

## Jubilee Gardens

John Vidal

### Archaos

FROM an old removal van on the edge of the ring, a Yamaha bike careers straight at a wild-eyed helmeted figure with a piece of corrugated iron strapped to his back. He falls. The bike retreats, revs again and flattens him, riding over the low wall and straight into the audience. The iron-clad figure is hoist 60 feet high into the eaves of a spider's web of robes where at the apex a man plays Mozart on a violin. He plunges 40 feet head-first and continues to play.

Down below, men with industrial grinders shower sparks off the tent's supporting girders while others beat anvils or attack the structure with flaming torches. A girl flies crazily overhead on a 40 foot swing, another biker is swept at full throttle into the roof, a man with a chainsaw cuts the girl's ropes and is in turn hurtled upwards. Jazz, classical and

choral music floats through the stench of carbon monoxide fumes mixed with cordite. This is Archaos.

The French company have taken circus by the throat and shaken it until the bits drop off. At its furious best their industrial vision is exhilarating, dangerous and theatrically hard to equal.

The French Government thinks so too, enough to triple the company's already huge grant to bring it on a par with the RSC or some opera houses. This is only their second show and the unlikely but highly disciplined group of Mad Max figures, trapeze artists and assorted crazies with one foot in a bucket of sump oil and the other somewhere over their left shoulder, will, I believe, be the sensation of the circus world in a year or two — if they don't blow a few gaskets before then in their outrageous excess.

They have already proved the great success of the invigorating London Festival of New Circus which continues (albeit without them) until Sunday and has shown that circus is anything but the fossilised remains of a decadent popular art form. As seen in the circus village in Jubilee Gardens on London's South Bank it is a rapidly developing spectacle catching up with other disciplines by crossing itself with theatre, dance and performance art.

Archaos are indisputably the leaders in their field. Their talent is to galvanise the traditional elements of circus by dipping them in a bath of easily recognisable contemporary references. They aren't pretty, conventional or safe. These are not the sort of people to invite for a 21st birthday party; they are God-awful, warm, gipsies of the theatre.

Their show, too, is patchy. Too much time is spent with jugglers and occasionally they are predictable, even safe. But they bring very great humour and all the spirit of a punch-drunk industrial society to the ring. For this they are welcome.