



Thursday, October 14, 1999

by Debbie Carter

# Follow that Rabbit

Theatergoers who attend “Alice in Wonderland” this weekend will follow Alice down the rabbit hole, sail on a pool of tears and endure the considerable wrath of the Queen of Hearts.

Traveling in groups of 12 to 15, the audience will follow Alice through Wonderland- a catacomb of eight rooms under and around the Salisbury Theatre.

Director Kade Mendelowitz, who also doubles as the set and lighting designer for the Theatre UAF production, said the idea of adapting the Lewis Carroll story as “interactive” theater was dreamed up to provide a different experience for the audience. “They get the perspective of being Alice in Wonderland,” he said.

The play begins with Alice alone in the fields by her home. When a talking rabbit happens by- worried about being late for a croquet game for the queen- Alice follows the rabbit and the audience follows Alice.

After Alice drinks a potion to become smaller, the audience “shrinks” with her, and the pit orchestra area lowers 6 feet to reveal a door through the stage.

They travel through the pool of tears, a forest where Tweedledum and Tweedledee recite poetry and then off to the Mad Hatter’s Hat shop, where it’s always time for tea. After escaping the Queen of Heart’s croquet games with their heads intact, the audience becomes the jury in a maddeningly unfair trial over missing tarts.

Four sets of Alices and white rabbits will lead parties through the nonsensical Wonderland.

Beginning at 7:30 p.m., groups will enter the theatre’s side door at 10-minute intervals for a 40-minute foray through Wonderland and will continue until the last group is through.

One of the more striking sights will be the Queen of Hearts, who will be costumed in an immense gown- alternating panels of yellow carpet backing and red, egg-crate foam. Wire normally used to bundle lumber serves to give the skirt form.

Tracy Campbell, a senior theatre major from Anchorage, plays the volatile queen (“Off with her head!”)- A part that requires vocal warm-ups beforehand, she said.

“She’s either screaming or giggling like a little girl.”

Campbell, who describes her character as “bipolar,” has acted in about six productions, but her school emphasis has been on directing.

Diana Williams, one of the Alices, likens the experience of the interactive theatre to going through a haunted house. A veteran of several haunted houses, Williams said the theater organization has “out-Disneyed Disneyland” with its show.

Williams, a theater major from Detroit, said each of the Alices has a slightly different take on her character, even though the lines are the same. This has made the role enjoyable, she said.

“Even the rehearsals are fun.”

As always, the play includes inventive attire from costume guru Tara Maginnis and Stephanie Stowman. These include a caterpillar who appears to sit atop a mushroom, and a Mad Hatter’s lime-and-dark-green, checked jacket and the Humpty-Dumpty-like Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

With the exception of the poetry reciting duo, who were borrowed from “Through the Looking Glass,” all is as appears in Carroll’s “Alice in Wonderland” in pretty much the same order, said Mendelowitz.

Staging the play has been a challenge because sets had to be created for eight separate rooms. A classroom has been transformed into a forest, a men’s dressing room into a mushroom field, the scene shop into the king’s courtroom, and the lab theater into a croquet field.

The show will give the audience the chance to visit the little-seen rooms connected with the theatre- dressing room, set and costume shops, and the trapdoor room, below the stage, said Mendelowitz.

Production times are Friday and Saturday at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. The play may also be seen Oct. 22 and 23 at 7:30 p.m. and 2 p.m. on Oct. 24.

Advance tickets for “Alice in Wonderland” are recommended since groups will leave in staggered start times printed on the tickets. Tickets are also available at the door, but some waiting will be necessary.

Tickets for the production are \$6 for adults and \$5 for university faculty and staff and the military, and students and children are \$3.