

Reviews: Theatre

# Thrilling circus will leave you amazed

CIRQUE BERSERK  
BRENT CROSS  
★★★★☆

Thrillseekers will love this edgier, more contemporary take on traditional circus courtesy of long-running outfit Zippos.

Dispensing with both animals and ringmaster, the adrenaline pumping acts are loosely linked by an athletic troupe of dreadlocked Timbuktu Tumblers and Tweedy the clown – whose bumbling schtick of incompetence belies an impressive mastery of circus skills. It may take a few tries, but he manages to juggle, tightrope walk and dance his hat across his shoulders, much to the kids' delight.

At one point, a giant transformer-type robot stomps on shooting fireworks from his arms. At another four motorcyclists buzz around inside a metal 'globe of death' – an undoubted highlight.

There's a fair bit of head-shaking – just as you think something cannot be done, the contortionist manages to fire an arrow with her foot over her shoulder, the limbo artist to shuffle under a two inch high burning pole, and the knife



■ A Lucius Team rider beside the Globe of Terror

thrower to miss the assistant strapped to a spinning table.

My daughter loved the "beautiful" aerialists, a duo on hoops and ribbons twisting overhead or spinning from on high with a strap around her neck. And the boys loved the Zulu acrobats who leaped off a tower onto a see-saw

catapulting a colleague into a waiting chair.

With liberal use of fire, and throbbing music it may be overwhelming for teeny ones but our party ranged from three to 10 and it proved great family entertainment that appealed across all ages.

Bridget Galton

## Kitchen drama fails to connect

MUSWELL HILL  
PARK THEATRE  
★★★★☆

Torben Betts maintains the fine tradition of mentor Alan Ayckbourn by analysing social divisions and modern malaise via the dinner party from hell in his fiery 2012 comedy. North London urbanite hosts Jess (Annabel Bates) and Mat (Jack Johns) boast the perfect middle-class lifestyle, writ large in the gleaming chrome stools and stylish island of their magazine-spread kitchen. But they, like all Betts's characters, are fatally isolated – constantly conversing, never connecting.

In 2010, Betts witnessed a couple spouting rote expressions of sadness about the Haitian earthquake while glued to their smartphones. This well-worn irony – globalised technological communication destroying the real thing – fuels Muswell Hill, whose insular oddballs spout solipsistic cross talk and non-sequiturs rather than engaging in empathetic dialogue.



■ Nicole Abraham and Annabel Bates picture: Boris Mitkov

The dislocation is so well observed that it becomes trying, particularly in Roger Mortimer and Deborah Edgington's ponderous first half. That's mainly set-up due to Betts placing the action "backstage" – in the kitchen, rather than at the dinner table. Conceptually, it's clever; dramatically, it's limiting. The play only kicks into high gear once everyone's assembled and the real fireworks begin.

Failed novelist Mat and conflicted adulteress Jess face stiff competition from their similarly damaged guests: the mentally unstable would-be radical (Ralph Aiken); co-dependent widow (Charlotte Pyke); deluded, relapsed addict

performer (Nicole Abraham); and her paramour, a married, middle-aged, washed-up luvvie (Gregory Cox) under constant pressure to make his students "somebody".

Betts astutely captures 21st-century arrested development and insecurity born of a need to prove our specialness, but uses people as props for his exploration. Pyke and Bates add flesh to somewhat skeletal roles, while Aiken, Cox and Abraham entertain in the explosive climax.

Impassioned critique of First World problems, but, like its subjects, stymied by a fundamental disconnect.

Until March 14.  
Marianka Swain

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