



RING MASTERS

Sarah Hemming on 'New Circus' performers Archaos

In Festival Edinburgh, where people walk down the street in peril of having their hair toasted by a fire-eater or their glasses sent skywards by a juggler's clubs, the idea of another circus coming to town might not exactly send everyone into raptures. Archaos, however, are a circus with a difference. When they visited the London Festival of New Circus last year, few had seen anything like it. No red-nosed clowns, no men baiting tired tigers — this circus exploded into life like a heavy-metal concert. Amid dazzling lights and deafening explosions, motorbikes appeared from nowhere, spinning and bucking and flying through the air, while an acrobat swooped over the audience wielding a chainsaw. Nellie the Elephant would have packed her trunk pronto.

It was adrenaline-pumping stuff; it was also pretty dangerous. The show coming to Edinburgh should be equally unpredictable, but a little less life-threatening: 'Each year we want to develop a concept, a feeling, in the show,' explains Pierrot Bidon, the prime mover behind Archaos. 'Last year was violence. This year is more tenderness, sex, érotique, romantique . . .

'The problem with conventional circus is that people have been doing the same things for 200 years,' he says. 'They have become asleep. When you make a show it means you have something to tell the audience — you want to give something to the audience, and so we look at our life and at life in general, and we develop a feeling that we work with. It depends very much on the people who are in the group. To make a new show, I look at my people, and I think what is their energy, what are they feeling at this time — and the show comes from this.'

The mood of this year's 'tender' show, then, derives partly

from the set of people who are in it: 'We have a lot of new people in the company this year,' explains Bidon. 'They are more gentle, less wild than the people last year!'

Many of the performers with Archaos do not come from conventional circus backgrounds — some were originally straight acrobats, others worked in street theatre. But they do live a conventional circus life, living in caravans on site, and eating and socialising together. In Edinburgh they will set up camp, circus-comes-to-town style, on Leith Links. This is very important to Bidon: 'We enjoy being on the road. But for us travelling is very important because that is part of our life and we have to have a strong life to have a strong show.'

Archaos are, of course, by no means alone in trying to rescue circus from a stale death, to dust off the ideological unsoundness it has acquired and return to it the popularity and versatility it could have. Bidon feels, however, that each of the groups involved in the wave of 'New Circus' approaches the problem in a different way. None of them, he says, involve the same all-encompassing philosophy as Archaos, and this sense of originality is the source of the group's name.

'Archaos comes from the Greek — it is the word for beginning,' explains Bidon. 'I think we are the beginning for a new ideology in circus. Which is to make circus very open, open to the world, and to make shows with the feeling of our time — with light, music, motorbikes, sport — using all the things of our time. I want to try and make it keep developing.' ■

Archaos are at the Edinburgh Fringe from August 11 to September 2 at Leith Links (not Mons).