

Alice Thoroughly Looking Class

Written by Seth Ewin

Alice in Wonderland - AB Paterson Auditorium, The Byre Theatre

Some of audience cackled insanely, becoming dizzily lost in the music, trippy dance routines, fantastic characters and psychedelic sets, and that's just the ones who hadn't taken drugs.

What was going through the minds of those who had spent the afternoon getting high is not something I would choose to go into, but seeing I am writing the review and spent Saturday smoking several special cigarettes before sauntering to my seat to see the show, I suppose I'll have to give it a go.

Alice (the actor's name I can't remember for the life of me and I seem to have roached the program) (She's Laura House ed.) begins the play reading a book, bored, behind her a tight mechanical dance involving the rest of the cast comes to life.

Hypnotised by the choreography of the intro, I was unsure which of the many identical scenes to watch, how could they keep time while so spread out? Who were they? What? Where? When? Was this real or just the drugs? Later I was told it represented the dull 50s and the rest of the play was the emergence of the 60s.

One of the principal joys of this piece was seeing something familiar (the story of Alice) presented in whole new way, but a way that kept alive much of Lewis Carroll's original anarchy, humour and absurdity. The enlarging and shrinking was done simply with rotating set and a delightful live table that leapt up to tower over Alice.

The white rabbit was a go-go bunny with digital time piece and neon top, played by Kirsty Clydesdale who had no need of animal costume or make-up to be quite definitely a cute little wabbit.

Reclining on a sea of writhing human backs and sucking suggestively on a hookah, the Caterpillar (Harry Giles) made his wonderfully sluggish entrance. He purred poetry at Alice, a great way to hear Carroll's verse.

I was hoping for more, mushrooms and so forth, in fact that is my only real criticism of the production like Nutella I just wanted more. Giles coming out of a cocoon as a raging butterfly would have been good too.

The tea party we'd all been waiting for then appeared, I am trying to do this chronologically but I can't vouch this wasn't before the Caterpillar (or hell even during). The Mad Hatter's grin was nearly as big as the Cheshire Cat montage projected on the screen. Jamie Wightman looked like Tim Burton had designed his costume and Hunter S Thompson his medication.

Here the play started to descend into a lively farce as events spun out of control for Alice and food went in all directions. The tiny Dormouse and big clumsy March further showcased (well it is that week) the cast's talent for animalisation.

The scene at the Duchess house was another great adaptation of the original, with the Frog Doorman a snowboarder in cool camouflage outfit, doing what snowboarders do - pass out after too much weed.

The Duchess and her bluesy cook created musical mayhem. Then the croquet game of flamingos and hedgehogs and Essex Queen of Chavs Bec Hawley towering over all in slutty heels while bellowing, quite, quite terrifying.

The trial scene at the end was a bit static compared to the rest of the show but it was livened up by the Mad Hatter's reappearance so it had its silver lining.

With such a great opening I didn't quite see how the piece could pull off a finale to match. Alice ends the trial cards start to fall from the ceiling, so far so not-that-exciting, then more cards, that's a lot of playing cards, then stroke of genius the mirror.

I can see a stoned twat in a white jacket and colourful shirt. He's clapping a lot, now he's standing up, he isn't bad looking if a bit on the small side, what a fucking-fantastic way to end the show.

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