An inspired blend of wit and whimsy, San Francisco’s We Players’ “Adventures with Alice” is a delight—especially for those familiar with “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” and “Through the Looking-Glass” by 19th-century British writer Lewis Carroll (aka Charles Dodgson).
We Players founder-artistic director Ava Roy, who’s equally adept at site-specific adaptations of Carroll, Shakespeare and other works by great writers—plus her own original pieces created collaboratively—drew from both books to create this rollicking adventure.

We’re clearly in good hands from the beginning, when a raggle-taggle horn trio (music composed by Charlie Gurke) entertains the gathered audience (and follows throughout the adventure), interrupted by Alice descending a hill from behind a eucalyptus tree and urging everyone to join in following the frazzled White Rabbit.

The audience is guided through a hike in Golden Gate Park (from near Spreckels Lake to Portals of the Past), following a perplexed and often indignant little Alice (a charming portrayal by Regina León in bloomers and pinafore) and the perpetually tardy White Rabbit (Britt Lauer), who scurries through the woods and up and down hillocks, long ears flapping.

The piece, under Roy’s witty direction, includes most of the familiar characters culled from the books: the White King, the White Queen, the Red Queen, Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee, Humpty Dumpty, the Mad Hatter, the somnolent Dormouse and more. Many actors play multiple roles.
The clever costumes by designer Brooke Jennings are clearly influenced by John Tenniel’s original illustrations but reinvented in wonderfully comical ways: The perennially smug Red Queen (Drew Watkins, an excellent choice) swooping down hills in a flowing red cape, the addled White Queen’s fright wig and frilly, tattered gown); the Mad Hatter’s red top hat (Alan Coyne, who also plays the snippy Humpty Dumpty languishing atop an exercise structure).

As audience members walk from scene to scene, players are scattered like waxworks along the route, in trees, atop peaks, on fences—yes, there’s the Mad Hatter sitting primly on the grass sipping his ever-present cup of tea (and yes again, there’s the wacky tea party scene, and the croquet match, and riddles without answers, and a hilariously animated recital of “Jabberwocky” by the Tweedle twins and more).

There are also many scenes with dialogue so nonsensical that at a certain point you are likely to give up trying to figure out what’s going on (and some of those scenes do run on a bit too long as, at two-and-a-half hours, does the entire show).

The star of the show on opening weekend was Libby Oberlin as the White Queen (who alternates with Lauren Hayes). Antic, as limber as a rag doll, mispronouncing words with great aplomb, hysterically funny when she occasionally turns into a bleating sheep, she’s a comic marvel.
Thankfully. Roy did not neglect the existential thread that runs through Carroll’s stories. The White Rabbit’s obsession with time is unsettling. Dodgson, a mathematician, knew things about time that the rest of us don’t. “Did you steal time?” the Rabbit shrieks, scampering down a hill.

And when Alice is informed that she’s only a thing in the Red King’s dream, she wonders what she’d be if he didn’t dream her. She simply wouldn’t be at all, she is told. “I am real,” she insists—but, of course, she’s not.

First performed last year, and now slightly changed (more audience interaction, a somewhat altered ending and a few other things), “Alice” works for kids and adults alike as performed by this altogether excellent troupe of acrobatic and inventive actors.

*We Players*’ “Adventures with Alice” continues through June 2 in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. The show starts near the N Polo Field and ends near Portals of the Past. Tickets are $20-$80 at weplayers.org.