

British Theatre Guide

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Alice in Wonderland

Lewis Carroll adapted by Robin Belfield and Simon Slater

The Watermill Theatre Company

The Watermill Newbury

19 November 2015–3 January 2016

Celebrating the 150th anniversary of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Robin Belfield and Simon Slater have adapted this whimsical tale creating a magical, inventive family Christmas show at the Watermill.

Neil Irish's innovative, colourful design with the four gigantic suits of cards and umpteen doors and cubbyholes is the ideal backdrop to this curious adventure tale.

Under Robin Belfield's skilful direction, we start with Alice looking for a hiding place in a game of hide and seek with James who is desperate to be a magician. His solution to making one of the jam tarts disappear is simply to eat it.

Alice then comes across the very late White Rabbit. She falls down a deep rabbit hole chasing him and enters a very strange and mystical world. When she eats a tart, she grows taller and taller, but drinking from a bottle shrinks her down to the size of a mouse. I won't spoil the effect but it's theatrically very clever.

The highly talented cast of actor-musicians play a multitude of characters and instruments with a witty musical score by Simon Slater. Look out for the quirky Mock Turtle Soup Song and the Lobster Quadrille.

The dancing Dodos are great fun, playing on kazoos as they change the scenery and getting wet from Alice's tears.

Josie Dunn is particularly splendid as the curious, petulant Alice as she explores the underground kingdom and tries to make sense of what is happening to her.

A friendly hookah-smoking caterpillar (Alex Tomkins) gives some sound advice as Alice continues her journey.

Along the way, she meets the ever-grinning Cheshire cat (Oliver Izod) who by contrast plays a totally "mad" Mad Hatter. Alice attends the tea party with large cups and teapots suspended on sticks, where everything just gets more curious as she is asked to solve riddles—all great fun.

Ed Thorpe portrays a delightful Dormouse who is always falling asleep and also the White Rabbit who is forever rushing about—the youngsters in the audience certainly warmed to the characters.

The haughty Duchess (Polly Highton) just confuses Alice, particularly when she changes a baby into a pig—clever stuff.

Everyone lives in fear of the Queen of Hearts, a strong, villainous performance by Zara Ramm, whose catchphrase of “off with their heads” sends shivers down their spines.

When Alice finally gets to meet her, they play a game of croquet using exceedingly unusual mallets.

There is some great audience participation in the second act that delighted the audience who participated with enthusiasm.

Finally, Alice is put on trial for stealing the tarts, but will she escape from a dreadful end? You’ll have to go to find out.

Alice In Wonderland is the perfect seasonal start to the festive season.

Reviewer: [Robin Strapp](#)