

# Snap Shots



## Notes

1. The interviews subsequently appeared in Ming Pao and Sing Tao Daily on May 31, 2010 and Young Post SCMP on June 2, 2010. Reporters from Student Standard and Tai Kung Pao also did interviews with the creators and the cast. Their reports appeared on June 4 and June 18, 2010 respectively.
2. The 'observers' are two members from the Alumnae Association's School Redevelopment Communications Sub-Committee.
3. This phrase 'curiouser and curiouser' was first spoken by the original Alice in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland when she was so much surprised by what she encountered in the rabbit-hole that she 'quite forgot how to speak good English.'

The Observers: **Nim Yin and Rosanna Lai King**

## A Wonderful Case of Collective Creativity

Monday, May 24, 2010 saw a full-scale rehearsal of **Alice** in the Silcocks Hall where some 200 students and half a dozen teachers came together for the first time since the inception of the musical play some two years ago.

To mark this special occasion, reporters from Ming Pao, Sing Tao Daily and the South China Morning Post were invited to meet the cast and creators<sup>1</sup>. Also invited -- as observers<sup>2</sup> -- were the writers of this article.

Below is their impression of the story, the musical, the production, the rehearsal, and the creative efforts that made that May afternoon come alive.

*When talent, passion and dedication meet, nothing is impossible.*

When three talented teachers -- with plenty of passion and loads of dedication -- meet, the possibilities are infinite. This is precisely what is taking place at Ying Wa. Together with the whole-hearted support of the entire student body and staff, the musical **Alice**, with original words and music, is rapidly taking shape.

### The Story: A Potent Mix of Escapism and Realism

In the world of children's literature, the name Alice is synonymous with adventures, nonsense and wit. But we also know that embedded in the fantasies and absurdities, there is much universal truth and deep philosophy. Over the years and across cultures and countries, the story of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland has been read and re-created countless times with many variations on the same theme. Ying Wa's version of **Alice** is based on a similar framework and structure; over and above the drama, the dance and the music, there is an

inner meaning to the story and many levels of that meaning.

In the story, the troubled schoolgirl faces many problems, with everything appearing curiouser and curiouser<sup>3</sup> at home, in school and with the world in general. And how to solve these problems? "Imagining herself to be a beautiful and noble bear, Alice transports herself into the Wonderland of make-believe," explains English Panel Head Teacher Carrie Cheung, writer and director of the show.

Through Alice's adventures, the audience will meet familiar Lewis Carroll characters. The Duchess, the Dormouse, the Mad Hatter, Twiddledum and Twiddledee will all be there. But here's the twist: in Miss Cheung's creation, these characters have been given new personae and roles in order to bring out the problems confronting a contemporary



The World of **Alice**



Alice. 19th Century themes, ethics and moral values are replaced by modern ones. The story revolves around the themes of personal, familial and academic dilemmas as well as current issues such as consumerism, vanity, greed, and environmentalism which impinge on the sensitivity of an idealistic but angry teenage Alice.

Along the story line, there will also be plenty of fun, humour, and sarcasm not to mention that this homespun tale also promises to contain many elements of theatrical drama.

## The Musical: An Extravaganza of Music, Song and Dance



To Music Teacher Victoria Wong, overall director in charge of the chorus and orchestra, a play with live music, songs and dances represents the highest form of the performing arts. Moreover, the poetry inherent in Miss Cheung's script has so inspired her that she has persuaded Mr. Li Cheong, a music graduate from the Chinese University, to write original songs and orchestrations for the play. As it turns out, a better choice in composer could not have been made: captivated by the beautiful lyrics, Mr. Lee has in a short span of two years written an amazing total of 18 songs, a number which rivals any professionally-produced musical. Quite a few songs are especially 'made-to-measure' to take in the talent, singing voice and range of a particular singer.

Sharing the inspiration is dance director Wong Yung Sze. "Visual elements such as costumes, lighting, stage setting all add up," says Miss Wong. And to put more zest into the play, she has choreographed with support from Studiodanz, seven original dances. "In a musical, ideas, feelings and atmosphere are often conveyed through body language, dance patterns and movements. For example, in a high-voltage number called the Surgical Dance, we try to convey Alice's anguish and the teachers' frustration with her as they analyse her by ruthlessly cutting up her brain," Miss Wong adds.



## The Production: A Touch of the Surreal

The production – there will be two shows – is set to be staged at the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts (APA) on July 24.

Mr. Francis Kwan, Vice-Principal and quiet force behind the scenes, is confident that the visually attractive staging plus the professionally-designed lighting and sets by the APA will project the surreal atmosphere of the action-packed play.

Mr. Kwan is also proud that the three leading teachers -- with the full backing of the school and staff -- have written and produced a musical from scratch. "In 2000, we successfully staged the classic, all-time favourite *My Fair Lady*. We had to pay a lot of money for the copyright. The experience

was very good but the play focused only on a handful of characters. So, this time around, we want to have a play that will involve many." It is really a case of the ready-made versus the tailor-made, the bought versus the creative. To everyone's delight, Ying Wa made the conscious decision of opting for the creative.

There are other reasons to be proud too. To mark Ying Wa's celebration of her 110th Anniversary, **Alice** is being billed as the show not only of the year but of the decade. Besides, this most ambitious of attempts will help launch the fundraising drive of the upcoming School Redevelopment Project. To-date, the two 1,200-seat performances have already sold out.

"Most of our students are not rich and do not have the funds to contribute to the redevelopment of our school. But with **Alice**, they are showing their gratitude and participation by donating their talent and their time," notes Mr. Kwan.

## The Rehearsal: From Happy Chaos to Harmony

On the afternoon of May 24, the usually stately Silcocks Hall was turned into a hive of activity as actors, dancers, singers, instrumentalists and directors gathered for this important occasion of first rehearsal. A baton-waving Victoria Wong was trying to get the attention of the 35-piece orchestra to sharpen the impact of the dramatic opening bars of the opening score. Practising the new steps amongst the gyrating dancers was Wong Yung Sze herself. Microphone in one hand and script in the other, Carrie Cheung was here and there and everywhere. At times surrounded by the eager faces of her actors and at other times stepping back a little from the frenzy around her, Carrie surveyed the scene with aplomb and control. And every once in a while the beautiful voices of the



soloists and choir could be heard rising above the din. Indeed, a happy chaos was the order of the day, and what a rare learning experience for all.

What is the biggest challenge of staging a show like this, asked the reporters? Integration, harmony and how to bring everybody together, came the answer. And obvious to all, the answer came from the heart.

What do you enjoy the most about this show, asked the reporters? "For me, it's the fun process of creating an art form," enthused Music Teacher Wong. "For me, it's not just a show, it's about bringing together all at Ying Wa. This is a moment in history," intoned Dance Teacher Wong.

For the two girls who play Alice and the one who plays Alice's father, it is an once-in-a-lifetime experience. "I am real proud to be the 'star' and I love the music," said one Alice. "This musical has given me lots of things," said the other. "To me **Alice** is the embodiment of the best of a hundred years of Ying Wa tradition and creativity." That just about sums it all.

Finally, credit should go to the talented Carrie Cheung, the teacher-writer who has the courage to reprise the role of the 19th century Alice in a modern context and is in the process of making it an enriching, creative challenge for all at Ying Wa.

"And the moral of that is – 'Oh, 'tis love, 'tis love, that makes the world go round!'" cries the Duchess. From what an outsider could observe, there is plenty of love going round in Ying Wa.

We now wait with bated breath the performances on July 24.