

Alice in Wonderland

a musical entertainment by Roderick Williams

Thursday 17 - Saturday 19 Dec 1998, St John's College Auditorium

presented by *The Oxford Girls' Choir with The Alice Band*

starring Victoria Couper as *Alice*

Producer Roderick Williams

Choreographer Nancy J. Walker

Musical Director Richard Vendome



*...the Queen of Hearts, she
made some tarts, all on a
summer day...*

[from the original 1992 production]

Roderick Williams's *Alice in Wonderland* was commissioned for the European Music Festival, presented by Music at Oxford in 1992, and was performed to packed houses each night for a week. In it the composer blends his own engaging style with witty quotes from the classics; *Alice* paints a vivid portrait of each of Lewis Carroll's much-loved characters, reinforced by stunning costumes, based closely on the Tenniel drawings.

As the plot unfolds we meet the pompous Mouse, doddering Dodo, mad March Hare and Hatter, vicious Queen of Hearts ("off with their heads") and all the others, played by a cast of 36. *Alice* has something for everyone: like the original story, it can be taken as light family entertainment or as an intellectual game.

Act 1

1. The Riverbank
2. Down the Rabbit hole
3. The Pool of Tears
4. A Caucus-race
5. Advice from a Caterpillar
6. An Invitation for the Duchess
7. Pig and Pepper
8. Advice from a Cheshire Cat
9. A Mad Tea-party

Act 2

1. Into the Garden
2. The Queen's Croquet Ground
3. The Mock Turtle's Story
4. Who Stole the tarts?
5. Epilogue: The Riverbank

cast

Alice Victoria Couper
White Rabbit Alice Armitage, Isobel Piper
Bottle Josephine Donaghy
Cake Angharad Milosevic
Mouse Clemmie Franks
Dodo Jessica Shepherd, Anne-Marie Oliveri
Lory Sarah Miller
Duck Hannah Burnham
Mother Crab Jael Simon
Daughter Crab Elizabeth Couper
Eaglet Gaia Marcus
Caterpillar Renira Doran
Father William Sasha Brown
Young William Daisy Venables
Duchess Catherine Young, Hannah Tucker
Owl Eleanor Armitage, Rehan Akyilders
Frog Footman Georgia Black
Fish Footman Felicity Lingard
Cook Catherine Eekelaar
Cheshire Cat Kim Varvell
Mad Hatter Natasha Peach
March Hare Catherine Medina
Dormouse Katie Birtill, Hannah Nye

Card Two Kimberley Waechtler
Card Five Louisa Nye, Katie Birtill
Card Seven Hannah Fogg
Queen of Hearts Renira Doran
King of Hearts Georgia Black
Executioner Miranda Jewess
Mock Turtle Lucy Steele
Gryphon Emily Burn
Herald Felicity Lingard, Jael Simon
Knave of Hearts Charlotte Roberts
Alice's older sister Natasha Peach
Alice's younger sister Harriet Ainsworth
Flamingos Isobel Piper, Marusa Dudareva, Nicola Deam
Hedgehogs Elizabeth Couper, June Kent, Harriet Ainsworth
Rabbit chorus Emelia Clarke, Sasha Brown, Florence Shepherd, Daisy Venables
Lobsters Felicity Lingard, Charlotte Roberts, Anne-Marie Oliveri, Catherine Eekelaar, Miranda Jewess, Clemmie Franks
Rosebushes Miranda Jewess, Hannah Nye

The Alice Band

violin 1 Sali-Wyn Ryan
violin 2 Fiona Leggat
viola Polly Wiltshire
cello Harriet Wiltshire
double bass Clare Carpenter
flute Kieran Moynihan
oboe Michael Wilson
clarinet Steven Moss
bassoon Hannah Crichton
piano Richard Vendome

lighting Ben Wood, Peter Taphouse
prompt Penelope Martin- Smith
wardrobe Maura Allen

Alice in Wonderland - composer's note



The idea of composing an opera to highlight the diverse talents of the Oxford Girls' Choir was first suggested to me by Richard Vendome in 1990 as we were returning from a tour of the Irish Republic. It had just been performing Purcell's *Dido and Æneas*, a piece originally presented by young girls, and the search was on for another

full-scale dramatic work that would give the choir an opportunity to act, dance and mime as well as sing. Richard realised that Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" would be the perfect subject, with its Oxford roots, its female lead, and the large number of characters to provide as many parts for the girls as possible.

I began work immediately, and the girls performed the first completed scene, the *Caucus Race*, at Oxford Town Hall in 1991. The opera was completed early in 1992 and premiered that summer at the Newman Rooms, as part of Music at Oxford's big-budget European Music Festival. It was directed by Meryl McQuay and choreographed by Nancy Walker, with the role of Alice played by Maria Finnis. There were five performances, all packed out. The band originally consisted of 17 players, including harp, saxophone and percussion, but this was reduced for a further production in 1994, with Emily Levy as *Alice*.

In adapting the book for operatic treatment I noticed how fond Carroll was of pastiche, as we can see in his witty adaptations of current Victorian rhymes such as "Twinkle, twinkle little star" and "How doth the busy bee". The music includes many operatic quotations among the original music; I hope opera buffs will enjoy spotting these! I was especially pleased to be asked to direct this revival and have an opportunity to attempt some dramatic effects that had occurred to me during composition.

The dreamlike qualities of the book are evident in the frequent and seamless changes of scene and scale and in the way Alice meets characters based on real personalities, though seen through the imagination of a child. The life of a Victorian child, even one as privileged as Alice Liddell, brought up in the Deanery of Christ Church, had its fair share of unkindness; this is reflected in the way many of the "adult" characters behave towards her. But in her innocence and natural curiosity Alice is always ready with a quick response!

Roderick Williams