

## Theater Review: Brown Paper Box Co. 'Grace, Or the Art of Climbing' thru July 7, 2019

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on June 17, 2019 - 11:39am

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CHICAGO – What is life but a constant climb? The Brown Paper Box Co., one of the most vital storefront theater groups in Chicago, asks that question and more in the significant “Grace, Or the Art of Climbing.” Using a woman’s journey through some difficult situations, the parallels of “the climb” become a artfully performed story that is all inspiration and uplift. The play runs through July 7th, 2019, at Stage 773 in the Belmont Avenue Theater District in Chicago. For more information and tickets, [click here](#) [19].



Play Rating: **4.5/5.0**

The events center around Emm (Alex Molnar), a former high level climber (think rock walls and outdoor climbing with ropes and rappelling) who gets back into the game after a split from her husband Sam (Graham Carlson). Emm’s former coach is her father Abe (Greg Mills), who suffers a stroke in the midst of his daughter’s psychological recovery. Emm’s reluctant new coach, Sims (Joshua Zambrano), begins to see the potential for higher aspirations with his new student. This all comes together through the mind and healing of Emm.



Alex Molnar in 'Grace, Or the Art of Climbing'  
Photo credit: Zach Dries for Brown Paper Box Co.

The stage script – written by circus performer and queer feminist playwright L M Feldman – is a tremendous symbolic life lesson, and the cast

and director Erin Shea Brady deliver it with a intelligent zest in all the joy it gives. The stage is full of climbing obstacles, and the terminology becomes more essential as the Emm tackles the possibilities. The timeline is narrated by our climbing hero, as she ticks off the weeks of her new consequence and development, which includes her father. This is a great show to see if you're at a crossroads or transition.

The play is athletic, as all of the cast members (even the older Abe) need to envelop the essence of the climbing sport. Besides the aforementioned main cast, the rest of the players (James Lewis, Lynnette Li and Elissa Newcorn) portray various roles – including instructor Sims' class of six-year-old climbers – with an ardent fulfillment. This expresses the sport of climbing better than any hangout at the rock wall.

The daughter/father relationship between Alex Molnar's Emm, who is excellent in carrying the play on her shoulders, and Greg Mill's Abe is touching in its energy. Mills has to communicate the burden of suffering a stroke and gaining-then-losing a daughter that is the result of his own plan after her marriage falls apart. Graham Carlson scores as both a husband who loses his grip and various roles of support, including a very poignant six-year-old boy interpretation.



Graham Carlson (left), Greg Mills and Alex Molnar in 'Grace, Or the Art of Climbing'

Photo credit: Zach Dries for Brown Paper Box Co.

The Brown Paper Box Co. is unafraid as they climb the ladder of stage advocacy. Their seasonal mix of musical theater, cabaret and dramatics like "Grace" is a gift to the community, without pretension or separation between the stage they occupy and the audience who experience it. They are one of the true spirits of the storefront, in both philosophy and connection.

*The Brown Paper Box Co. presents "Grace, Or the Art of Climbing" in both matinees and evening performances – including Monday, June 17th (7:30pm) – on various days through July 7th, 2019, Stage 773, 1225 West Belmont Avenue, Chicago. Featuring Alex Molnar, Greg Mills, Graham Carlson, Joshua Zambrano, James Lewis, Lynnette Li and Elissa Newcorn. Written by L M Feldman. Directed by Erin Shea Brady. For more information about the Brown Paper Box Co. of Chicago, [click here](#). [20]*



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