

'Wonderland' kids present Alice's journey down the rabbit hole

By Tim Keller For the Comet | Posted: Wednesday, August 6, 2014 4:30 pm

RATON— Beginning the celebration of its centennial this month, Raton's Shuler Theater has spawned a vital theatrical community that starts its kids on stage from a young age. This weekend the Santa Fe Trail School for the Performing Arts presents three performances of its original production, "Wonderland—Adventures with Alice," featuring actors aged 7 to 17, many of whom already have years of stage experience.

In residence for the summer repertory season, Nora Leahy wrote a new script directly from Lewis Carroll's classic books, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass. The play begins when young Alice—played by Asia Gentry—falls down a rabbit hole. As she searches for the way home, she meets a procession of the oddest characters imaginable.

"It's a great play for the kids," Leahy says, "because each gets a featured scene as Alice encounters one after another while trying to find her way home."

Directed by Leahy's partner, Ian McCabe, the pair worked with their young actors to overcome preconceived notions of the characters based on Disney's animated 1951 film, "Alice in Wonderland," or Tim Burton's 2010 film of the same title.

"Most of the kids had seen Tim Burton's film," Leahy says. "One of our challenges has been to get them to create their own versions of these characters. We also restored some of Lewis Carroll's great characters, like the duchess and Tweedledum & Tweedledee, that weren't in the films."

Another difference is that the new play is performed mostly in verse.

"The first book opens with a ballad," Leahy says. "As I began, I loved the poem so much that I thought, 'I can write the whole play in verse!' A couple weeks later, I'd figured out that it was much harder than I'd imagined."

She included four scenes that break from verse, quoting directly from Carroll and using a variety of



Wonderland Cast

Raton's theater community starts its kids on stage at a young age. When the Santa Fe Trail School for the Performing Arts presents its original production, "Wonderland," this weekend, it'll feature many young actors that already have years of experience.

approaches, all accompanied by original music composed for the production by Han Zaw. The Pool of Tears, the Cheshire Cat, the Caterpillar, and the cards in the garden of the Queen of Hearts, painting the roses red—all get musical accompaniment for choreographed dance and even puppets.

The cast and crew have been at work—it's actually looked suspiciously like play—six hours a day for three weeks, in a summer theater camp led by Leahy and McCabe. In addition to Gentry's starring role as Alice, other featured actors include Zoe Gomez as the Queen of Hearts, Emily Miera as the Mad Hatter, Laura Robertson as the Cheshire Cat, and Abby Greenly as the White Rabbit.

Johnny Gentry and Lijah Medina play Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Rounding out the cast are Nicholas Padilla-Gulley, Avery Feldman, Rebecca Ramirez, Kylee Pacheco, and Brandon Robertson. Others are Zander Osborn, Jaiden Osborn, Allie Irvin, Madison Lester, Dominic Baez, and Christina Padilla. Summer youth apprentices Kate Little and Ila Raine Medina are featured as the play's narrators.

Just as the cast spans a wide range of ages, Leahy and McCabe have designed the production to appeal to all ages. Leahy says, "The language is more heightened than most children's plays, but there are so many theatrical elements that the story's being told on multiple levels at all times. Adults and small children can enjoy it side by side."

"Wonderland—Adventures with Alice" will be presented at the Shuler Theater Friday and Saturday nights at 7:30 p.m., and in a Sunday matinee at 2:30 p.m. General admission tickets are \$15 for adults, \$13 seniors, and \$5 children. Tickets and additional information are available at the Shuler Theater, 131 N. 2nd St., (575) 445-4746.