

Alice in Wonderland

an NWCT world-premiere adaptation

conceived and composed by award-winning jazz artist Ezra Weiss

book by NWCT Artistic Director Sarah Jane Hardy

**NORTHWEST
CHILDRENS
THEATER and
SCHOOL**

STARRING PORTLAND JAZZ LUMINARIES MARILYN KELLER & SHIRLEY NANETTE

AS THE QUEEN OF HEARTS

NW Neighborhood
Cultural Center
1819 NW Everett Street
Suite 216
Portland, OR 97209-2189

phone: 503-222-4480
fax: 503-222-4130
www.nwcts.org

Our mission—to educate,
entertain and enrich the lives of
young audiences

Managing Director
Judy Kafoury

Artistic Director
Sarah Jane Hardy

Education Director
Carolyn Newsom

Volunteer Director
Diane Carlson

CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER!

Tumble down the rabbit hole into a nonsensical world of riddle and rhyme, using two uniquely American artistic styles: musical theater and jazz! Alice's journey into Wonderland features favorites like the Mad Hatter, Caterpillar and Queen of Hearts, all reborn through the styles of jazz greats from Davis to Monk. Plays Jan. 23-Feb. 15, Fri. at 7 p.m., Sat. at 2 and 7 p.m., Sun. at 2 p.m. For tickets, call 503-222-4480 or visit www.nwcts.org.

THE BAND

The musicians featured in *Alice's* six-piece live band is a testament to Portland's love of jazz music, and to Ezra Weiss' own unique draw as an artist and composer:

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| <i>Trumpet</i> | Katie Pressley |
| <i>Saxophones, Clarinet</i> | Noah Bernstein |
| <i>Trombone</i> | Lars Campbell |
| <i>Piano</i> | Ezra Weiss |
| <i>Bass</i> | Bill Athens |
| <i>Drums</i> | Tim Paxton |

THE CAST

This jazz adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland* features:

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Dormouse, Queen of Hearts</i> | Marilyn Keller |
| <i>Dormouse, Queen of Hearts</i> | Shirley Nanette |
| <i>Alice</i> | Annabel Cantor |
| <i>White Rabbit</i> | Sophie Rogers |
| <i>Mouse</i> | Sophie Mackay |
| <i>Eaglet</i> | Joellen Sweeney |

(also *Dormouse, Queen of Hearts* understudy)

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------------|
| <i>Caterpillar, King of Hearts</i> | Matt Loehrke |
| <i>Duchess, Card</i> | Athena Patterson |
| <i>Cheshire Cat</i> | Emily Bryan |
| <i>March Hare, Card</i> | Jason Means |
| <i>Mad Hatter</i> | John Ellingson |
| <i>Ensemble</i> | Michael Chaffee |
| | Alyssa Haning |
| | Rafe Larsen |

THE DESIGN TEAM

The NWCT 2008-09 design team is intact for this production: costume design by Mary Rochon; set design by Jeff Seats; lights by Jeff Forbes; sound design by Rodolfo Ortega; scenic art by John Ellingson; props by Alexandria Eccles.

THE PARTNERSHIPS

NWCT is honored to be a featured Partner Event with the nationally-acclaimed **Portland Jazz Festival**, produced with Alaska Airlines/Horizon Air and the Oregonian A&E. The festival is an impressive who's who of modern day jazz greats, as well as the 70th anniversary of Blue Note Records. A celebration of jazz music, Black History Month, and the City of Portland, Alice plays throughout the Festival, introducing jazz to the next generation.

NWCT is also thrilled to be a featured 'Fully-Staged World Premiere' with **Fertile Ground**, a city-wide festival of over 20 new works, staged readings and events, produced in partnership with Travel Portland and the Portland Area Theater Alliance.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Release Date
January 8, 2009
Kill Date
February 24, 2009

Media Contact
To set up interviews
or discuss other
possibilities for feature
stories, please contact:
Marri-Beth Serritella
Sucha Production, Inc.
503-528-1370
mb@suchaproduction.com

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Fri. & Sat. 7 p.m., Sat. & Sun. 2 p.m.

Where: NW Neighborhood Cultural Center
1819 NW Everett Street, Portland, OR 97209

Tickets: 503-222-4480 or WWW.NWCTS.ORG

Age Range: Most enjoyed by ages 6 and up

Prices: \$16-20 adults, \$12-16 youth (14 & under)

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high resolution photos online at: <http://nwcts.org/html/press.html>

244, 266, 316, 327, 368, 456

Jason Means (March Hare), John Ellingson (Mad Hatter) and Annabel Cantor (Alice) in Northwest Children's Theater and School's new jazz musical, *Alice in Wonderland*.

