

# Alice

EDUCATION  
PACK

A MUSICAL BY  
TOM WAITS

3RD - 19TH MAY

8PM - THE GYM  
THE  
ARTS  
CENTRE

WWW.FREETHEATRE.ORG.NZ



# THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS

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THANKS TO OUR PRINCIPAL FUNDERS AND SUPPORTERS FOR *THE BLACK RIDER*:



Te Matatiki Toi Ora



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FREE THEATRE CHRISTCHURCH RECEIVES PRINCIPAL AND CORE FUNDING FROM:



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IN ADDITION TO OUR FRIENDS AND VOLUNTEERS FREE THEATRE CHRISTCHURCH IS ALSO GRATEFUL FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONS:



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**VENUE:** The Gym, The Arts Centre of Christchurch,  
Worcester Boulevard.

**SCHOOLS PERFORMANCE:** Wednesday 2nd May, 7.30pm

**RUNNING TIME:** 90 minutes with a 10 minute interval.

**SUITABILITY:** This production is especially suited for Years 11-13.



# Alice

**DIRECTED AND ADAPTED BY PETER FALKENBERG**

ORIGINAL DIRECTION ROBERT WILSON

MUSIC AND LYRICS TOM WAITS AND KATHLEEN BRENNAN

TEXT PAUL SCHMIDT

## CAST

**Alice**

Emma Johnston

**Deacon Dodgson,  
White Rabbit, Fawn and  
White/Black Knight**

George Parker

**Rose, Cheshire Cat,  
White Sheep and Tweedledum**

Marian McCurdy

**Lily, Duchess, Black Queen  
and Tweedledee**

Greta Bond

**Caterpillar, Frog, March hare,  
Humpty Dumpty and Executioner**

Pascal Ackermann

**Cook, Mad Hatter and Black King**

Chris Reddington

**Dormouse**

Reuben Derrick

## MUSICIANS

Pascal Ackermann, Rory Dalley, Reuben Derrick, Michael Kime,  
Marian McCurdy, Chris Reddington, Heather Webb

**Set and Lighting  
Ubu's Bar  
Producers**

Stuart Lloyd-Harris  
Jenny Ritchie  
George Parker  
Marian McCurdy





Image from Free Theatre's 2017 production of Tom Waits and Robert Wilson's *The Black Rider* (2017). *Alice* is a followup project for Waits and Wilson as it is in 2018 for Free Theatre.



## **ABOUT THE COMPANY:**

Free Theatre Christchurch (est. 1979) is a professional theatre collective based in Christchurch, New Zealand. Peter Falkenberg is the founder and Artistic Director of the company. As the country's longest running producer of experimental theatre, the company offers a unique experience for artists and audiences not catered for by local commercial and amateur theatres.

The Free Theatre works as an ensemble, conceiving work from an initial idea and developing it over a longer period of time. This work often takes place in spaces that are not conventional in terms of theatre. As a professional art theatre, Free Theatre is closer in creative process to contemporary dance companies or international experimental art theatre groups such as Ex Machina or The Wooster Group that create exciting new work by pushing beyond generic boundaries.

The company works with artistic collaborators from diverse disciplines and with diverse and unusual texts (literary, filmic, musical, social and cultural) to produce completely new and original work that engages directly with time and place. Core ensemble members undertake years of professional training in different performance techniques and traditions and conduct ongoing company training. Free Theatre ensemble members also regularly participate in and lead professional theatre classes locally, nationally and internationally.



# ABOUT ALICE:

**What:** *Alice* is an “avant-garde” musical.

**Who:** *Alice* premiered at the Thalia Theatre in Hamburg, Germany in 1992. It was the second collaboration of theatre director Robert Wilson, musician Tom Waits and followed their successful 1990 production of *The Black Rider: the casting of the magic bullets*. Free Theatre Christchurch’s 2018 production of *Alice* is also a followup to their production of *The Black Rider* in 2017.

**Inspiration:** Waits and Wilson were inspired of course by the title character from the well known *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll (this was his nom de plume, his real name was Charles Dodgson).

