

## Perspectives: 5 things we learned about 'Lookingglass Alice'



*From left: Douglas Langworthy, choreographer Sylvia Hernandez-Distasi and director David Catlin at the 'Lookingglass Alice' Perspectives. Photo by John Moore for the DCPA's NewsCenter.*

*Perspectives* is a series of free panel conversations moderated by DCPA Theatre Company Literary Manager [Douglas Langworthy](#). They take place from 6 p.m. to 6:45 on the evening of each production's first preview performance. The next two *Perspectives* will be held Sept. 25 (*As You Like It*) and Oct. 9 (*Tribes*) in the Jones Theatre. No reservations necessary.

Langworthy's guests for the *Lookingglass Alice* Perspectives on Sept. 11 were adaptor and director [David Catlin](#), as well as choreographer [Sylvia Hernandez-Distasi](#), who grew up in a circus family.

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Mathematician and logician Charles Dodgson (otherwise known as author [Lewis Carroll](#)) based his heroine on a real girl named [Alice Liddell](#) who challenged him, along with her sisters, to tell them stories fantastic stories. “He was interested in bending and challenging ideas of logic,” Catlin said. “He would have notions, like, “If you fell through the center of the Earth, then, at a certain point, you wouldn't be falling down anymore - you would be falling up.” His stories celebrated nonsense. His stories asked people to believe in impossible things. Which you can do with a kid. Kids know how to play.”

[Lookingglass Theatre](#) was formed by a group of students at Northwestern University back in the late 1980s, one of whom was [David Schwimmer](#) (TV's [Friends](#)). “He had \$500 sitting in a bank account that he had gotten for his Bar Mitzvah, and he didn't know what to do with it,” Catlin said. “So he decided to self-produce a version of *Alice in Wonderland*. It was a very physical production. [Andre Gregory](#) - you may be familiar with him from *My Dinner With Andre* - developed the script we used. It was stripped down. It was about ensemble. It was about physical storytelling.”

The root word for “audience” is “audio,” so the word actually means “to hear” – which is kind of obvious when you stop to think about it. “Shakespeare is mostly an auditory experience,” Catlin said. “You wouldn't go see a play in Shakespeare's time; you would go *hear* a play.” Catlin was comparing other theatre experiences to seeing a Lookingglass production. “We were starting this company about the same time as the start of [Cirque du Soleil](#),” he said. “We wanted to see if we could take the traditional auditory experience of a play and add these other physical, visual elements that would allow you to experience the story in new ways.”

None of the [Lookingglass Alice](#) actors had circus training before joining the company. “We create the shows based on the physicality of the performers,” Hernandez-Distasi said, “and then I come in and I push them to the edge of their limits of physicality. We get these very physical performers who have climbed ropes and we go a little further than they can naturally go.”

The DCPA's Stage Theatre has been lowered by 2 feet to accommodate this production. “Part of the fun is that the whole team at the [Denver Center](#) has been like the [White Knight](#),” Catlin said. They are very inventive and very creative and very collaborative here. When we came in, they had already – and in an excited way - solved a lot of the things that were going to be different for us here. One of the issues was that the stage floor here was 18 feet to the (ceiling) grid. We have been accustomed to having 20 to 22 feet. So, normally, that would be a big problem. But here at the Denver Center they said, 'Well then, we will just lower the floor 2 feet.' And that's ... beautiful. That's 'believing in impossible things.' Because even if something *is* possible - that's a lot of work. But they believe in the show that much here.”



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- Bonuses: Catlin developed *Lookingglass Alice* in part as a way of saying to his daughter - and to the kids we adults once were - "Let's not be in such a hurry to grow up." he said. "My daughter recently turned 13 and said to me, 'Dad, do you think I could get my nose pierced?' And I thought: 'Oh, my goodness. We've got to keep doing this show, I guess.'"
  - If you want to know how long most plays will be in performance, look at the script. Typically one written page means one minute of stage time. Not so with *Lookingglass Alice*. "This play is about 95 minutes in performance, but the text is only about 30 pages long," Catlin said. "Two-thirds of the storytelling is visual, physical storytelling. Sylvia has been instrumental in writing the physical parts of the story."
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### ***Lookingglass Alice*: Ticket information**

Performances through Oct 11

Stage Theatre

ASL interpreted & Audio described performance: 1:30 p.m. Oct 3

Call 303-893-4100 or [BUY ONLINE](#)

TTY: 303-893-9582

Groups of 15 or more: 303-446-4829

Also: Purchase in person at The Denver Center Ticket Office, located at the Helen Bonfils Theatre Complex lobby.

Buy and print online at [Denvercenter.org](#).

*Please be advised that the Denver Center for the Performing Arts – [denvercenter.org](#) – is the only authorized online ticket provider for the Denver engagement of 'Lookingglass Alice.'*



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