

WA Ballet's ALICE (in wonderland) launches at His Majesty's Theatre in Perth



Tanya MacNaughtonThe West Australian

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Chihiro Nomura as Alice in WA Ballet's ALICE (in wonderland). Credit: Sergey Pevnev

BALLET

ALICE (in wonderland)

His Majesty's Theatre

REVIW Tanya MacNaughton

5 stars

Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is a childhood tale close to my red roses-coloured heart.

So I was curious and curiouser ahead of WA Ballet's opening night of ALICE (in wonderland) by Hong Kong Ballet's artistic director and American choreographer Septime Webre.

My wanderlust for this wonderland resulted in an evening as fantastical as could be hoped in a vibrant feast of sight and sound.

The whimsy in Alice's first dance against the stark white set soon makes way for an explosion of activity on the stage as traits of her family members cleverly resemble those of familiar characters to come during her journey.

Dancers are elevated to great heights on James Kronzer's surreal set design with a new Fly System installed by Las Vegas' Fly by Foy, which is rigged for the tandem bicycle ridden by Tweedledee and Tweedledum and assists Alice's change of scale when drinking the potion and eating the cake.

It is personality plus in the highly entertaining contemporary dance of the doors during Alice's "eat me" and "drink me" moments.



Juan Carlos Osma as the Mad Hatter in WA Ballet's ALICE (in wonderland). Credit: Sergey Pevnev

The creative detail in Cirque du Soleil costume designer Liz Vandal's 214 pieces is astounding, playing a major part in bringing these colourful characters to life.

Jessica Gethin conducts the WA Philharmonic Orchestra through Matthew Pierce's imaginative score, written in collaboration with Webre, where each main role has been given their own musical theme to suit their style.

It was precision with every pointed toe, jete, fouette and pirouette, demonstrating the skill and strength of the company's dancers who were up for Webre's choreographic challenge.

Webre has said the Cheshire Cat/Alice pas de deux is the hardest he has ever created and during the opening performance Chihiro Nomura (Alice) and Matthew Lehmann (who played the moggy and King of Hearts) performed it with aplomb.

Alexa Tuzil's core got an extreme workout as Caterpillar, whose feet hardly touched the ground while moving her team of mushroom dancers aloft.



WA Ballet's ALICE (in wonderland) is on at His Majesty's Theatre. Credit: Sergey Pevnev
The flamingos were another highlight in an inspired Swan Lake-esque Caucus Race where Oscar Valdes was far from a Dodo in his execution of movement along with Dayana Hardy Acuna as the elegant Eaglet.

This is a ballet that champions its child guest artists with more than a walk-on role and who were close to stealing the show as fluffy baby flamingos, piggies, doors, sandwich cards and hedgehogs.

The production is storytelling ballet at its best, from the pure rage expressed by Queen of Hearts (Glenda Garcia Gomez), the madness of the Mad Hatter (Juan Carlos Osma) and the playful darts of White Rabbit (Julio Blanes) to the antics of Tweedledee (Matthew Edwardson) and Tweedledum (Jesse Homes) and the frightening five-metre long Jabberwocky puppet by designer Eric Van Wyk.

You would be mad to miss a trip down this rabbit hole full of fun and oodles of frivolity.

ALICE (in wonderland) is at His Majesty's Theatre until December 15, so don't be late for this very important date.