**Plot:** Tom Waits describes *Alice* as "adult songs for children, or children's songs for adults. It's a maelstrom or fever-dream, a tone poem, with torch songs and waltzes...an odyssey in dream logic and nonsense." In other words, rather than illustrate the narratives of Carroll’s stories they explore in a surreal and dreamlike way the fascination that the author Carroll/Dodgson himself had with a young girl called Alice Liddell (who he was friends with at the time and who inspired his stories). The character of Alice in Waits and Wilson’s production is played by a actress who portrays Alice both as a child and as a grown woman reflecting back on her experience with Carroll/Dodgson who also appears as the white rabbit.



Image Above: Actors and collaborators during a rehearsal, from left Stefan Kurt (Dodgson/White Rabbit), Tom Waits, Annette Paulmann (Alice) and Robert Wilson.

**Below:** Dodgson was a photographer and this is a photo he took of the real Alice Liddell.



**Right:** John Tenniel provided the now famous illustrations of Carroll/Dodgson’s stories for its original publication.



In 2002 Tom Waits produced a CD recording of the music created for the production.



### **Alice (sung by the the character Charles Dodgson)**

It's dreamy weather we're on  
You waved your crooked wand  
Along an icy pond with a frozen moon  
A murder of silhouette crows I saw  
And the tears on my face  
And the skates on the pond  
They spell Alice  
I disappear in your name  
But you must wait for me  
Somewhere across the sea  
There's a wreck of a ship  
Your hair is like meadow grass on the tide  
And the raindrops on my window  
And the ice in my drink  
Baby all I can think of is Alice  
Arithmetic arithmetock  
Turn the hands back on the clock  
How does the ocean rock the boat?  
How did the razor find my throat?  
The only strings that hold me here  
Are tangled up around the pier

And so a secret kiss  
Brings madness with the bliss  
And I will think of this  
When I'm dead in my grave  
Set me adrift and I'm lost over there  
And I must be insane  
To go skating on your name  
And by tracing it twice  
I fell through the ice  
Of Alice  
And so a secret kiss  
Brings madness with the bliss  
And I will think of this  
When I'm dead in my grave  
Set me adrift and I'm lost over there  
And I must be insane  
To go skating on your name  
And by tracing it twice  
I fell through the ice  
Of Alice  
There's only Alice



# HOW TO STAGE ALICE?:



**Surrealism:** Waits and Wilson's production (*see images above and below*) was inspired by Surrealism. Free Theatre also incorporates Surrealist elements into its production.

sə'riəlɪz(ə)m/

*noun*

noun: **surrealism**

- 1 a 20th-century avant-garde movement in art and literature which sought to release the creative potential of the unconscious mind, for example by the irrational juxtaposition of images.

(Wikipedia)

