

# Review: 'Lookingglass Alice' at the Denver Center through Oct. 11

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Chicago-based [Lookingglass Theatre Company](#), in association with [The Actors Gymnasium](#), literally turns Lewis Carroll's topsy-turvy nonsensical world on its head with its experimental, energetic and acrobatic **Lookingglass Alice**, playing through Oct. 11 in The Stage Theatre at the [Denver Center for the Performing Arts](#).

Adapting scenes and characters from all three of Carroll's "Alice" stories: "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," "Through the LookingGlass," and "What Alice Found There," director David Catlin appears to have reduced the stories to their fundamental components, then regrown them into an extraordinarily athletic experimental theatre piece filled with circus-quality stunts, stunning costumes and props, spectacular showmanship from actual actors, and STILL manages to maintain the lyrical quality of the text.

It's an awesome achievement that began more than ten years ago.

On a rainy, housebound day, Alice (Lauren Hirte and Lindsey Noel Whiting alternating performances) daydreams of becoming a queen. Her strange alter-ego Charles Dodgson (Samuel Taylor) mysteriously makes that possible by transporting her to a confusing, absurd, theatrical and hostile mirror realm. While a mere pawn, Alice must traverse a metaphorical chessboard before she may be crowned queen. It's an ordeal that rivals Odysseus' odyssey as she encounters strange beings who play by an entirely different and confounding set of rules.



Among those arbitrary rules, apparently, are the laws of physics, because Alice defies gravity on multiple occasions, through various meaningful and impressive aerial dance routines. The journey through the rabbit hole involves a hanging ring, there's a bouncy ball party involving Alice and Thunderdome-style bungee cords, and finally she creates and inhabits an actual cat's cradle of knots out of three rope loops suspended from the flies as Queen Alice ascends/descends from Wonderland back to Victorian England.

In a rare display of "tennis court" staging, with the audience on parallel sides of the playing area, the action is as much vertical as it is back and forth. An ensemble of only five actors (including the one playing Alice) play countless characters. My favorites were Alice's only true ally, the unicycle-riding White Knight (Taylor), the kooky somnambulant Dormouse (Molly Brennan), egghead poseur destined for a shocking fall Humpty Dumpty (Kevin Douglas), muscular and fierce Cheshire Cat (Adeoye), and the Caterpillar (Brennan, Douglas, Adeoye).

No doubt you'll have favorites of your own. There are plenty from which to choose.

Lauren Hirte, who played Alice on press night, displayed a profound understanding of her character, even while performing astounding feats of raw strength, grace and balance. Taylor, in particular, brought a sense of effortless whimsy and sensitivity to his many demanding roles, while the others gave bravura performances in their multiple parts.

A lot of stuff gets thrown around: gigantic balls and balloons, shoes, folding chairs, fellow actors. And there's a lot of shouting, which adds to the chaotic spirit of the plot. The play embraces the absurdity and nonsensical elements of the text, and embodies them in the most spectacular way possible. The cast's timing is uncannily precise and well-practiced, and yet many moments have a spontaneity that help the audience feel part of something alive and organic, even after more than a decade of performance.

**Lookingglass Alice**, which runs 90-minutes with no intermission, is suitable for the whole family (except the little ones, of course).

Tickets for **Lookingglass Alice** start at \$35. To purchase, call Denver Center Ticket Services at 303-893-4100. Tickets also may be purchased at the Denver Center Ticket Office, located in the Helen Bonfils Theatre Complex lobby. Buy and print online at [www.denvercenter.org](http://www.denvercenter.org). \$10 tickets available for select performances made possible in part by SCFD. \$16 student tickets are available to Tuesday and Wednesday performances with a valid student ID. Student rush \$10 tickets are available one hour prior to curtain with a valid student ID and are subject to availability. Senior and military rush tickets are available one hour prior to curtain, subject to availability. Children 4+ are welcome in our theatres and must be ticketed.