259, 459

John Ellingson (Mad Hatter) and Annabel Cantor (Alice) in Northwest Children's Theater and School's new jazz musical, *Alice in Wonderland*.

391

Ezra Weiss (adaptor, composer, pianist), John Ellingson (Mad Hatter) and Annabel Cantor (Alice) in Northwest Children's Theater and School's new jazz musical, *Alice in Wonderland*.

#403

Ezra Weiss (adaptor, composer, pianist), and Annabel Cantor (Alice) in Northwest Children's Theater and School's new jazz musical, *Alice in Wonderland*.

430, 447, 466

Ezra Weiss (adaptor, composer, pianist), Jason Means (March Hare), John Ellingson (Mad Hatter) and Annabel Cantor (Alice) in Northwest Children's Theater and School's new jazz musical, *Alice in Wonderland*.

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THE VISIONARY VOICE: EZRA WEISS

Inspired by Lewis Carroll's masterpiece, Ezra Weiss' original compositions are the musical artistry behind NWCT's original adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland*.

As a child, Ezra was active in theater, both as an actor and a musical director. He was also involved in band programs, and studied piano with Larry Loeber. Ezra received his Bachelor of Music in Jazz Composition, studying with Wendell Logan and Neal Creque, and a Masters in Jazz Piano at Queens College, where he studied with Bruce Barth and Ted Rosenthal.

In Portland, Ezra led Blues Connotation, which later became the Ezra Weiss Sextet. Ezra also began teaching throughout the Portland metropolitan area, including at NWCT, where he has music directed numerous productions.

In 2002, Ezra recorded his debut CD, *The Five A.M. Strut*. Subsequent recordings included *Persephone* and *Get Happy*, both of which received excellent reviews and radio airplay.

Ezra has led bands in many of the U.S.'s greatest clubs, including Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Smalls, and Tonic in New York City; Ryles in Boston; Nighttown in Cleveland; Chris' Jazz Cafe in Philadelphia; Jimmy Mak's in Portland; and Catalina's in Los Angeles. He has composed and/or arranged music for Billy Hart, Thara Memory, Rob Scheps Big Band, Leon Lee Dorsey, Stan Bock, and Renato Caranto, among others. He has also performed with many great musicians including Greg Bandy, Michael Philip Mossman, Antonio Hart, Thara Memory, Rob Scheps, Renato Caranto, and Dennis Rowland. He also co-led the Courtney Bryan/Ezra Weiss Jazz Orchestra in New York. Ezra is the winner of the 2002, 2006, and 2007 ASCAP Young Jazz Composer Award.

MARILYN KELLER

Sharing the show-stopping role of The Queen of Hearts are two immensely talented jazz divas, Marilyn Keller and Shirley Nanette. Both popular headliners of the Portland jazz scene, these women bring incredible dynamism and belting soul to this iconic role.

Marilyn Keller, a member of the group Black Swan since 1997 has diverse musical roots. Since her Portland debut, Ms. Keller has established a loyal following while remaining active in other performance ensembles and artists, including The Don Latarski Group, Darrell Grant, Thara Memory, Tall Jazz, Tom Grant, Michael

Allen Harrison, Disciples in Song, and the Augustana Jazz Quartet.

Ms. Keller was as a member of the Mt. Hood Community College Vocal Jazz Ensemble and vocalist fronting the award-winning MHCC Jazz Lab Band. She is featured at the Jazz Worship Service at Augustana Lutheran Church every Sunday and can be seen frequently at venues and events throughout the Pacific Northwest.

A celebrated recording artist, Ms. Keller's discography includes: *At Last; How Many Ways* with Don Latarski and Chris Stevens; *How 'Bout Now and Once in a Blue Moon* with Tall Jazz; and *Promise* with Jeff Ibach & Promise. She is featured on several Black Swan recordings. (Some content courtesy of www.bscjb.com.)

SHIRLEY NANETTE

Shirley Nanette made her debut with the Oregon Symphony in 1981, conducted by Norman Leyden and has since appeared as guest soloist with the symphony orchestras of Chicago, Seattle, Spokane, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Baltimore, Tucson, San Diego, Honolulu, Long Beach, and the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C.

