

'Alice' cast takes on variety of roles Slow-to-catch-on production shows circuslike qualities.

Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The (GA) - Saturday, April 10, 2010

Readability: >12 grade level (Lexile: 1550L)

Author: Wendell Brock ; For the AJC

Back in 1988, with Lewis Carroll as their muse, a group of Northwestern University students created Lookingglass Theatre Company, famous now for first producing Mary Zimmerman's exquisite "Metamorphoses."

Known as a test tube of imaginative ideas and playful physicality, the influential Chicago ensemble has brought its signature piece, "Lookingglass Alice," to the Alliance Theatre for a run that coincides with Tim Burton's Disney blockbuster film, "Alice in Wonderland."

The shows have as much in common as a raven and a writing desk. Written and directed by David Catlin, "Lookingglass Alice" is a tangled ball of philosophical yarn that can make grown men snooze and toddlers scream with fear and delight, thanks to a few nerve-shattering, circus-inspired tricks involving collapsing walls, ladders and a lovely girl who sails through a high-wire hoop of a rabbit hole.

Every performance has its cold nights and audiences. But Wednesday's official opening of "Lookingglass Alice" felt, for the first quarter-hour or so, as lugubrious and plodding as a game of chess -- kind of like visiting a wonderless place where it's always 6 o'clock.

Neither a shrill Red Queen looking like an enormous opera curtain with tiny feet (Molly Brennan) nor a daffy White Knight on a unicycle (Doug Hara) could muster much whimsy from the chilly surrealism. (In this production, the shattering of a wall is more than just a metaphor, but the conceit of having stagehands clean up while the audience listens in to the techies' headset conversations is a little tired.)

Happily, there's joy in watching this nimble group play multiple roles and evince a variety of styles and emotions. They can fly, and make you cry.

The noise and funk of Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi's choreography picks up considerably with the arrival of the dumb and dumber Tweedle Dee (Anthony Fleming III) and Tweedle Dum (Brennan). The rubber-mugged Hara gets in some good laughs, and Kevin Douglas makes for a deeply moving Humpty-Dumpty. Brennan's Dormouse is hysterical and irreverent.

There's a funny chair-dance sequence, lots of bouncing balls, stilts and riffs on the scale and size of things. (Mara Blumenfeld's costumes cleverly reference and deconstruct everything from the medieval to the baroque.) And though Lindsey Noel Whiting's Alice can't expand and contract the way the heroine does in Burton's digital treatment, she is a superb gymnast and expressive actress.

Slightly disappointing but low-tech in a good way, this Dali-esque "Lookingglass Alice" invites us to look beyond the surface into a hidden, often nonsensical universe of surprises and dreams.

Theater review

"Lookingglass Alice"

Grade: B-

8 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays; 2:30 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays; 7:30 p.m. Sundays (except

10/10/13

'Alice' cast takes on variety of roles Slow-to-catch-on production shows circuslike qualities.

April 25). Through May 2. \$20-\$50. Alliance Theatre, 1280 Peachtree St. N.E., Atlanta.
404-733-5000, alliancetheatre.org.

Edition: *Main; The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

Section: *Living*

Page: *D1*

Record Number: *108494019*

Copyright 2010 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

To bookmark this article, right-click on the link below, and copy the link location:

['Alice' cast takes on variety of roles Slow-to-catch-on production shows circuslike qualities.](#)