



Susan Hightower, left, and Jefferson Mays are the sole stars in the CityStage production of "Alice's Adventures," running Tuesday through Jan. 24 at the downtown theater, Columbus Center

Spirited 'Alice' takes stage

Expect variations from original Lewis Carroll fantasy

By FRED SOKOL

Theater writer

CityStage swings into the new year with "Alice's Adventures," an adaptation of Lewis Carroll's fantasy piece. He created the story which derives its name from Alice Liddell, a little girl he knew. Adapted by Jocelyn Clarke and sculpted by avant-garde director Anne Bogart, the 75-minute play reinvents the original Carroll fiction. It has, thus far, delighted audiences in Columbus, Ohio, and Pittsburgh.

The English author wrote what he first called "Alice's Adventures Underground" during the early 1860s.

Carroll took the charming Alice to a make-believe place she discovers after tumbling into a hole while following a white rabbit.

She encounters characters like the Mad Hatter, the Queen of Hearts, and the Cheshire Cat. Actor Jefferson Mays, playing about a dozen roles in the current show, swiftly moves from one iden-

IF YOU GO

Event: "Alice's Adventures"

When: Jan. 12-24

Where: CityStage, Columbus Center, Springfield

Cost: \$23-\$35

For further info: Call 788-7033 (box office) or 733-2500 (Ticketmaster)

tity to the next.

Susan Hightower, the only other performer, is cast as Alice. Those who attended StageWest during the early 1990s may remember Hightower's work in Eric Hill's company. Her characterization as Ophelia in "Hamlet," on the main stage, was striking.

Anne Bogart, who runs the graduate directing program at Columbia University, also shares the leadership of the Saratoga International Theater Institute,

which is producing "Alice."

Speaking by telephone recently, she pointed out that, "Everyone who has read it has a different movie going on in his or her head about Alice. I always wanted to do a fairy tale. Jefferson Mays, one of the actors, kept giving me different versions of Alice. Finally, I decided to do it and worked with Jocelyn Clarke, the talented writer who adapted the fiction."

For scenic design, the production features a 7-foot box painted many wild colors on the stage.

Each of these actors has been trained extensively, utilizing one or more methods of acting, including the Viewpoints technique Bogart favors. This dramatic style, which moves away from psychological realism in acting, helps actors develop a common vocabulary.

The training mixes acting, dancing, storytelling, music, and other elements. The director has always been one to fuse a variety of art forms with imaginative results.

Both Mays and Hightower have previously worked within the Viewpoints con-

text. Each, too, has engaged in Tadashi Suzuki's rigorous methodology. One anticipates, then, that "Alice" will not be a conventional theater experience.

A few years ago, Bogart presented an eclectic, edgy version of "The Women" at Hartford Stage. It was quite musical. The director added vaudeville to that production and one surmises that "Alice's Adventures" will exhibit creative theater and song, as well.

Bogart says, "I am especially interested in what theatergoers, with absolutely no knowledge of 'Alice' (if possible) have to say about the show. You really do not have to read any of it to appreciate it. I do think it works well for children, too."

My previous sense of Bogart's work is that her productions are atypical, if not experimental, as she moves away from the very tried-and-true.

She has terrific respect for actors. In fact, she has said of Mays that he "was born to do all of these characters."

Bogart renderings are usually quite theatrical and filled with spirit. She choreographs and conducts within the overall framework of producing a show.