Ms. Nanette performs regularly at notable Oregon musical events, including The Mount Hood Festival of Jazz, Cascade Music Festival, Sun River Music Festival, and annually at Oregon Art Museum's "Museum After Hours." She has opened for Frankie Valle and the Four Seasons, Billy Eckstine, Diane Schuur and Lou Rawls and Eddie Harris, and substituted for Tony Bennett with the Spokane Symphony when he became ill. She performs annually with the Woody Hite Big Band and the George Reinmiller Big Band. A fixture of the Portland jazz scene, she was honored with her own float in the Portland Rose Festival Grand Floral Parade two consecutive years.

Twice chosen as the only jazz vocalist to be represented by the Oregon Arts Commission, her first recording entitled *See You Later* included compositions by George and Ira Gershwin, Cole Porter, Rogers and Hart, Irving Berlin, and Michel LeGrand. Her newest landmark work, a CD and DVD set entitled *Starting Here, Starting Now*, was recorded at Jimmy Mak's jazz club in early 2008. Ms. Keller was recently inducted into the Oregon Music Hall of Fame for her dedication to jazz and her extraordinary career. (Some content courtesy of www.shirlynanette.com.)

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AN INTERVIEW WITH SARAH JANE HARDY AND EZRA WEISS

What made you want to create new works for the stage for young audiences?

Sarah: Portland develops material that is well-suited to Portland audiences. While it is important that we at NWCT participate in the national conversation, it's equally important that we participate in the local conversation. And new works is a huge part of that.

Ez: I am a writer, and grew up in children's theater, and wrote a lot, even as a kid. I was very excited at this prospect. And because I know how much good material influenced me.

Why now, and why this project?

Sarah: I knew it would take a lot of time and energy, and I just wasn't ready before now. Recognizing how much of our budget could go to large holding houses for musicals that don't particularly suit our stage was a motivating factor. And because Ez was around, and said he would do it. (laughs) That's probably the biggest reason.

Ez, what is it about *Alice in Wonderland* that inspired this "jazz odyssey" for kids?

Ez: I think it goes the other way around: What made me decide to make *Alice* into a jazz odyssey? It was a matter of finding the 'chocolate and peanut butter' combination. We could go traditional Victorian style, but that sounded really unappealing... We could go contemporary, but I've seen that done... Or, we could go Disney with it, but Disney went Disney with it, so I said, "Well, what if we made it jazz?" Then I thought about how we could make it work and tie in some of the character with specific styles from jazz musicians.

Each of you has experience writing or composing original work. What kinds of unique challenges and opportunities present themselves when creating for a young audience as opposed to an adult audience?

Ez: Not being able to use swear words. (laughs) I actually called Sarah Jane and said, "Please, I need a rhyme for 'kitchen,'" and the perfect thing for the Queen of Hearts

to say is 'quit your bitching.' Please tell me we can say 'bitchin'!" But we can't. I had to change it to 'snitchin.'

Sorry about that.

Sarah: The kids that come to the theater want to have a good time. In fact, kids want to enjoy themselves all the time, every minute of the day if they possibly can. So they're already on your side, and I take that very seriously. I don't want to let them down, because they trust us to entertain them. I find that inspiring. We look to preserve the story through theatrical iconic moments and key storytelling elements. Except you can't swear.

What is the most important message or theme that you hope to convey to your audience?

Ez: Lewis Carroll's text is really rich, so we're holding on to that as closely as possible and bringing it to life through the jazz aspects. The main thing is that they end up exposed to jazz in a fun way. When I was a kid, seeing people play instruments, that might as well have been a magic show. I didn't know how they did it. Even if they never hear the word 'jazz', the entire time, it's still there on some subconscious level, so when they hear it again they'll think, 'Oh, this is like *Alice*; I liked *Alice*!' And maybe they'll start listening to Coltrane.

Sarah: *Alice* has an educational component that extends beyond the show to another art form, an exciting possibility that theater offers all the time. And not just children's theater and music, but children's theater and jazz. It's definitely interdisciplinary.

What's next?

Sarah: Well, we're in rehearsal now, and doing an original cast recording of the score of *Alice*. Beyond this production, part of the reason is to develop the kind of materials we'll need to get royalties for stories we want to adapt later. Rather than going to New York to find someone to write us a play, we'll write here sharing our material and process with other people. And I don't know how long Ez plans on sticking around, but as long as he's here, I will ask him to write for me!