

THEATRE

*Archaos with the Chihuahuas in Bowinax,
Leith Links, Edinburgh*

ARCHAOS may, in some quarters, be thought to have done to the circus what heavy metal would do to the Royal Ballet. The Rambos of the ring; the bully boys of the big top.

Yet behind their death-defying explosion of deliberately shocking inventiveness — a beautiful but seemingly blind female trapeze artist roughed up and ravished by punk scene-shifters; a crippled dwarf dumped in a litter bin and carted off with the debris — there is a fairly serious artistic statement.

They are here to rip aside that curtain of conspiracy which disguises the blood, sweat and tears of circus life. In the place of tawdry tinsel, they expose a dark anarchy which lurks behind the painted smiles and is at times quite frightening in its calousness.

This is Hell's Kitchen incarnate. Yet, paradoxically, hugely funny — and very sexy. What turns bad taste into black comedy, of course, is the style and wit with which it is achieved. And here Archaos is in a class of its own.

For not only are its artists exceptional masters and mistresses of all the traditional circus skills, they are also comic actors of the highest order.

But they wear their perfection lightly, almost contemptuously.

So, while a pair of half-naked acrobats built like Adonis and Venus go through a romantic balletic routine which tests all imaginable muscular control, a troupe of dirty old men in filthy raincoats leer (and worse) from the rusting gantry which serves as a gallery.

Raucous

Rockers clad in studded leathers streak past the toes in the front rows on motorcycles which sound like launched space rockets and look twice as dangerous. Cars driven at high speed explode and fall in half, disgorging their mangled passengers.

A shy man planted in the audience to take part in a silly trick with fake goldfish gets the taste of blood and gradually goes barking mad with a chainsaw before being caged like a beast and dangled from a fork-lift truck.

So much for the lure of the greasepaint, the roar of the crowd.

Wherever there is a moment of quiet beauty — a trick cyclist who rides like Nureyev danced, a juggler who uses a cat's cradle with the lyricism of Puccini — there is its counter-

A devil's carnival staged by angels



by JACK
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CRITIC OF THE YEAR

point of raucous destruction.

It is a kind of devil's carnival performed by artists with the precision of angels. Their physical arrogance is astonishing.

Nor is all this its only originality. Orchestrating this wickedly ordered mayhem are the Chihuahuas, the Paris-based band that marry the effrontery of the spectacle to the audaciousness of their music.

For the strong of heart and broad of mind, there is no greater treat in this Edinburgh Festival than Archaos. Frank Dunlop deserves nothing but congratulations for promoting them from last year's Fringe sensation to this year's official star attraction.