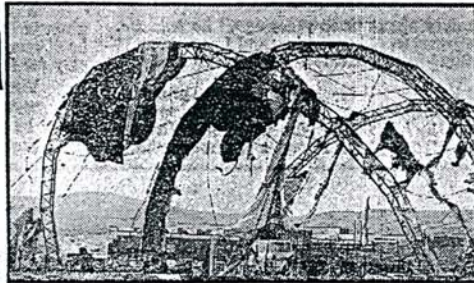


How the Big Top became a big flop



FLITTERS! Archaos tent after the big wind, and one of the cast sticking a tongue out at misfortune



WITH a new £75,000 fabric, rushed from a factory in Toulouse, France, Archaos the French circus is back in action in the carpark of Wembley Stadium.

Their time spent in Ireland was something all of the cast and crew of the circus "just want to forget", says producer Adrian Evans.

When they do remember it, they refer to The Curse of Archaos, and some people put the run of extraordinary misfortune in Tallaght during the Dublin Theatre Festival down to the fact that the field was a grave site for bubonic plague victims.

It was billed as the ultimate in circus entertainment. The theatre festival

programme couldn't say enough about Archaos — "astonishing, mind-blowing" and "hilarious" were just some of the words used to describe the Metal Clown Tour which was presented in association with Dublin County Council, and financially supported by the French Ministry of Culture.

But on Wednesday October 2, when they rolled into town, nobody could have envisaged the litany of rotten luck waiting round the bend for the bikers, dancers,

rockers, trapeze artists and chainsaw operators who remember their visit to Dublin as "a living nightmare".

October 3 Just one night settled at their site on the Old Blessington Road, Tallaght and a motorbike was stolen. Having recovered it, they thought nothing of the misfortune and continued preparing for their first performance, scheduled for the following Tuesday.

October 5 Gale force winds bashed against the £270,000 tent in an open field behind the Garda station.

October 6 Howling winds blew down 100 metres of wire fencing surrounding the tent, and it wasn't long before the tent itself was torn to shreds.

October 7 Adrian Evans, producer of Archaos, flew from Seville to make arrangements for a replacement tent. "It was a beast of a wind and our tent was left in shreds. We hired a new tent at our own expense, at a cost of almost £55,000," he recalls.

October 13 Five days later, Archaos opened to Dublin audiences and performed until October 15, when winds began gathering pace once again.

October 14 Just as the show got off the ground, disaster struck when a leading cast member, Antoinette Poubioglio — suffering from a heart condition — fell ill and was rushed to hospital.

October 16 and 17 Archaos contacted the Dublin Theatre Festival, informing them of 70 mile an hour winds; "The upshot was that we had to call of these performances," says Adrian.

October 18, 19 and 20 The circus performed without any hitches. But Antoinette (42), who had undergone a seven-hour heart by-pass operation in St. James's Hospital, died on Sunday, October 20.

October 21 With just seven of the originally-agreed 12 shows performed, Archaos pulled the plug on a private performance for Irish Life, the main sponsors of the Dublin Theatre Festival, which had invited 1,000 staff and privileged guests.

Announcing that they were owed £60,000 by the Dublin Theatre Festival, a member of the Archaos crew told the stunned crowd that the festival operators had been given an ultimatum to have the £60,000 by 7.30pm. The cheque they received was for just £15,000 — consequently, they refused to give a show.

October 22 Telephone lines, water and electricity supplies at the site were disconnected; "It was absolutely freezing up there. We were already out by thousands of pounds and we were left without facilities," claims Mr. Evans.

October 23 On leaving Tallaght, members of the cast were surrounded by the Gardaí, who questioned them about the death of Antoinette Poubioglio; "It was



The show went on, after the wind

the last thing we needed. Our morale was deeply affected by it," says Adrian.

But there was more to come and as the entourage made its way to Rosslare, the sound truck overturned. "It was almost as if anything that could have gone wrong did go wrong. At that stage, there was little that could have affected us."

Gardaí are now satisfied Antoinette did not die under suspicious circumstances, but it was "the final nail in the coffin" for the dejected cast members who are suspicious that their run of bad luck may have been due the fact that Tallaght was a burial ground for thousands of plague victims.

"A lot of people were uneasy that it was a burial ground. It's very hard to imagine all of that bad luck befalling any organisation," remarks Mark Borkowski, press consultant for Archaos.

"To say that we were looking forward to coming to Ireland would be an understatement. But it has been the most unpleasant time for Archaos. Our morale was deeply affected. It is a great shame that our visit to Ireland ended in this way".

The Dublin Theatre Festival says that relations between festival staff and Archaos members are good; "The flitter is now in the hands of our respective solicitors," said spokesperson, Aisling Kilroy.