

Subversive circus will turn safety men white

It has chainsaws. It has clowns and high-wire bicycling, a mobile crane and a rock band.

It is miles from the main streets of the Festival and it is the hottest, most talked about, most difficult show to get a ticket for by about the same distance.

It is Archaos, the French punk circus, performing up the road in Leith, which makes traditional big tops seem not just tame, but insultingly boring.

Archaos have their own concept of what constitutes spectacle, and it involves dropping a Renault 5 from a considerable height, coming up behind you with a lighted torch, rolling an oil drum, riding flaming motorbikes and cycling across a tightrope, not just on the usual unicycle but on a penny fathoming and one wheel of a bike too.

Where traditional circuses have animals, Archaos have cars which they drive on and off, cut in half and — in the



It is a dog's life being a journalist so Cyril Kasmese became the Dog Man for Archaos.

NEVILLE HADSLEY finds a circus to top all others at the Edinburgh Festival.

case of a mini-cab — set running in a circle and abandon.

This particular trick is an hilarious subversion of the traditional circling elephants, and that's what Archaos is all about. Everything they do is about subverting and rebirthing the circus form.

Instead of the usual muzak, Archaos perform to the energetic thrashing of a rock band, The Chihuahuas.

The finale scared me rigid, employing enough fire and fireworks for the average street on November 5, metal cutters like those in a standard garage and the afore mentioned Renault which landed a few yards from where I was sitting.

There was even a quite convincing decapitation with a chainsaw, but none of this should fool anyone into thinking that this is not Circus. On the contrary it is hyper-circus, with all the elements of a traditional performance — clowning, stunts, acrobatics contained within, and it must be said, performed with quite astounding ability and, where required courage. Dangerous? Probably. Offensive? To some, yes. But here was one



Gemma Cooper ran away to join Archaos in Edinburgh and now performs as a rubber and chrome Bodicia in Boulinax.

capacity audience which loved every minute of the two hours, and children too, were transfixed.

If they missed their Iraqi strongman — off to join his country's army — they didn't show it.

Archaos have a brilliant show that would turn a safety officer white but here, you can't get a ticket for the next few days at best, for gold.

Meanwhile, any new play that deals with the tortured relationship between Joe Orton and his lover, and eventual murderer Kenneth Halliwell must offer insight beyond that of the primary source — Orton's own detailed diaries and John Lahr's various adaptations.

Halliwell's *Hell* currently running at

the bedlam Theatre is an ambitious play written by young Dublin-born playwright Roddy McDevitt and produced, directed and performed by Edinburgh University Theatre Company.

McDevitt's creation does mine some old seams, like the transformation of Halliwell from the stronger, more creative of the two into a humiliated wreck crumbling in the shadow of Orton's emergence as the darling of new theatre.

But unlike Lahr, he takes a few liberties in order to explore the darker parts of Halliwell's psyche. McDevitt has an excellent grasp of form, and an extremely innovative bag of tricks.

Halliwell, as he begins to realise that Orton will eclipse him and achieve what he dreamt, so hard for — literary fame — finds his mind invaded by a strange, rather stodgy policeman, who, it gradually dawns is a character from one of Orton's most successful plays.

And worse, his dead parents — a mother who loved him but died of a wasp sting and his cold father who committed suicide — also make frequent visitations.

The performances are patchy although John Fairfoul as Orton is strong and Thomas Phillips as Halliwell is excellent when he does not rush his delivery. Yet it is the play itself which makes this one of the surprises of the Fringe. The final scene — a splendid Orton-esque farce in which all the characters are dead except the redoubtable but imaginary Inspector Truscott — is a brilliant climax — the sort of thing which makes

TELEVISION

Films look at changes in racial tensions

Twenty five years after the introduction of race relations legislation in Britain, what — if anything — has been achieved?

That is the question posed by *Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, made by the BBC's Pebble Mill-based unit for multi-cultural and religious programmes. The unit was set up in January and this is its first major project to hit the network — the opening programme is on BBC2 on Monday at 9.50pm.

"We thought it would be an appropriate time to look at how far we had got in 25 years," said executive producer Mr John Wilcox.

"I think there is a trend for people to think there aren't many problems and if there are any the law will deal with them. If anything, the problems may be growing worse."

The series comprises three films made by different producers who each had very individual briefs.

Depressing

Monday's film, made by Paul Sen, looks at what happens when ordinary individuals take their cases to the law and what they find when they get there. The programme reconstructs the cases of some winners and losers, including those of two Midland women — Patty Lindo and Brenda Beazer.

The second programme, made by Michael Burke, focuses on Tower Hamlets in London.

"In its time it has certainly been a bench mark for race relations," says Mr Wilcox. It is an increasingly depressing picture though, as relations between those who see themselves as traditional Cockneys and the largest ethnic group, the Bangladeshis, become more strained.

The third programme, by Onye Wambu, has a more positive outlook as it focuses on the future and what kind of action black people are taking. There is a group of London Underground workers who, appalled at what they saw as racial bias in tests established by a re-organisation of the workforce, set up an action group that threatened legal and industrial action. The tests were dropped, an equality board set up, and black workers are now moving into the sort of jobs they feel their experience and abilities