

Set designer taps wacky 'Wonderland' style

AMY SIERADZKI
COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS

When "Alice in Wonderland" came up next in the Young Actors Theatre season, Katie Seitzinger was thrilled to receive a phone call from executive director Tina Williams that put her in charge of her first solo set design. Sharing the role of technical director with her fellow staff, she quickly sketched ideas in her notebook and Adobe Illustrator.

Reading the book as a child, she went crazy over the quirky characters like the Mad Hatter and the Queen. Seitzinger also admired Alice's empowered spirit, wanting to go home no matter the consequences.

As her set pieces leapt from paper to the stage, Seitzinger's design took on a larger than life scale — a giant clock on the wall, the topsy-turvy black and white checkered flooring that plays with perspective and warps and magnifies the stage, and in the works, an animated Cheshire Cat's smile — all of this playing into the wacky world of Wonderland.

"The main focus of 'Alice' is time," explains Seitzinger. "She's trying to get back to where she's from by five o'clock for her birthday party, so in each scene the clock hands move because time is passing, until the end of the show when it reaches five. Both Alice and time control the show because she wants to go home, and no matter what anyone says to her, she says she's going to see the queen. It all works out in the end, but she knows what she wants."

Much of Seitzinger's visual inspirations are taken from her two times in the Disney College Program. Most recently, she was a guide on the trams in the parking lot, testing out her script with different accents and making rides as magical as possible.

A Tallahassee native, Seitzinger started at Young Actors in fourth grade after seeing the show "Oklahoma!" which blew her mind with its singing and dancing, and inspired her to join in the fun. She considers YAT to be her second home, and appreciates staff members Vicky Swezey, Robert Stuart and Tina Williams, who always pushed her to perform at her best and encouraged her to join YAT's Act One and Broadway Bound groups.

Seitzinger vividly recalls a YAT trip to Downtown Disney (now Disney Springs) in 10th grade with YAT that allowed her to perform and learn from Disney choreographers. Starring in roles at the theater from "Hairspray" to "High School Musical," her most challenging was as Mrs. Van Daan in the play "The Diary of Anne Frank." Her favorite role however, was playing the villainous Queen in



YOUNG ACTORS THEATRE
As a high school student, Katie Seitzinger, is shown in her favorite role as evil queen, center, in a Young Actors production of "Once Upon a Mattress."



"Once Upon a Mattress."
"It was my first time being a villain and after a school matinee show, I walked out to greet the kids and a little girl stuck her tongue out at me," laughs Seitzinger.

She began volunteering with YAT during college at a time when she wasn't sure how the theater would continue to fit into her aspirations. Assisting backstage and with summer camps, she soon found a place for herself. Though she never imagined what role she would fill behind the scenes, her interests in graphic design and aptitude as a visual learner pointed Seitzinger, now 23, towards set design.

Seitzinger's history degree from Florida State University allows her to make authentic, period appropriate choices for her theater designs. She recognizes "Alice in Wonderland's" Victorian England era style, and said that this particular production blends two of Lewis Carroll's stories, making it very different from the version audiences may be familiar with. Seitzinger relishes the freedom that "Wonderland" provides in terms of creativity.

"Wonderland doesn't have to make sense because she's in this magical place and going with the dream sequence allows you to explore different things," explains Seitzinger.

"I made the set all in gray scale because Alice doesn't remember the land of Wonderland itself, she remembers the people she meets who will be in bright costumes that will really stand out. Set design still gives life to the world that they're acting in even though the background isn't as colorful in this show. It still gives you enough so that you know they're in a different world."

She's excited for the shows to begin on Friday at Young Actor's Theatre, and can't wait for her first original set design to light up the stage. For Seitzinger, the theater is a positive, happy place, where she learned many lessons and continues to grow.



Katie Seitzinger is in charge of set design for Young Actor's production of "Alice in Wonderland." AMY SIERADZKI

If you go

What: Alice in Wonderland
When: 7:30 p.m. on Feb. 24-25 and March 2-4, and 2 p.m. on Feb. 26 and March 5
Where: Young Actors Theatre, 609 Glenview Drive
Cost: \$14 for children (12 and under); \$16 for students; \$18 for seniors; \$20 for adults
Contact: For more information, visit www.youngactorstheatre.com or call 850-386-6602.

In addition to serving on the technical side, Seitzinger is an instructor for the film and television classes at YAT, giving students skills in acting on camera and making their own video projects. She hopes to give back to her students what the theater and staff has gifted her, confidence and the power to persevere.

"The very first thing the YAT staff said when I came back was, 'we need you,'" smiles Seitzinger. "I felt wanted and important, and they all really support me and my ideas. In a world full of negatives, theater brings some positivity and happiness. All the students on this stage are giving you a show and it opens a door to a whole new world of

the arts to people who have never seen it before. It's like a wonderland."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency

for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).

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