

Alice in Wonderland

US : 1933 : dir. Norman Z McLeod : Paramount : 77 min
 prod: Louis D Lighton : scr: Joseph L Mankiewicz & William Cameron Menzies
 : dir.ph.: Henry Sharp & Bert Glennon

Jackie Searl; Billy Barty; Baby LeRoy
 Charlotte Henry; Richard Arden; Gary Cooper; W.C. Fields; Cary Grant; Edna May Oliver;
 Edward Everett Horton; Jack Oakie; Leon Errol; Charles Ruggles; May Robson; Ned Sparks;
 Louise Fazenda; Alison Skipworth; Lucien Littlefield; Harvey Clark; William Austin

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	≠	M	☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5090	4.5	9	5	1,683	-	-	-	-	-	No	unseen



Alice, the Caterpillar and "You are old, father William"

Source: Illustrated History of the Talkies

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996 review:

"Top Paramount stars appear, disguised as various Lewis Carroll characters, in this slow-moving adaptation of the classic story. Fascinating because of its casting – Cooper as the White Knight, Fields as Humpty Dumpty, Grant as the Mock Turtle – but, overall, a bore. Screenplay by Joseph L Mankiewicz and William Cameron Menzies. ** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review – identical to above

Halliwell's Film Guide review

"Intriguing but disappointing version of the nonsense classic, keeping to the Tenniel drawings by dressing an all-star cast in masks, thereby rendering them ineffective. Ida Lupino was brought from the UK for the title role, but not used. Scr: Joseph L Mankiewicz

and William Cameron Menzies, from the novel by Lewis Carroll. Music: Dimitri Tiomkin
**”

“Nothing grows out of anything else in this phantasmagoria. It’s like reading a whole volume of separate four-line gags.” – **Variety**

“Lavishly produced, with great care given to costumes and settings and make-up, but the spirit is missing.” – **New Yorker**, 1977

Comment from **The Good Film and Video Guide** review of “**ALICE’S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND**” (72):

“This version has no guts or gusto, though it’s less dull than Paramount’s 1933 effort, with which it shares an all-star cast hiding under Tenniel-like furs and feathers.”

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
review:

“Ambitious film version of the classic fantasy; but lovers of the book will not find the film satisfactory. **1/2 ”

A Pictorial History of the Talkies note:

“1933: Paramount made “**ALICE IN WONDERLAND**” with an unknown, Charlotte Henry, as Alice, and surrounded her with an all-star cast.”

That Was Hollywood – the 1930s review:

“Paramount’s Christmas treat for family audiences was an all-star version of the Lewis Carroll classic tales in which the famous players were hidden behind masks and costumes and recognisable only by their voices. Newcomer Charlotte Henry played Alice, while Richard Arlen (Cheshire Cat), Gary Cooper (White Knight), W.C. Fields (Humpty Dumpty), Cary Grant (Mock Turtle), Edward Everett Horton (Mad Hatter), Jack Oakie (Tweedledum), Edna May Oliver (Red Queen), May Robson (Queen of Hearts) and Charles Ruggles (March Hare) were among those she met. Joseph L Mankiewicz collaborated on the screenplay with the Art Director William Cameron Menzies, while Norman Z McLeod directed.”



Paramount considered over 6,000 hopefuls (including a young Ida Lupino) for their high-budget star-laden production, and the best they could find was a 19-year old from Brooklyn??

Source: Illustrated History of the Talkies

They Had Faces Then – Super Stars, Stars and Starlets of the 1930s note on Charlotte Henry:

“Let’s all say a word of gratitude to Charlotte Henry. If Charlotte hadn’t won out, Ida Lupino would have played “**ALICE IN WONDERLAND**” and that wouldn’t have been right at all. We needed Ida for other things. Miss Henry was a passable Alice. But a girl can’t do much when she is surrounded by W.C. Fields as Humpty Dumpty and Edna May Oliver as the Red Queen and half the hams in Hollywood in Tenniel-inspired masks – all with only a minute or two to establish their characters, and themselves. There had been a few roles before “**ALICE**” for miss Henry – she was billed as Charlotte V Henry then. And there would be a few more to follow – Bo-Peep in “**BABES IN TOYLAND**” and a girl in “**THE LAST GENTLEMAN**”. But you can’t get much attention when you’re playing with Laurel & Hardy or George Arliss. So she didn’t linger long on the movie scene. Sorry about Charlotte – but we’re glad it wasn’t Ida.”

“Charlotte Henry is both the winner and the victim of a nationwide search launched by Paramount Pictures in the early 1930s to bolster a shaky regime. Charlotte was born on March 3rd 1914 in Brooklyn, and appeared on the stage from the age of five. On Broadway, she played in "Courage", with Janet Beecher, and made her movie debut in the screen version, 1930.