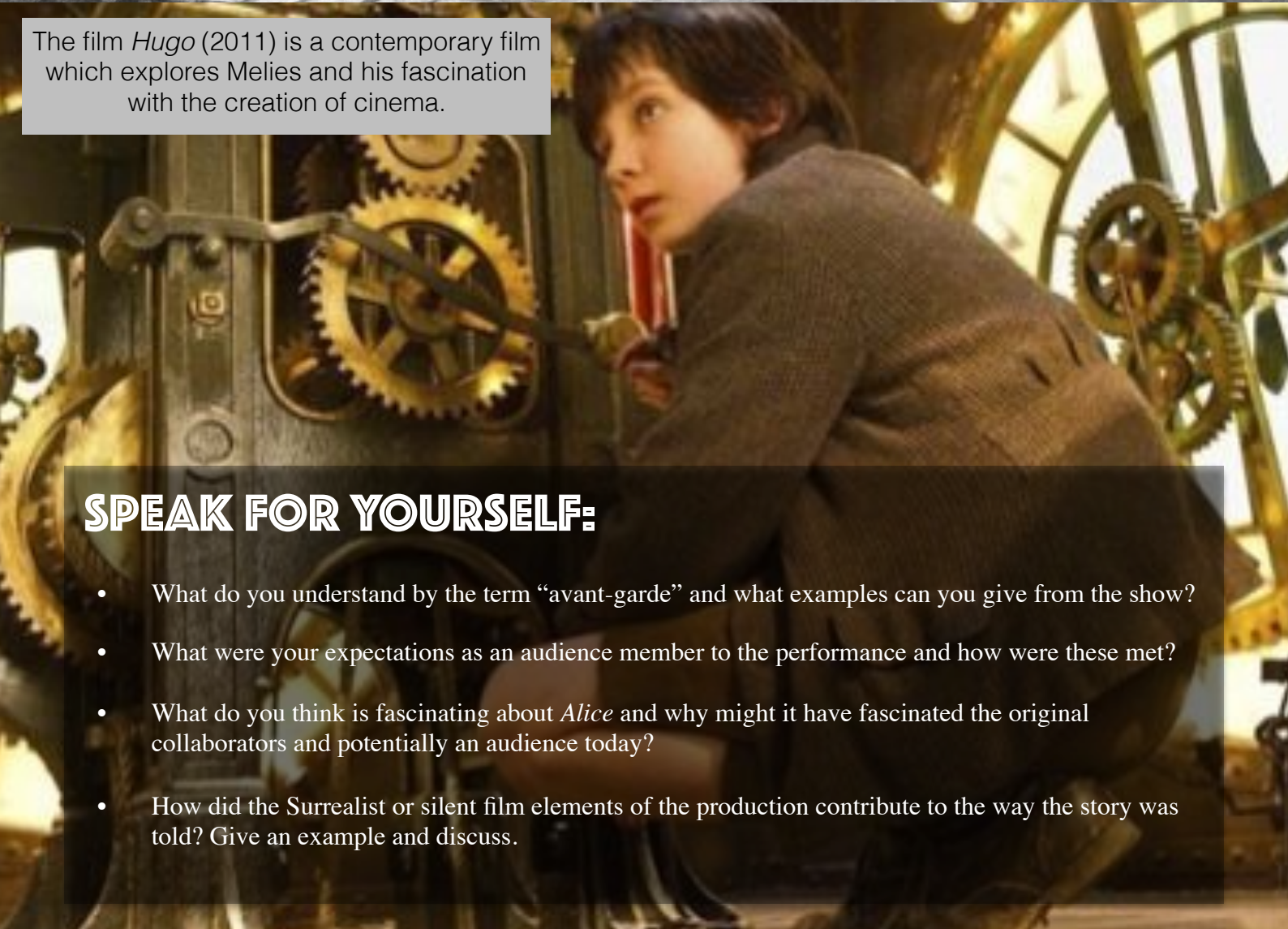






A key design and directorial decision for Free Theatre's *Alice* however was to focus on Dodgson's use of photography. The set is therefore created to be like George Melies' early silent film studios where the actors use early silent film acting techniques to become, in addition to their characters, "workers" in the film studio.

The film *Hugo* (2011) is a contemporary film which explores Melies and his fascination with the creation of cinema.



## SPEAK FOR YOURSELF:

- What do you understand by the term "avant-garde" and what examples can you give from the show?
- What were your expectations as an audience member to the performance and how were these met?
- What do you think is fascinating about *Alice* and why might it have fascinated the original collaborators and potentially an audience today?
- How did the Surrealist or silent film elements of the production contribute to the way the story was told? Give an example and discuss.





## SET & LIGHTING DESIGN:

Designer Stuart Lloyd-Harris speaks

**-What was your role/job in the production?**

Set Designer, Set Builder, Props design, Lighting design, rig and operate.

**-What are the difficulties/challenges working on the project?**

The major challenge is competing with audiences expectation. Most people have an idea in their heads already about what a production of *Alice* will look like (brightly coloured pantomime etc). Our challenge is to convince them that it doesn't have to look like that, that the story can be told in different ways and still be a story worth watching.

