

VIVA THUNDERDOME

ARCHAOS

LONDON, CLAPHAM
COMMON

FORGET FOR a moment your image of the circus – mangy old lions, dodgy jugglers and a couple of unfunny whitefaced clowns. Archaos (art meets chaos) from France have dragged the ancient art of circus screaming into the 21st Century. They are very Mad Max, very William Gibson. Instead of the smell of greasepaint, it's the smell of cordite.

This is grebo circus, where motorbikes have replaced horses, and the audience look almost as unsavoury as the performers. Remember the ropey French greaser who kept making indecent propositions to your younger sister? It was probably a member of Archaos.

Some of the conventional props of the circus are still in evidence, but if there are whips, they are not for controlling animals, but more likely for use of consenting trapeze artists on each other, but perhaps there was always an element of S & M in circus. There are a couple of clowns of a sort, including Archaos's leader, an amiable gap-toothed rogue called Pierrot Bidon who wears a yellow helmet and a sheet of corrugated iron strapped to his back.

The clowning consists of wandering around on fire, being dragged behind a motorbike, being run over, or blasphemously laughing manically at the top of the tent with a crown of thorns on his head as if crucified. When the juggler appears he arrives in a battered vintage Mercedes, a reject from some God-awful heavy metal video.

The music varies from Mozart played by a violinist hanging upside down from the top of the tent or on the back of a motorbike to a group on stage



Nice 'n' sleazy, nice 'n' greasy . . . a French astronaut.

playing scampi in a basket cabaret tunes or sub-metal thrash. They are not particularly good, mostly because they are trying to avoid being knocked down by crazed bikers.

The show is admittedly patchy, but then you'd hardly expect polish from this lot. It

could be something to do with the fact that, in an uncharacteristic burst of good taste they left their performing dogs and chickens who walk the high-wire back in France.

Conventional heavy metal acts and circus acts have become clichés, but Archaos use clichés from both, add

some new ones, and have come up with something genuinely new. They are crazy enough to be taken seriously. Archaos will be back. That's a threat, and a promise.

Peter Culshaw
● Archaos, Clapham Common nightly at 8.30, until October 16.