Adventures with Alice
Ava Roy
Adapted from Lewis Carroll
We Players

Regina León & Drew Watkins

Leave all logic behind; put away the need for plotline; forget understanding exactly what is happening at all times; readily accept questions with no answers and riddles with no solutions. Anyone ready to meet these requirements is more than eligible to plunge into a two-hour, thirty-minute whirlwind of Adventures with Alice as adapted by Ava Roy from those famous writings of Lewis Carroll that have spawn hundreds of adaptations from plays to operas, ballets, video game, and entire theme parks.

In the tradition of the twenty-four-year-old company, We Players, this adaptation of Adventures with Alice takes its audience to the great outdoors – in this case the very real wonderland of Golden Gate Park – as Alice and audience members wander among creatures both real and fantastical and underneath trees as giant and majestic as in any child’s tale of wonder. With stops along the way in meadows, hillsides, and lakeside, our journey with Alice is in fact dreamlike – almost otherworldly in the natural beauty around us and definitely quite surreal with events disjointed and peculiar things we sometimes only slightly recognize and rarely fully comprehend.

Regina León & Benoît Monin

In this adaptation, the normally seven-and-a-half-year-old Alice (Regina León) is a teen ten years older who does not fall into a hole or a magical lake but finds herself lost on a hill among a forest of eucalyptus. Seeing us, she scurries through underbrush only to be confronted by a very curious White Rabbit (Britt Lauer) who is soon freaking out that “My whiskers and ears are late … The Queen … The Queen!” As the bunny in tennies hurries off, we pick up our various seating options and rush to follow, heading to the first of about ten stops over about a mile’s total distance while passing along the way all sorts of odd-looking royalty and inhabitants of the land we now find ourselves.
Our adventures include a slew of strange and silly events from a croquet game where the wickets, stakes, and balls are the characters of Wonderland (along with many of us) to a race where no one moves and everyone wins. We attend a tea party where stacks of cups and saucers among pink flamingos become a playground for a Dormouse (Chris Steele) and a March Hare (Maria Ascención Leigh) to frolic, sending clanking dishes crashing in all directions (but somehow none breaking). A furious fight for the crown between a frilly Lion (also Maria Ascención Leigh) and an equally frilly but one-horned unicorn (also Chris Steele) is a series of challenges involving such rounds as dance steps, silent treatment, and worded insults (with points awarded after each round by a Mad Hatter [Alan Coyne].

In this land where the direction of backwards rules the day, characters depart saying, “I’ll see you yesterday;” and a queen cries uncontrollably over a thorn-pricked finger that has yet to happen. When Alice says she is thirsty, she is given a biscuit; and when she is told she can have jam every other day, she discovers that in this land, she can never have jam today ... only yesterday and tomorrow.

And everywhere we go, the White Rabbit at some point appears, appealing to us for answers to his questions of “Where is time? Did you steal the time?”

Along with the aforementioned characters lifted from Carroll’s storybook pages, we meet

on a number of occasions the always scuttling, scuttering twins with blue-shadowed eyes matching their blue tongues, Twiddle Dee and Twiddle Dum, played by the multi-talented Chris Steele and Maria Ascención Leigón, respectively. The two squeak and squawk in a never-ending array of accents, voices, and speeds, particularly as they recite and act out Lewis Carroll’s nonsensical poem, “Jabberwocky.”

When the Mad Hatter is not entertaining us using a yellow rubber chicken as a microphone, Alan Coyne also takes on the role of a high-dwelling Humpty Dumpty, making up words with his own meanings, reciting a poem with clever rhymed couplets, and making the case to Alice that un-birthday gifts are much better than birthday ones (after all, it is 364 gifts versus just one).

Also with a logic all her own is a White Queen (Lauren Hayes, alternating the role with Libby Oberlin) whose memory goes both ways and who rarely speaks without an occasional ‘baa’ coming from her sheepish lungs. Her
King, also White in name (Benoît Monin), is much more on the sophisticated end than often flustered and confused, rolling on the ground Queen. The stately King is often silently watching the current proceedings from a far-off hill or on top of a great, fallen tree, sometimes making royal notes in his memorandum book.

Drew Watkins & Regina Leo

Never silent is her highness, the eccentric Red Queen, who arrives fanning open with a clacking aplomb her wide, red cape. Drew Watkins is almost larger than life as a Red Queen who could rival any drag queen on the walkway with a brassy strut and vocals that shriek to at least a high-C range.

Needless to say, in this Wonderland there is a plethora of slapstick that has been directed by Ava Roy to appear as chaos created spontaneously. When there is this much craziness occurring in scenes more often more nonsensical than not, some naturally work better than others. While there is much funny occurring, there are few times when the audience finds itself beyond mild laughter.

Much entertainment does come from the costumes designed by Brooke Jennings and created by master seamstress Dana Taylor, with characters appearing to have stepped right off the page of an illustrated, children’s book. All along the way, our journey and the vignettes themselves enjoy the accompaniment of a three-piece band playing music as composed and directed by Charlie Gurke.

Certainly, there is much to enjoy in We Players’ revival of its 2023 much-praised Adventures with Alice, especially when placed within the beauty of Golden Gate Park. My biggest regret is that my granddaughter of five does not live nearby, for this production is the perfect time to introduce young ones to the magic of live theatre.

Rating: 3.5 E

Adventures with Alice continues through June 2, 2024, in a two-hour, thirty-minute production (no intermission but frequent walking breaks) by We Players. This production takes place in sections of Golden Gate Park along JFK Drive, starting near the Polo Fields and across from Spreckles Lake. Tickets are available at http://www.weplayers.org/.

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