**-What was your major design inspiration for the project and what set and lighting design decisions did you make?**

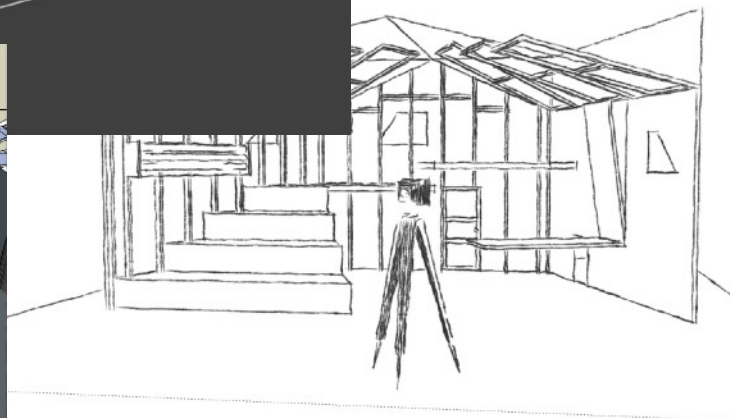
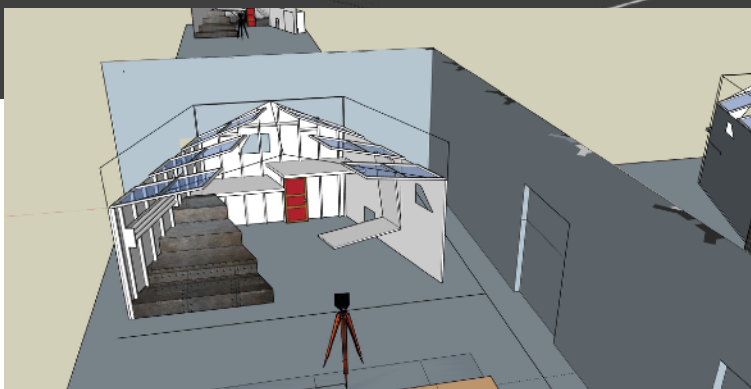
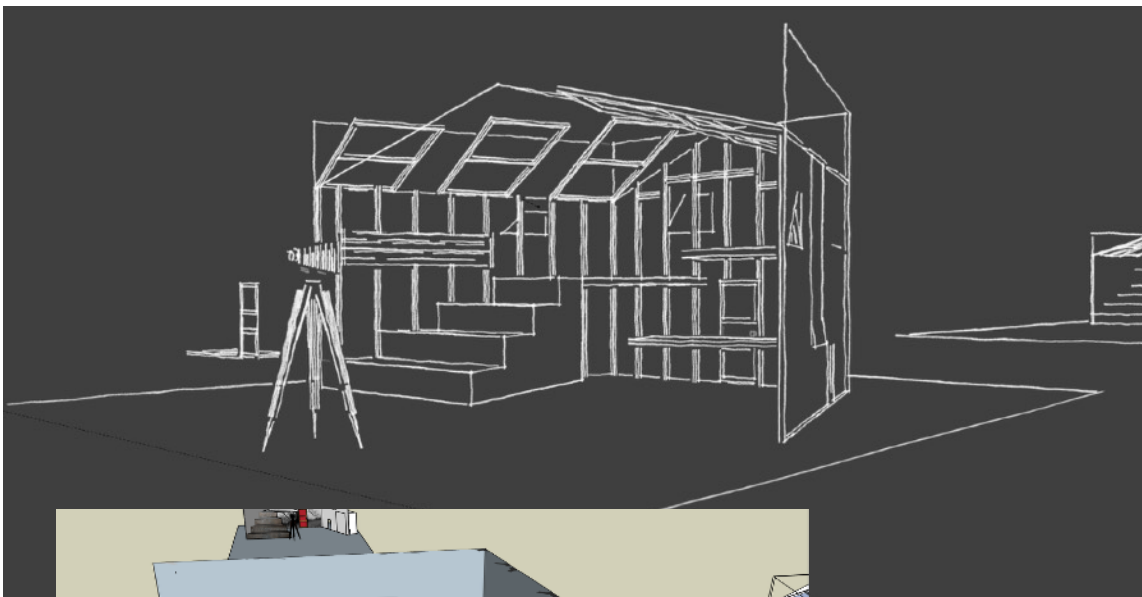
Photography and film were both art forms invented during the mid to late 1800s. Before the turn of the century Charles Dodgson was a photographer and Melies was experimenting in film. Both of them needed studios to contain and work with natural light. They have this in common. So my idea for a design and what attracted me to the project was to tell the *Alice* story, where instead of presenting it as it is usually presented - like a children's pantomime, instead, finding staging solutions that Melies would have used in his studio.

