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LOCAL NEWS • EVENTS • GARDENING • HISTORY

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

The 2022 Shawford Pantomime

This year's Shawford pantomime (which was to have been last year's!) was a sequel to the original story by Lewis Carroll of a child's imaginative struggle with the confusing world of adults. How apt and surreal, as we learn to live with Covid-19 with the audience wrapped up in coats, sitting in a draughty hall and wearing face masks! Despite the unusual conditions the audience warmed to the performance from the outset, enthusiastically responding at the appropriate points ('behind you' etc.) and lustily joining in with the singing at the several opportunities offered.

The story begins when Carroll (a.k.a Uncle Charles) (played suitably soberly by Marcus Whitfield), introduces Alice (a superbly sassy Ella Tyson) to the game of chess. Alice falls asleep and wakes to find herself face to face



with the anxious White Rabbit (played nicely nervously by Clemmie Fowle), After singing and dancing the White Rabbit song together, they fall, holding hands, into Wonderland.

A 'Puff of Smoke' placard (expensive special effect!) announces the presence of the Caterpillar (a chillingly caustic Jenny Walmsley), the Red Queen's spy, who's spotted

Alice's return and is joined by (Tweedle) Dum and Dee (played dutifully dimly by James Marshall and Bee Welch respectively) the Queen's twin henchmen.





Next, Alice, lost, meets a confused White Knight (a wonderfully woolly Jon Hawkins). Fortunately, his

trustworthy, and far more grounded, Steed (played with admirable acumen by Eileen Gorrod) suggests the best way home for Alice is to join a chess game. Requiring an appropriate chess headpiece,



Alice is directed to see the Mad Hatter (also played by the marvellously multi-talented Marcus).

Meanwhile, the Red Queen (played regally and rancorously by Sarah Hawkins) hears of Alice's arrival, promotes the Knave of Hearts (a subtly scheming Anthony Fletcher) to Red Knight and directs him, Dum and Dee to arrest Alice.



Alice meets the Hatter having tea with the March Hare (a funnily frolicsome Fred Fowle) and the Dormouse (a delightfully dozy and dancing Amelia Stepney). The Hatter explains his role in the making of chess headpieces. Dum and Dee arrive (the others hide) and eat some stolen royal tarts. The Red Knight turns up and suggests they blame Alice. She emerges and shares the party food with the audience (who are bombarded with sweets). The Red Knight sneaks back and arrests Alice, framing her for stealing the tarts.

After a brief interlude, the Red Queen's downtrodden subjects sing and dance the hilarious Flamingo Flamenco, shortly after which Alice escapes.



Meanwhile, the Red Queen decides Alice should be tried. The Cheshire Cat (played with full-volume fair-mindedness by Antony Fanshawe) as her defence counsel, persuades the Red Queen (with the help of the audience) to give Alice a chance to acquit herself by joining a chess game.

The Hatter, Hare, Dormouse, White Knight and Steed agree a strategy to help Alice defeat the Red Queen, via the Mad Hatter's making

headpieces for all of them to be able to join the game. They gain access to the Queen's court by taking headpieces as 'unbirthday' presents for the queen.



There follows a dramatic chess game (or rather stage-managed chaos!) during which Alice, as a pawn, crosses the board and is crowned the White Queen (Hurrah! -photo on left)

Alice promises to make Wonderland a better place. The Red Queen is condemned to cleaning cages in the Retired Flamingos Home. Wonderland is declared a smoke-free zone, so the Caterpillar is forced to stop sending smoke signals. No further punishment is required for Dum and Dee, as they mete it out to each other all the time. The Red Knight becomes the Knave again and makes tarts for their celebration at which they all dance the Lobster Quadrille.



Alice thanks all involved, adding she'll return home one day.

The excellent script was written by Simon Theobalds and brought to life by the diligent direction of John Amos, assisted by Sheila Forbes. The songs were written by Martin Harris and the dancing choreographed by Emma Barker.

Thanks to all involved, of course, including the band: (Martin Harris, David Woodward, Richard Croker and Gordon Munro), the crew back stage and those involved with the costumes: (Bryan Green, Pamela Potts, Liz Whitfield, Bridget Amos, David Woodward, Jo Fowle, Louise Tyson, Jude Vallis, Kevin Hughes, Katie Stepney) and their families and friends for all their support and encouragement.

Special thanks to Andrea Green for handling the tickets so ably.

David Jobson



Photographs by Adrian Walmsley