

We're all mad for JSerra's Alice in Wonderland. Feb 3, 2020

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Confined to a hospital, a young girl, bored of her bland reality, is offered the chance of a lifetime. She's quick to accept, but there's one small catch...

In this Faustian twist on the Lewis Carroll classic, Alice, a mental patient, scours Wonderland for her heart, unwittingly traded to the enigmatic Cheshire Cat. Through her encounters with the insane, nonsensical, and just-plain-peculiar, she learns to appreciate real life and conquer her inner demons.

Abigail Cox grounds the show as obstinate Alice. Shallow and self-absorbed, she stubbornly stamps her feet when scolded by her parents, dismissing their concerns with a defensive pout. However, when dealing with the wacky workings of Wonderland, she adopts a more modest demeanor, softening her tone and straightening her spine. Her strength returns later, but with a mature sense of refinement she previously lacked.

Zoe Strickland captivates as the crooked Cheshire Cat. Methodical, mischievous, and a tad malicious, Strickland's Cat commands the room as she flounces with feline grace. Effortlessly transforming from devious and cajoling to debonair and calculating, her derangement remains frighteningly constant. Strickland shows a different side as the maniacal Mad Hatter, unhinged as she strains against her straight jacket. Though seemingly separate, the Hatter's occasional flashes of the characteristic Cheshire grin leave one wondering if the two are really the same.

Noah Herrera provides comedic relief in the dual roles of Caterpillar and White Knight. As the Caterpillar, he is suave and sanctimonious, scolding Alice for her stupidity. As the knight, he tromps about overzealously, navigating the checkered floor in the L-shaped movements of a chess piece. Rachael Patin shows spectacular range as the Dormouse and the Red Queen: in one scene, she's meek and unfocused, mumbling dreamily about treacle. In the next, she's domineering and erratic, screaming her head off while proclaiming "off with their heads".

Technical elements bring to life the psychedelic Wonderland. Angelique Brown's lighting employs subtle but persistent color shifts to imbue Wonderland with an unsettling aura. This effect is furthered by Kayden Kutchins' and Rachael Patin's set, which features a raked checkerboard stage and walls covered in tally marks, twisting arrows, and paint splatters that make each scene feel physically off-kilter. Austin Asher's sound completes the chaos, with otherworldly echoes from Alice's reality reverberating ominously.

JSerra's Alice in Wonderland is a wacky and wonderful interpretation of a timeless tale.