



Lucinda Alford tosses caution over her shoulder at her audition to become a member of Archaos: 'Please, please let me be a Metal Clown. I love motorbikes, explosions.'/Photographs by Roger Hatchings.

Goodbye world, I'm off to join the circus

ARCHAOS is Mad Max meets Bertram Mills: a mutant circus which leaves the audience exhausted, never mind the performers. It's the loudest, most totally absorbing performance I've seen. So, when I read in the magazine *Time Out* that Archaos needed 12 'Metal Clowns' for its London run, I have to go for it.

The ad says it's looking for 'degenerate, depraved, manic and masochistic 18- to 25-year-olds'. The only part I have to lie about is my age (I'm 26). My job as *The Observer's* fashion stylist doesn't provide the most obvious training, so my application says, 'Please, please, let me be a Metal Clown. I love noise, motorbikes, explosions. I am very strong.'

A week later I receive a letter. 'Dear Potential Metal Clown, Please bring yourself to Wembley car park on Monday 28 October... it is very important to come "dressed" in your interpretation of what a metal clown would look like in performance. Best Wishes and Good Luck.' That's it.

All I can remember about the Metal Clowns in previous shows are the massive sheets of cor-

gated iron on their backs and the occasional chainsaw in their hands. So, for the audition, I wear old, black leather bike trousers, a 'leetle' fishnet, and a silver T-shirt.

At Wembley on Monday, I worry that I haven't put enough effort into my costume. People arrive encased in chicken-wire cages; saucupans on their heads; cling wrap around all limbs.

A veteran Archaos Metal Clown tells us Metal Clowns are stupid, they laugh all the time and they walk like monkeys. (And, if selected, they earn £15 a night for the three-week run.) Watched by Olivier Grov and Reynald Coulon, Archaos' artistic directors, two by two, like animals into the ark, we try to do our stuff. Laughing, fighting, falling around, it brings out the Neanderthal child in us. I wait and watch. Going on 'cold', in front of so many, I have a minute to convince Archaos to take me on. I blank out everyone and act like a maniac. I laugh, whoop and, for a reason I can't recall, swing my partner around my head.

We wait, they are back with the list. Twelve are picked out of the 67 (a mix of unemployed

or unemployable, anarcho-punks, buskers and the curious). The second name Olivier reads out is, 'Lulu Alford'. Wow, I can't believe it. ARCHAOS!

Only one other woman is chosen, Nicky, 23, is a South African trained at drama school who has given up a waitress job for this. So, the response is, 'What did you do that was so special?' 'Oh, did you get in?' It seems that my bestial sounds, the fireman's lift and my 'outwardness' has done the job. Also in is Frank, who says it was Archaos or a Krishna temple.

Archaos' current show (which has already been seen in Denmark, Finland and Ireland), 'stars' a company of 120 from a dozen countries. It tells the history of Brazil from the arrival of Portuguese explorers in 1500 to the murder of children by death squads this year.

Woven in, with extravagant use of symbolism, cars and BMXs, is the arrival of 'civilisation', the end of slavery and the invasion of the Europeans. Metal Clowns are the conquistadors; the Brazilian dance troupe Bahia Axe Bahia represent the indigenous people.

Tuesday afternoon, Wembley car park again, the first

rehearsal. A vast tent (able to seat 2,000) is up. At each venue Archaos recruits new Metal Clowns, so this training process starts afresh. (The Finns were apparently the least manageable, always drunk on vodka.)

The first feat we learn is how to fall backwards with our metal 'tole', the sheet of corrugated iron strapped to our back. I do it wrong. It hurts. I stupidly assume that the tiny bit of foam rubber between my back and the tole will give me protection.

'Non, Lulu, you must fall to the side.' Olivier and Reynald conduct rehearsals in Franglain, with frequent 'How you say this?' Communication problems are nothing compared to remembering what you're supposed to do and where. Forget at your peril. 'Move quickly out of the way. There will be a huge explosion — and the trucks will come through very fast.'

Wednesday: Another six hours' practice. I am completely knackered. Thursday: The seating is in; the drainage ditches that will house the explosions are dug; the lighting is still being set up. Sankay, chief of lighting, says she'd rather be on a checkout till.

Archaos are tired, but there's a wonderful energy. We're told everyone is equally important; crew, technicians, performers, novice Metal Clowns. It's early evening, the first full rehearsal is late in happening. It's chaos. A meeting is held in French, then English, then Portuguese.

I finish at 10.30pm. Friday is the first performance. I'm exhausted, smelly and black and blue. And in love with the circus — I think.

Watch this space. On 24 November, Lucinda Alford will tell all about her three-week stint as a (mini) Metal star.



Metal Gurus

Assemble French street troupe Archaos, famed for its mix of obscenity, horror, motor-bikes and mad heavy machinery, returns to London on October 28 with its biggest and boldest show so far, 'Metal Clowns' — a vivid demonstration of the culture clash between the European invaders of South America and its indigenous peoples. The show will take place in the new 2,500-capacity Archaos tent, to be pitched beneath Wembley stadium's twin towers in late October, and director Pierre Bédouin is seeking enthusiasts through *Time Out*. 15 Metal Clowns to join the company for the London run. Chad in crash helmets and leathers with large corrugated metal sheets strapped to their backs, the Metal Clowns are Archaos regulars, whose worth at the softings of others is only matched by their cheerful disregard for their own injuries. So, if you've ever wanted to run away from home to join an anarcho-circus, this is your chance. You must be over 18 and under 25, with several weeks free from late October. Apply in writing to: Cahore (Metal Clown), Time Out, Tower House, Southampton Street, London WC2E 7HD, telling us who you want to be a Metal Clown. Include your age, height and weight, address and phone number, and a photo. Auditions will be held at the 'Cannon Cultural' outside Wembley Stadium at 7pm on Tuesday, October 25. Successful applicants will be notified nearer the time.