

THE



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CIRCUS

Archaos — Metal Clown Wembley

THE new show from France's cult, punk circus claims to celebrate the joyful, anarchic and violent spirit of Brazil. The setting is a tunnel-like big top, pitched in a carpark between the surreal domes of Wembley Stadium and an industrial estate. The show's tutelary deity is a bearded stiltwalker, who wades on dressed only in tattered polythene rags, while a group of

apemen gibber and crouch beneath a long-range rocket launcher. What follows, when the launcher rears up into a steeply high trapeze frame, evokes a less positive side of modern Brazil: chaos and dysfunction. On the first night, only one in three of the nervous trapeze artists managed to hold on to the catcher. Thank goodness Archaos deigns to use safety nets.

Fortunately, from this point Archaos forgets about competing with traditional circus and proceeds with its own inimitably zany business. There is a very concrete Brazilian element in the show, provided by the

15 acrobatic dancers of Bahia Axe Bahia, from the city of Salvador. Some of the time they enact scenes of colonialist oppression (a slave market, a slave uprising); more memorably they dance, and especially perform *capoeira*, the virtuoso wheeling leg dance which originates from the foot-fighting technique developed by manacled slaves. It is worth the price of admission just to see these astonishingly synchronised, whirling legs.

Still, Brazilian dancing, even of exciting quality, is hardly Archaos's *raison d'être*. Those who yearn for chainsaws, motorbikes, naked flesh and heavy rock music will not go away

entirely unsatisfied. Moments of mad humour remain in the mind: a man dancing with his spinning motorbike stuck between the rollers of a mobile MOT tester; a woman who wheels a supermarket trolley full of miners' lamps straight through the *capoeira* dancers. Quite what all that has to do with Brazil is anybody's guess; but driving home, I saw a giant coffee-pot on a trailer, and it seemed to make perfect sense.

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