



## Theatre Review

# Alice through a child's eyes

### Script inconsistencies saved by superb production

by Bruce Raymond

Most of Toronto's theatre groups would kill for a budget large enough to mount a production as opulent as *Alice*, YPT's presentation currently on display at its Front Street Theatre.

Visually extravagant, Maristella Roca's adaptation is taken from the works of Lewis Carroll, in reality the Reverend Charles Dodgson, late nineteenth century storyteller to children, one of whom, the real-life Alice Liddell, was a daughter of one of Charles Dodgson's friends. Dodgson was also an avid celebrity photographer, hence the presence of the camera as the starting point of Alice's search for the infamous jam tarts.

*Alice* owes most of its source material to *Alice in Wonderland*, although some bits and pieces originated in other Lewis Carroll fantasies. Most of the well-loved characters are there, outlandishly transmogrified and modernized, but I missed not seeing the Cheshire Cat's grin and was a little taken aback at seeing Tweedledum and Tweedledee turned into hockey players. The Jabberwock was imported from *Alice Through The Looking Glass* and although the Walrus and the Carpenter weren't identified as such, the Oysters were there, skittering magically down the stage until they were eaten, "every one!"

However, *Alice* is aimed at pre-teen children who aren't remotely interested in the production's literary antecedents. It is enough for them

to sit for a little over an hour and be positively mesmerized by the visual happenings, even if they aren't exactly certain what the story's all about and would be inclined to ask, like Alice herself midway through the first act, "What's going on?"

I suspect that the dialogue was understandable to most children, although I wondered about the inclusion of such words as "Microsoft shares," "the nineteenth hole" and "rumble." But then as a friendly grandfather near me declared, kids today know more words than we think they do, thanks to television.

Most of the cast tripled or quadrupled in a multiplicity of roles. Most of them were so heavily disguised that it was difficult to recognize them as real people, with the exception of Jim Jones when he was playing the Reverend Dodgson, and Alice herself played in a somewhat muted style by Keira Loughran. My personal favourite was also a Jim Jones characterization, the hookah-smoking Worm Man, but in that magnificent costume, nobody could go wrong.

The music by Allen Cole and Rick Sacks fulfilled its proper function. The lighting design of Louise Guinand and the sound design by Todd Charlton enhanced the performances effectively. But it is the inventive direction of Gyllian Raby combined with the brilliant overall design of Carolyn M. Smith which make this production stand head and



A scene from the YPT production of *Alice*.

shoulders above most plays aimed at children. Well done! ♦

*Alice* plays at the Young Peoples Theatre, 165 Front Street East, until May 14th. Tickets are available from 416-862-2222.