

Lookingglass Alice Accomplishes the Impossible With Innovative Spectacles At The Arsht Center

By
Contributor

By Michelle de Carion

[Lookingglass Alice](#) is not the beloved Disney tale you know and love simply put on a stage, nor is it a modern retelling. This signature show created by the Lookingglass Theatre Company (LTC) in Chicago is an innovative and engaging take on Lewis Carroll's classic filled with acrobatics, illusions, and improv.

The Arsht Center has brought this production to Miami from July 22 to August 16 to step outside of their typical Broadway line-up and present inventive, and transformative theatrical adventures in untraditional playing spaces.

This cutting-edge play is a blend of "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" and "Through the Lookingglass", using the structure of Lookingglass by taking Alice on her journey to becoming a queen, and adding in scenes from Wonderland that most people are familiar with.

The story starts with Alice's journey down the rabbit hole. She shrinks down onto the chessboard becoming a pawn in the Red Queen's game. In order to become a queen too, Alice, played by Lindsey Noel Whiting, must move across the board and pass a series of tests.

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Each square she steps on brings her new, curious characters, including the hookah-smoking Caterpillar, the White Knight, Tweedledee and Tweedledum, the Mad Hatter and his tea party, and Humpty Dumpty. Her exciting, and at times confusing, adventure ends with a coronation and a crown.

The show is designed for a smaller, more intimate setting so that the audience can feel like they are immersed in the story and so the cast can interact closely with them.

The Arsht Center has been transformed and placed all of the seats right on stage. Though you won't have the plush cushion underneath you, or the extra space like normal, the new set up for this play is worth it. For dramatic effect, the ushers allow small groups of people to enter at a time so they can walk through the Lookingglass—which is a giant mirror covering the front of the stage.

By setting the audience on stage in a more close-knit setting, LTC is breaking apart the traditional theater style and revolutionarily creating a new one.

The fact that they have gone to great lengths to bring this giant mirror with them from city to city is proof that this troupe is attempting and succeeding at accomplishing impossible things.

By taking down this backdrop, LTC is breaking apart the traditional theater style and revolutionarily creating a new one. What results is an open atmosphere where the cast members have the freedom to roam around the room and play with the audience. In addition to the set-up, Lookingglass Alice makes headway with incredible acrobatic acts and artistic illusions.

Alice does aerials in mid-air a number of times during the show in addition to doing gymnastic-type performances with other cast members, and they even managed to suspend Carroll upside down for the finale.

What also sets this show apart is how the cast uses improv to interact with the audience. In one of the beginning scenes

the Red Queen, played by Molly Brennan, calls out a few of the individuals coming in late.

“You are late!” she screamed at the people rushing in who were obviously on Miami time. The silly and accident-prone White Knight also played by Taylor, walked into the crowd and asked one of the audience members to fight the jabberwock. He also asked a young woman to hold his helmet for a time, but then asked for it back as he entered on a ridiculously tall unicycle.

Though I was enormously impressed with the aerials and stunts, I was most astounded by the small ensemble cast that played multiple characters without a break for the straight 90 minutes.



Photo Credit: Lookingglass Alice

Since each member has to step into a myriad of roles, their ability to play different characters convincingly really shined. In the course of 90 minutes, Brennan masterfully plays an intimidating, yet humorous Red Queen (with a striking British accent), a stammering walrus, a shy and sleepy Dormouse, an inquisitive caterpillar, and a rapping Tweedledum. The only person who stays in the same role the whole time is Whiting as Alice—which in of itself is impressive because she has to be on the whole time.

Though you may get lost in the awe of the action, it's important not to overlook the various overarching themes. When the black cat presents a crown to Alice near the end of the play, she doesn't know what to do next. “What do I do now?” she asks him.

“Anything you want” he responds. Though the lesson “it's not about the destination but the journey” is cliché this one rings

true in Lookingglass Alice. In the beginning, Alice is consumed with her goal of becoming a queen, thinking that it will give her a sense of self-worth and importance.

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She eventually realizes that she is wonderful as she is and the real reward that holds value is the friends she makes on the journey. Though her road includes struggle and frustration (like all of us experience as we grow up,) Alice is still able to maintain her childish innocence and creativity.

Another theme that stands out is the lesson, "You have to practice to play," which is mentioned a number of times throughout the show. All of the people involved in this production—from the writers to the choreographers and the cast—had to practice before they got the opportunity to play on stage.

Any kind of creativity, ingenuity or innovation is born out of dedication and practice. This lesson, and the show as well, inspires all of us to commit to perfecting and performing our passions so that we can really enjoy life and truly "play."

From the stunts, to the talented cast, and inventive scenes—there is a lot to be in awe of. For me the only aspect I feel where Lookingglass Alice fell short was the script. A lot of the dialogue was hard to follow and confusing at times. The storyline may also be hard to follow for those who are expecting the exact sequence of Alice in Wonderland, as well as the odd placement of Carrol throughout the show. The highlights for me came when then cast went off the script to do improv and inject some humor. I laughed a lot during the show, not because the jokes were well crafted, but simply because the cast members like Taylor were having so much fun their infectious energy spread to the audience.

Though the language was a bit confusing, you could make the argument that that is the point. None of what Lewis Carroll dreamed and wrote in his books made any sense.

In the final scene as Lewis Carroll exits he says, "What is life but a dream...or something like it." Dreams are fantastical, based on reality, but don't follow any logic.

A lot of the script and the scenes in this play do not make sense, but they are fantastic, fun, funny, and just plain interesting to watch and engage with. If you try to pick apart every line, every symbol, or every character in the show you will go crazy

Carroll created Wonderland to give Alice, and us, a playground where we can find out who we really are and accomplish those dreams that seem impossible.

Michelle de Carion is a freelance journalist based in Miami.

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Updated: 2:23 PM. A previous edition of this story unintentionally revealed a plot point. That was not our intention and we have modified the story accordingly.