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Wonderland leaves Hatters smiling

BALLET REVIEW

LEE ANNE CHARBONNEAU

Special to the News

The **Royal** Winnipeg **Ballet** graced Medicine Hat's Esplanade stage Saturday with *Wonderland*, a sumptuous adaptation of Lewis Carroll's 1865 literary classic featuring the adventuresome Alice.

"I fear it all seems curiouser and curiouser," says a mystified Alice (Jennifer Welsman) in Act 1.

From the delighted audience's point of view, the visions and events unfolding in the tale are, indeed, increasingly curious. And fantastically beautiful.

In her expressions and movements, Alice is the archetypal child of wonder. As she encounters the Caterpillar, a team of four sparkling black-and-teal dancers playing the part of one character, she responds with dazzling effect. One beloved character, the Dormouse (Emily Grizzell,) proves it possible to fall fast asleep mid-symphony. To patrons, Dormouse is a funny favorite while to Alice, she is a source of exasperation. The White Rabbit (Harrison James), Alice's nearly-constant companion, uncannily twitches and spazzes around the stage. The March Hare (Maureya Lebowitz,) makes karate noises of triumph at the Mad Hatter's tea party. The dancers are completely consumed by their quirky characters but maintain the grace and

musical flow that defines **ballet**.

Contemporary visual and aural elements transport the nearly 150-year-old tale into the information age and make the performance richly entertaining. Cleverly-positioned and stunningly-lit screens are used with dynamic effect. As Alice chases the White Rabbit through a maze of scirms, the stage becomes a green forest with gurgling brook. Concepts of size and pattern are expressed with novel and creative computer video-projection, a significant element in the production. In addition to the musical strains of Canadian composers Brian Current and John Estacio and 19th-century Viennese composer Josef Strauss, incredible soundscapes are featured in the production. Crowds chattering, bells ringing, clocks ticking, croquet balls being whacked, all these sounds come to life in this modern **ballet**.

The dancers are stunning. With a seemingly hidden power, they swirl, twirl, flourish, soar and skitter across the stage in beautifully executed synchronicity. Costumes are delectable and diverse and produce characters ranging from a classic ballerina sparkling in white tutu to weirdly-tuqued woodland creatures to majestic fowl in feather boleros to a hairy gorilla eating a banana.

A favorite with the audience, *Wonderland* expanded the scope of, and the magic of, **ballet** for many Medicine Hatters, young and old.





NEWS PHOTO CASSIE WEISS

Members of the **royal** Winnipeg **Ballet** perform Wonderland Saturday night at the Esplanade.