

Falling for Lookingglass Alice

In Good Taste
Denver

Here is my 6-word review of *Lookingglass Alice* now playing through October 11 in the [Stage Theatre](#) at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts:

Delightful, delirious, delusional, surprising and trippy.

There. That about says it. What, you want more? Now that my head has stopped spinning after seeing the show, I'll try to fill in the details.

The show, which has acrobats, trapeze artists and stilt jumpers reinvents the classic Lewis Carroll story. It got its start at Chicago's [Lookingglass Theatre Company](#), started almost 30 years ago by a very young [David Schwimmer](#) and seven other theater friends. Judging by the name of the theater company, and the fact that this is the third reimagining of "Alice in Wonderland," you can tell that playwright David Catlin is pretty spell-bound and entrenched in the Alice tales.

His twist on the story uses a minimalist set and creative lighting to keep our attention focused on the action – except for periodic flashes of lights that briefly illuminate (and cast some momentary heat) on the crowd and the action on stage. The effect divided up some scenes but also served to briefly break the spell the audience was under – a shock back into reality I could have done without.

The audience is part of the action, not only in how they are sitting (I'm not going to spoil this part for you but it's a bit of a shocker in the opening), but they also get pulled into the action. Actors run through the audience, drop in, climb over and talk to them. At one point, giant balls (a la [Blue Man Group](#)) make the crowd go wild (or at least the kids in the audience). The Red Queen called out a front-row audience-member for trying to film the action with her cell phone – while staying completely in character. And she let a man know she saw him walk out and back in again in the middle of her scene, proclaiming "Off with his head!" Remember, people, not only are the ushers watching you, the actors are too.



Alice and the height-obsessed Red Queen. Photo by Adams Visual .

There are only five actors playing numerous characters. And sometimes numerous actors play one character such as the three who form the caterpillar blending into each other in voice and body. It's very cool and very funny. And there is a lot of funny in this show. The White Night is a hoot and, for me, at least, was the most endearing part of the show. When everything else was all, you know, Alice-in-Wonderland-y, his character, played by Samuel Taylor, was

grounding, sweet and funny and just the right amount of clumsy. Of all the characters, I would have liked to have sat down for a tea party with him! Stage hands and the disembodied voice of the director talking to Lewis Carroll, give multiple dimensions to the production, moving it in and out of the audience's reality.



The White Knight takes a spin around Alice. That picnic basket is no ordinary basket – wait till you see what's in it! Photo by Adams Visual.

The women in [Looking Glass Alice](#) are strong. Really strong. Not just as their characters but also, physically. Lauren Hirte, who originated the role of Alice in Chicago, supports Samuel Taylor's White Knight on her shoulders! And Molly Brennan dances around with Hirte on her shoulders when she is the mouse. Hirte's trapeze work is incredibly impressive, fun and unnerving. Sudden leaps, drops and falls are all done with nothing but the hard floor below (and in one case, a trap door!).

The show is often nonsensical and it can be hard to decipher what they are saying and even hard to hear at times too when the voices don't carry like they should. The flashing lights, scary concepts, frenetic action and intensity could easily be too much for some. And although it is only 90 minutes (without intermission), the show could feel like too much, too long for younger children. Purchasing seats farther back in the theater could help with that.

So I guess I did have more to say about the show than just six words! Relinquish to the dreaminess, be in total awe of the performers' abilities and get ready to jolt a few times and you'll do just fine falling through the Rabbit Hole along with everyone else.

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