

The most dazzling ‘Lookingglass Alice’ to date

Hedy Weiss

It is a very good bet that Charles Lutwidge Dodgson — the English writer, mathematician, logician, Anglican deacon and photographer most widely know by his pen name, Lewis Carroll — would adore “Lookingglass Alice.”

In fact, there are moments when watching the latest edition of this quintessential Lookingglass Theatre show that is now celebrating its 10th anniversary with a virtuosic reprise that you might easily be convinced he is directing and stage managing the whole thing. But for all that Carroll talked about playing with time, you really cannot go backward. So the credit for the inspired madness here must rest fully with David Catlin, the show’s adapter-director, his bravura cast of five (who seem to multiply before your very eyes), his team of ingenious designers, and the breathtaking choreography of Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi (co-artistic director of Lookingglass’ partner, The Actors Gymnasium in Evanston).

‘LOOKINGGLASS ALICE’

Highly recommended

When: Through Feb. 15, 2015

Where: Lookingglass Theatre Company at Water Tower Water Works, 821 N. Michigan

Tickets: \$45-\$85

Info: (312) 337-0665; lookingglasstheatre.org

Run time: 90 minutes with no intermission

In its first revival in nearly five years, the show maintains all the magic of the original (and many of its original players), but it has been tweaked in many winning ways. And for all its madness and manic energy, it flows in an almost balletic way from its first sleight-of-hand (in which Alice and Dodson face off in a strangely non-reflective mirror) to its last wistful line (“Life is a dream...or something like it”). In between there are physical, linguistic and theatrical antics of every sort, with a dreamy, multi-talented ensemble cast that clearly is not breathing the same level of oxygen (or sheer fearlessness) as the rest of us.

The role of Alice is a grueling one, and it is being shared by Lindsey Noel Whiting and Lauren Hirte (its originator), both of whom have performed it many times here and on stages nationwide. Whiting played the role at Saturday afternoon’s opening, and she was a dazzler. Though a slip of a girl with no visible muscle mass, she possesses extraordinary strength and stamina, finessing several breathtaking aerial routines (on a hoop, on ropes and on bungee cords), easily supporting a male actor in a shoulder stand, double-flipping with the best Olympians and never showing the slightest sign of exertion. She also is a lovely actress with the perfect edginess and improvisational flair for Alice.

Whiting’s partners in logical chaos, ever-changing rules, unpredictable cues, off-balance balancing and a consistently unsettling sense of down-the-rabbit-hole mayhem and discombobulation include: Anthony Fleming III as a demonic Cheshire Cat (with a pair of eyes that can do their own form of acrobatics); Kevin Douglas as the speed-of-light Mad Hatter and death-defying Humpty Dumpty; Molly Brennan in a snap, crackle and pop turn as the towering, imperious Red Queen, and Samuel Taylor as the White Knight (and Dodson), a master unicyclist, acrobat, droll comic and, like everyone in this ensemble, an all-around daredevil full of the most disciplined mischief.

Daniel Ostling’s magical set (with complex rigging by Lee Brasuell), Mara Blumenfeld’s laugh-inducing costumes,

Christine A. Binder's eye-popping lighting and Ray Nardelli's inspired sound (from chimes and drumbeats to waltzes, salsa and hip-hop) are in perfect sync with Carroll's imagination.

Be advised: While children will be gobsmacked by this show, adults might appreciate it even more. It's a genuine Chicago theater gem.



Anthony Fleming III (top), Molly Brennan and Kevin Douglas encounter Alice (Lindsey Noel Whiting) in "Lookingglass Alice."



Samuel Taylor is the White Knight.

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Hedy Weiss has been Theater and Dance Critic of the Chicago Sun-Times since 1984, reporting on local, national and international productions, as well as a wide range of other subjects including art and architecture, books, travel and international affairs.

