

arts & entertainment



Photo by Kevin Higley

The Studio Theatre production of *Alice in Wonderland* is a surreal version of the Lewis Carroll novel.

Surreal 'Alice' leaves audience in wonderland

By Carla Engstrom

Alice in Wonderland is so hopelessly abstract and absurd that one cannot help getting lost in the plot. But at the same time, its originality makes it entertaining.

The production runs through Sunday at Studio Theatre.

If you're expecting a play similar to a Neil Simon comedy, *Alice* isn't for you. It has its moments of comedy, but it consists mainly of scenes that make you wonder.

Somehow Alice (Elizabeth McCord) was different in the book, but there is no doubt in your mind who Alice is. Her small frame and blond curls give her away.

A cast of six play various parts, except for Alice, who remains Alice throughout the show.

The cast begins the play by discovering an abandoned room. At first, it appears to be hectic backstage action. Then one sees that they're just children. They scream like children, jump up and down in place and try to frighten one another with the props in the room.

Jabberwock recognizable

The first recognizable scene from the book involves the Jabberwock (Judy Zimmermann).

You expect to see an adult characterization, but she retains a child's perspective. This is hard to adjust to because it seems somewhat unprofessional.

The Jabberwock's costume is not frightening itself. It's made up of an old coat put on backwards and a mop wig. The audience has to rely on the reactions of the cast for the impact of the Jabberwock.

The impact is minimal.

The transitions are hard to follow. And the actions drag until the White Rabbit (Scott Hobbs) appears.

The White Rabbit convinces the audience that he's afraid of his own shadow. He's perfect except he doesn't say his classic line "I'm late. I'm late for a very important date."

One nice thing about Lewis Carroll's characters is that they are so human. It's easy to identify with the conversation Alice has with the rabbit.

Because the play is surreal, some of the things that appear in the play don't appear in the book.

In avant-garde theatre, it's easy to attach meaning to actions. So the scene where the ventriloquist (Hobbs) and his puppet Alice perform, doesn't relate to the story, but it might add to Alice's further loss of her identity.

Growing sequence 'ingenious'

The cast does an ingenious job of helping Alice in her growing sequence. They inflate Alice by blowing in her fingers. Her body seems to grow larger than the rest of the cast.

At the end of the scene, Alice doesn't like her shape and deflates. The scene is interrupted by an absurd chorus of "By the sea, by the sea."

It doesn't make much sense.

The Mouse (Greg Wagner) plays a typical version of a scared mouse. He is timid in his actions and his costume consists of a rope tied around his waist for a tail, a pair of wire rimmed glasses and a Mickey Mouse hat.

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School of Music slates free concert

The UNL School of Music will present a free public concert at 8 p.m. Thursday at Kimball Recital Hall, 11th and R streets.

The concert will feature the UNL saxophone and percussion ensembles.

Contemporary and classical compositions will be performed along with original works by members of the saxophone ensemble.

Theme of 'The Front' gives serious, lasting lesson

By Will Huffman

Many people will go to see *The Front* with the illusion they are going to see just another Woody Allen comedy.

They come away disappointed because *The Front* certainly doesn't fit the mold of the usual Woody Allen brand of cinematic comedy.

The film deals with an intensely important subject—the blacklisting of writers, directors and actors during the McCarthy Era.

Although the studios and networks never admitted that such a list indeed existed, many persons were denied any type of work simply because they refused to cooperate with the witch-hunters.

In *The Front*, Woody plays a small-time, unsuccessful bookie who serves as a "front" for three blacklisted writers. He's in it for the money, which allows him to live the high life he has always dreamed of.

Things aren't quite so simple. One of Woody's friends, an actor named Hecky Brown (Zero Mostel), commits suicide because he has been blacklisted and can't find work. The realization arrives that it's more than just a game.

In the end, Woody must make a decision. Should he continue to play along and thus retain his new found

The film also is successful in transforming a political issue into real, human terms. The filmmakers obviously have deep feelings and sympathies for the characters and situations, and the final credits explain why.

Producer-director Martin Ritt, writer Walter Bernstein, and actors Mostel, Bernardi and Lloyd Gough were all blacklisted during the early '50s.

Their tone is not bitter; rather, they seem to be trying to explain just how easily such shameful occurrences can happen.

The McCarthy Era is one of the low points of American history, and the film translates those historical

terms into human ones by showing us how many innocent people suffered.

Many heavily theme-oriented films like *The Front* lose relevance after a few years. Either their messages lose topicality, or the controversy surrounding the films dies down, revealing the film wasn't good to begin with.

I believe *The Front* will withstand the test of time. I certainly hope the McCarthy nightmare is never forgotten. It could happen again so easily.

That is the main achievement of *The Front*—reminding us in a subtle, yet effective way just how quickly and easily our rights can be breached.

freeze frames



affluence? The final scene, where Woody testifies before the Un-American Activities Committee, is superb.

Allen's face can express more in one small glance than most other actors can in a whole scene.

All of the performances are first rate, including Allen, Mostel, Herschel Bernardi as a television producer caught in the middle, and Michael Murphy as one of the blacklisted writers.

By all means see *The Front*, but revise your expectations. The film treats a serious subject in a sometimes light-hearted way. Fortunately, this approach proves more effective because it avoids the heavy, preachy style of many other "theme" movies.



Michael Murphy and Woody Allen play in *The Front*, a very well-done movie about the blacklisting that went on during the McCarthy era. Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures