

BIKING WARRIORS

● So the circus is just for lickle kids and big girls blouses, eh? Welcome to the chainsaw and grenade nightmare of CIRCUS ARCHAOS, about as far from New Age as you can get but appearing at Glastonbury anyway – must have threatened the right people. STEVEN WELLS dodges the shrapnel.

SCENE: A stinking turnip pasture, rural England, the good old days.

1st STINKING PEASO: Oi 'ear 'as 'ow t'Circus be a'cummin'!
2nd STINKING PEASO: Aye, with more of that farty type humour and nudity and gratuitous scythe mayhem, I'll be bound!
1st STINKING PEASO: Ooooooh arrrrrrr!

So how did circuses get BORING? The modern circus is a Victorian invention and by the turn of the century the circus equivalents of CBS and EMI had moved in and circus became a commodity – cliché replaced anarchy, good taste replaced vulgarity. Since then circus has suffered some of the same tedious tendencies that afflicted pop music in the early '70s – respectability, safeness, Mike Oldfield... NO FUN!

PIERROT PILLOT Bidon is a thirtysomething French Johnnie who looks fiftysomething (a gallic Oliver Reed actually) and who is much given to taking the piss. He claims, for instance that he is the only member of Circus Archaos who ever gets any groupies.

"I am the Casanova. I am very stupid and I am very fat but all the girls know I am good in bed."

Eleven years ago Pierrot was doing his act (which involved hypnotising chickens – I am NOT making this up) when he decided that it was time for circus to get exciting again. He thought:

"Pffft! What is this circus? It is just a business, only a grocery!"

There are no lions or tigers in the Archaos show: "We want to make the circus relevant to peoples' lives – the traditional circus had horses because people were familiar with them. But now? No! I hate it when circuses are cruel to animals. I am not saying that they all are – but some of them? Yes! If you go to Africa and steal a tiger or a monkey then it is very cruel..."

THE CLIMAX to the current show is brilliant. A car is dropped from a great height onto another car loaded with fireworks. Sparks fly from two grinders. A sea-shell splattered Mini full of water is driven on by two drowning clowns. A skinhead drags a victim around the tent with his motorbike. A shabby punker in a grey lab coat breathes flame. The rock band go bananas. A semi-naked couple shag on top of a London taxi cab whilst the men dance with each other. Two clowns tear across the ring riding inflatable killer whales. Things go BANG! The show screams to a drawn out finale with the entire cast of performers plus the entire audience romping around the ring to the blasting rock music – provided by Southern French/Northern Spanish cult band The Chihuahuas.

It is, to put it mildly, a bit over the top. If I have a major criticism it would be that there are too many rape scenes – too many women being chased and manhandled which, despite the fact that most of the women in the show are strong women, leaves a bad taste in the mouth.

Archaos, unfortunately, was not chosen as a name because of any connections with either anarchy or chaos. It's a Greek word meaning monopoly and it was chosen, boringly enough, so it would appear first in any alphabetical listings.

Circus Archaos is now one of the biggest circuses in the world – two shows employing over 40 performers each tour Europe (and, recently, Australia), picking up and shedding performers on the way.

This is not easy work even if, as I was told more than once, "it beats working". During the first show we saw on the Barcelona seafront, a rope artist was slammed onto a large metal fuse box by an over zealous assistant. Result – a nasty cut. On the second night one of the acts ended up with a broken arm whilst a clown, in an after show farting about session, bust his collarbone. Ouch.

ATOP THE huge rusted metal Inca temple a choir assembles. They carry candles and start to sing a hymn in German. A chainsaw starts up about five feet away from my head. Somebody screams. A maniac, teeth glinting in the lights, runs bellowing into the ring. His victim starts to run. The chainsawist chases him into the audience on the other side. There are some very frightened people over there. The victim is dragged over to the execution block ZZZZZZZZZSHLUCK! PLOP!

The crazed murderer holds a severed head to the crowd and screams for their approval. His face is a mask of blood and sweat and dirt-smeared rage. Suddenly he notices the choir who have been sweetly singing throughout all the carnage. He runs over and waves the severed head at them. The arteries in the neck spurt blood into the sawdust. RAAAAAAAAAAAAARGH! he says (which is mad chainsaw-wielding loony talk for "Look at me!"). He runs up the stairs at the side of the stage and, with a final WHOOORAGHHHHH! he flings the head into a TV set which promptly explodes KABOOOOOOOOOOM!

The Madman turns to the distraction at the other end of the ring which, memory fails me here, is either the clowns or the cannibalism scene involving the human dog. Anyway, a distinctly unsevered head pops back up in the TV screen and cackles manically, but its drowned out by the frenzied oompah rock being strutted by the band on the opposite stage. Heavy.

If you think that the circus is about as relevant and exciting as *The Black And Minstrel Show* – it's time you thought again.



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