

Story sent rolling and tumbling along by outstanding company

Foursome build on movie theme to great effect as troupes breathe life into dramas



Fringe Circus

MARY BRENNAN

The Elephant In The Room

BARBU Electro Trad Cabaret

Les Inouis

Ockham's Razor

All shows at Underbelly's Circus Hub, The Meadows

BEAUTY, the smaller tent on the Meadows, is what you would call an intimate space. Audiences are ranged close to the stage, which is more or less big enough to swing a kitten in. French company Cirque Le Roux manage to turn this compact set-up to their advantage in *The Elephant In The Room* by installing a monochrome drawing room, where four characters under the influence of classic Hollywood film noir bend over backwards (and then flip head over heels) to protect guilty secrets. Newly married Miss Betty (Lolita Costet) is already hankering to be a widow – is that the pachyderm of the title? Is there a hidden agenda to the athletically sexual opportunism of the American stranger (Philip Rosenberg)?

Can the butler really be as clumsy and unstable on his pins as Gregory Arsenault's slapstick misadventures suggest? As for that unwanted husband (Yannick Thomas) – there is something sinister about him. Could he be a gangster? A cop?

Whatever twists the narrative has in store, the real bobby-dazzler acrobatics emerge seamlessly along the way, served up with a wit and invention that does not only defy gravity with brinkmanship balances, but sees a table-top or sofa back become a launchpad for high-speed take-offs in tumbling and catching routines.

As the lights come down, there is some slinky male double-work but the erotic charge is subtle rather than sleazy, while the finale – all four performers intertwining on one Chinese Pole – is a tour de force of skill and daring.

There is a murder. Hey – where's that elephant? Nowhere to be seen – maybe because the room is already crowded out with talent. *Runs until Saturday, August 29*

BARBU – bearded by name, exuberantly whiskered for real. This is a two-in-one circus show, where the first half is a jolly array



INTIMATE PERFORMANCE: In *The Elephant In The Room*, the erotic charge is subtle rather than sleazy, leading up to a finale that is a tour de force of skill and daring.



FOUR ON THE FLOOR: The *Elephant In The Room* is a fusion of circus and physical theatre and its stars dazzle with their movement.

and the antics on and off-stage get very in-yer-face – especially during the lads' pole-dancing routine or their frisky excursions into the audience. What both segments of Cirque Alfonse's Electro Trad Cabaret celebrate, however, is the wayward and even eccentric appeal that we hope has not left the circus tent with the long-gone animal acts. This Montreal company have in their sights the kind of feats of strength, magic tricks and human pyramids that traditionally wowed audiences who crowded into the 19th century's fairgrounds.

Having delivered those with humour and finesse, they acknowledge how the passage of time has encouraged a tad more raunch into the ring – but again, there is a giggle in the butt-wiggling even when the lads, and their female counterparts, are taking complex balances to the scary teetering point.

The live electro-trad music amps up the atmosphere in the Lafayette Big Top to a rambunctious pitch – circus does not get hairier, or lairier, than this. *Runs until August 29*

BELGIAN company T1J weave a chilling topicality into their circus-theatre fantasy *Les Inouis* with the story of a migrant who

survives shipwreck only to find his dreams of freedom are, as it were, being thrown to the wolves.

As with *L'Enfant Qui...* – on the Fringe at Institut Français d'Écosse – there is a wistful charm and a poetic sensibility to how this harrowing tale is presented. The brutality meted out to the hapless migrant gains in savagery when the blows bludgeon a defenceless puppet.

The jeopardy that attends his pregnant wife is tremblingly evoked on a tightrope while snarling masks come into play as the wolves become a waterfront patrol, sniffing out new arrivals. Staged within the close quarters of the Hub's Beauty marquee, there is a palpable sense of unspoken concerns being projected on video animations and through the metaphor of circus elements. By the end, the "once upon a time..." beginning has

tumbled acrobatically into the here and now.

Runs to August 29

TWO short episodes of aerial work – *Arc* and *Every Action...* – give indications of how UK company *Ockham's Razor* are trying to get narrative off the ground. In *Arc*, a man and two women are marooned in mid-air on a grid-iron.

Thrills, and hints of possible spills, arrive as the trio clamber over and dangle from the metalwork, but while flirtation and rivalries create relationship tensions, the grid itself imposes limitations on where they can take those conflicts without climbing down from the frame. *Every Action...* has an altogether more accommodating concept: one very long rope passes over two pulleys – tug down on one end, t'other will fly up.

There is a lovely whiff of Hoffnug's bricklayer in the comedy cantrips that ensue, when the quartet of aerialists keep mismatching the size of opposing bodies. The tomfoolery is all precisely calculated of course, but the foursome make it look hilariously accidental. *Runs to August 29*

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