**Image right:**

An early special effect from Melies film *A Trip to the Moon*.



Designer Stuart Lloyd Harris's set design created using Sketchup:



## REHEARSAL AND TRAINING:



**Laban, silent film acting, puppets and music rehearsals:** To achieve a Surrealist acting style in Free Theatre's production, director Peter Falkenberg introduced Laban movement as a physical and vocal training technique. Laban categorised all human movement into eight different qualities - Float, Punch, Glide, Slash, Dab, Wring, Flick, and Press. The actors trained physically in these movements using it to develop characteristics for each character. They constructed puppets and their operation of them was inflected by the Laban training also. The actors also studied silent film acting which required very expressive and large gestures at times added to the surrealist atmosphere. The musicians used the Waits album as a starting place but also developed incidental surrealist-inspired music together with the actors and director for some of the scenes between the songs.

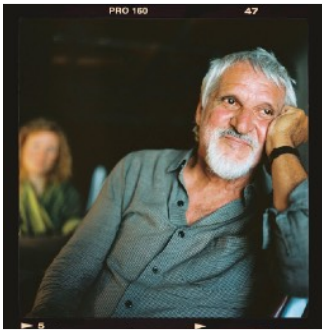
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© AFP/Getty Images

## SPEAK FOR YOURSELF:

- What set design feature were you most attracted to and how did it affect the performance?
- What did you notice about lighting and how it was used in the performance, discuss one example.
- How were puppets used in the production? How was it effective and how might it have been different if actors had played these roles?
- What did you observe about the music? Some of the musicians were also incorporated into the performance as actors eg. The Mad Hatter (Chris Reddington). What was the affect of this for you as an audience?





## DIRECTION:

Director Peter Falkenberg speaks

“Childhood is the paradise we all appear to have lost, but where none of us has actually ever been. The yearning for this lost wonderland is expressed in Lewis Carroll’s Alice tales and in the popular success that they still have so many years later. But the childish fantasies that we find here also harbour beneath all their alluring whimsy the bitter cruelties that are part of our childhood experience, which we tend to erase from our memories. In Robert Wilson and Tom Waits’ Alice these Victorian fantasies are replayed as bittersweet realities of the actual lives of the author Dodgson and his muse Alice and are revealed as still being alive today in our own minds.”



## SPEAK FOR YOURSELF:

- What kinds of physical theatre or performance styles were used in the performance?
- The body is an important element of many avant-garde or experimental theatres and text is often not the most important thing. Discuss one example of the way of the body was used in the performance that is different compared to conventional theatre performances you have seen?
- This performance was created by the company collaboratively. What do you think the benefits and challenges are of working like this?
- Photography and film are connected to voyeurism. What was the audience’s position in this production and what was your experience being in this position.



# ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES:

## ALICE and FREE THEATRE

- Robert Wilson's website. Images from the original Hamburg production. URL: <http://www.robertwilson.com/alice/>.
- Tom Waits fan website with images and interview about *Alice*. URL: <http://www.tomwaitsfan.com/tom%20waits%20library/www.tomwaitslibrary.com/alice-introduction.html>
- Free Theatre Christchurch website with critical reviews of *The Black Rider* performance, video showreels and more info and images: URL: <http://www.freetheatre.org.nz/the-black-rider.html>

## FREE THEATRE EDUCATION

**Our Free Theatre Education Programme seeks to encourage young people to develop an active interest in experimental theatre both as audiences and as participants. We run workshops in The Gym in the Arts Centre and in schools specialising in puppetry, mask and physical theatre for all levels. Please contact us directly if you would like to arrange a workshop for your school or see our website for more info and to sign up to our mailing list.**

## CURRICULUM LINKS

**Free Theatre Education activities have direct relevance to many of the NCEA achievement standards levels 1-3**

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