

FURY OVER THE SEX CIRCUS!



Concern: Michael Stern

ONCE upon a time circuses were about performing elephants, lion-tamers, and chimpanzees that appeared uncannily human.

They provided, so we thought, quite innocent entertainment — until it was pointed out that the animals might be performing their tricks under duress, and being subjected to many cruelties off-stage.

Indeed, animal-lovers have had plenty of practice at picketing the big top wherever it has pitched in the West.

But soon, we may have a brand new picket for a brand new style of circus, one that is, according to its own publicity, a 'seamy mix of raunchy rock and roll, stunts, skills mayhem and mania.'

Extravagant hype has surrounded it. The French circus Archaos has described itself as the cruellest, sexiest and most dangerous show yet. What's more, it wishes to perform on Durdham Downs, Bristol.

There is talk of exploding shopping trolleys, simulated sex, and a score of other things you would never see at a Gerry Cottle show.

Simulated sex (and, indeed, the real thing) must have taken place on the Downs many times before but probably never in front of a paying audience. Nor may it yet, should Archaos be inclined to put it on the menu.

The final decision lies with the city council's Downs committee, which has delegated two of its officers to take a peek at Archaos live in Manchester.

On their say-so, the committee of councillors and Merchant Venturers will decide what is fit or unfit for us to see. Perhaps many Bristolians will be happy to with the arrangement, though why Archaos should treat two city council officers to an expenses-paid trip to Manchester is a mystery.

For they, indeed the entire Downs Committee of councillors and Merchant Venturers, could have copped an eyeful of Archaos much nearer home.



Inside the Week

ANDREW MOURANT

They could have trucked on down to the Pilton Festival with hippies, strolling minstrels and other exotic folk in search of simulated sex, human flame-throwers and assorted X-certificate antics.

Worthy Farm is about 30 miles from Bristol; Manchester 180, and rather a long way to go when you have the chance of being outraged on your own doorstep.

Yet a closer examination of Archaos's publicity draws doubt into the critical mind. The show, for instance, is described as being sexier than anything in Soho.

But Soho is said to be sexy no longer. Westminster City Council claim to have cleaned it up.

Indeed it is arguable whether Soho ever was sexy. Licentious and sordid perhaps. But sexy? Perhaps the Archaos publicity department is in need of its own French lessons.

The performers may find all this publicity much to their profit, regardless of the Downs committee's judgement. They may also be amused at the sight of the British getting in a tangle over a risqué show with which the French would carry on regardless.

Archaos, in fact, gets government assistance. Ours is the society that covered up chair legs in Victorian times because they were considered indecent.

Alors, plus ça change.