In 1933, Paramount announced its wish to cast an unknown as Alice in "**ALICE IN WONDERLAND**", and received between 6,500 and 7000 applications from all over the world. Charlotte was acting in a stage production of "Growing Pains" at the Pasadena Playhouse, but took time off to ask for a test. Then, sending out charming publicity photos of Charlotte dressed as little Alice, Paramount announced her as the winner. In spite of the high-pressure publicity and the all-star cast, the picture was a flop.

After 1936, she returned to the stage, playing in stock; returned to Hollywood in 1941, and got a job in "**BOWERY BLITZKRIEG**", with the East Side Kids. She is now said to be living in San Diego. [towhit, in 1974] ”

Those Endearing Young Charms caption:

“In this 1933 version of the Lewis Carroll fantasy, Baby Leroy was seen as the "Joker" in the Scene of the "cards". W.C. Fields headed an all-star cast.”

The Time Out Film Guide review:

“Curiouser and curiouser and that’s not the half of it. With Cary Grant as the Mock Turtle, Gary Cooper as the White Knight and W.C. Fields as Humpty Dumpty, great things might be expected, but something went disastrously wrong in the pot. Most of the blame must rest with McLeod, whose incredibly cack-handed direction piles on the whimsy by the bucket-load and can’t come to grips with the absurdity at all. Carroll may not have envisaged Alice as being totally unsullied by the ways of the world, but as played by Charlotte Henry she’s as pert a piece of jailbait [sic] as ever fell down a rabbit-hole. Even the backdrops look as if they’ve been lifted from Donald McGill postcards.”



Baby Leroy muscles in on the act for added audience coo-appeal. Looks as though as he half expects to be eaten at any moment...

Source: indeterminate

Cast:

Alice	Charlotte Henry
Humpty Dumpty	W.C. Fields
Mock Turtle	Cary Grant
White Knight	Gary Cooper
Mad Hatter	Edward Everett Horton
March Hare	Charles Ruggles
Dormouse	Jackie Searl
Red Queen	Edna May Oliver
Tweedledum	Jack Oakie
Uncle	Leon Errol
Queen of Hearts	May Robson
White Queen	Louise Fazenda
Caterpillar	Ned Sparks
Duchess	Alison Skipworth
Gryphon	William Austin

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]



Feasting and fun – the three Queens

Source: Illustrated History of the Talkies



Full marks for spotting Cary Grant on the right...

Source: indeterminate

If the silent cinema ever tackled these stories I have no record of the fact. This then was the first attempt to render on celluloid the wordgames, logic plays and dream reality which have made the two Alice books such enduring favourites of Victorian children's literature.

Sometimes a film becomes indelibly scarred by a coinciding event in one's personal life – **"TARZAN AND THE JUNGLE BOY"** and **"TREASURE OF MATECUMBE"** are two associated with personal calamities in mine. And this one, never seen on British television, was given a rare showing at a London art cinema in 1983. That day a friend and I had arranged to see it, he was very keen, but an event intervened with far-reaching personal consequences, and the friend died before we had the chance to catch it again. The film has not resurfaced since, and I could scarcely watch it now without those negative connotations.

That aside, one can only observe how these spot-the-star showcases are usually a disservice to their subject matter (**"THE LONGEST DAY"**, **"A BRIDGE TOO FAR"**, most disaster movies) and the Alice books have fallen victim to them more than once. But if director McLeod could not, as Time Out says *"come to grips with the absurdity at all"* then there is little else but star-spotting to commend it. W.C. Fields is intriguing casting, but the one name which leaps out as inspired would be Edna May Oliver as the Red Queen. Anyone who recalls her Aunt Betsy in **"DAVID COPPERFIELD"** will know she is perfect for the part. McLeod cut his teeth on some of the Marx Brothers' knockabout farces – **"MONKEY BUSINESS"**, **"HORSE FEATHERS"** – not exactly the best proving ground for Carroll's idiosyncratic and language-sensitive humour. Unmysteriously then, the film flopped.

Charlotte Henry was only the first in a long line of monstrously gireatric Alices. She'd already been seen the previous year, at 18, in **"REBECCA OF SUNNYBROOK FARM"**, and in **"CONFLICT"** two years before that, not that this prevented Paramount touting her as an unknown "discovery" to play Alice. She quit the cinema in 1941. Hollywood has never been short of child actresses in the 8 to 12 range, and in the early Thirties, with studio production at its peak – there were more than ever. Casting 19-year olds (and older) in the part of Alice is both unnecessary and absurd, reducing the story to the level of pantomime. However, there were *some* genuine children in the cast, and all of them were boys.

Baby LeRoy (age one) was specially written into the film as "Joker" in the pack of cards, Jackie Searl (13) was the Dormouse, but I've no information what Billy Barty (8) played. A midget, often cast as imps and fairies, he could presumably be squeezed into almost any role.

See [ALICE IN WONDERLAND - GENERAL NOTE](#) for all other known interpretations, and subject index under **FANTASY / FAIRY TALES / FOLK TALES**.