

Mad Hatter's Tea Party acro-batty fun

Greg Bruce

1 *The Mad Hatter's Tea Party* is not quite pitch perfect in its attempt to hit all the possible multiple demographics with its co-mingling of stunts, jokes, acrobatics and party tricks, but it is close enough that you can confidently call it psychedelically infused fun for the whole family.



2 Some of the jokes, especially the innuendos, are shocking enough to elicit a sideways glance to see if you really heard what you definitely heard – and to make sure your children have no idea what's going on.

3 The show's influences are, broadly, circus, musical, stand-up comedy and, obviously, also the wild mind-wanderings that comprise the source material, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

4 The problem with circus-inspired stage shows, at least from a cynical adult's point of view, is that Cirque du Soleil has so flooded the market with audacious and frequently dangerous stunt-driven choreography that 9. For kids though, and those parents willing to set aside their cynicism and watch *The Mad Hatter's Tea Party* through their children's eyes, the choreography is difficult enough and dangerous enough to elicit joy.

5 There is a loose storyline but what ties the show together is really the Master of Ceremonies/narrator/provocateur that is the Mad Hatter (Eloise Green) herself. Long before the show has even begun, she is already circulating among the on-stage portion of the audience, telling jokes and setting the tone.

6 The fact there is an on-stage portion of the audience at all is clear evidence of the amount of thought that has gone into creating the show. Most of the performance takes place on a raised catwalk in the centre of the stage, with the rest of the space entirely taken up by the audience. This level of thought has gone into the show from many angles: the spread and pacing of the acrobatics, the song and dance numbers, jokes, on-stage banter and audience interaction.

7 What ties it together though, and makes it a coherent whole, is the slightly unhinged Mad Hatter, a performer worthy of having a show named after her.

adapted from *The New Zealand Herald*, 2018