



The Elephant in the Room

Mary Brennan



Beauty, the smaller tent on the Meadows, is what you'd 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 nonetheless 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 clutzy and unstable on his pins as Gregory Arsenal's slapstick misadventures suggest? As for that unwanted husband (Yannick Thomas) – there's 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 doesn't 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's some slinky male double-work but the erotic charge is subtle rather than sleazy, while the finale – all four performers inter-twining 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.

EDINBURGH FESTIVALS Magazine



The Elephant in the Room

Lidia



The Elephant in the Room is a mesmerising blend of circus, dance and physical theatre merged with a little film noir. This intriguing circus show is hilarious and entertaining, with a fast paced and gripping narrative to keep you on edge.

The show is high energy from start to finish, featuring an incredible display of flips, lifts and tumbles as well as dance and slapstick comedy. The story is beautifully written, and performed with vigour and fantastic showmanship.

Featuring four larger than life characters, a set packed with intrigue and amazing music, the performance immediately has you hooked and wondering about the mysterious elephant in the room.

A breath-taking performance, this extravagantly fantastic show is a wonderful example of the genre and should definitely be on your must watch list.



The Elephant in the Room

David Doyle



Cirque Le Roux's noir circus theatre piece is stunning from its opening moments to its gasp-inducing finale. The show follows the inimitable Miss Betty (Lolita Costet) as John Barick (Yannick Thomas) pursues her, while also being courted by Mr. Chance (Philip Rosenberg), who seems as interested in the hapless butler, Bouchon (Gregory Arsenal), as he is in her. It's a tale that twists and turns, and which never stops surprising.

The ensemble, who perform magnificently together, utilise slapstick humour as well as acts of incredible physical skill to navigate through the tale and produce real moments of magic. The show constantly swerves between high-octane action and more sedate scenes that demonstrates the real breadth of talent on show. One of the most touching moments of the entire piece is a mirrored movement piece between Mr. Chance and Bouchon that shows real acrobatic skill and also real character depth. In fact one of the most striking things about the entire piece is how this is a real theatre piece with a fully realised plot and characters that use circus skills to help drive the show forward, but doesn't exclusively rely on it.

The most memorable aspect of the show is the finale performed by all the members of the ensemble on a Chinese pole. Over the course of the final moments of the show there are instances that are truly breathtaking. As the cast does the seemingly impossible with their bodies the audience is in the palm of their hands, hoping the action never ends, and when it does finally draw to a close they leap to their feet to deliver a rightly deserved standing ovation. A show that really ought to be seen before its time at the Fringe ends.

ThreeWeeks in Edinburgh



The Elephant in the Room

Lucy Diver



How do you measure a circus show? In gasps. And giggles. There were plenty of both here – and a standing ovation too. Often the missing element can be narrative: pretty pictures, but no story. Cirque Le Roux give us that, in a 1930s film noir love plot. Acrobatics represent fights, seduction techniques and lovemaking, in a deft balancing act between comic, sexy, tender and heartbreaking. Fumbling butler Bouchon, Gatsby-esque Mr Chance, desperate Mr Barick and much put-upon seductress Miss Betty – from these four, two couples and a death. The tension and passion rise, and the physical art gets better and better. Top-quality technical work, the hooks of romance, and a cultivated aesthetic – that’s what gets the gasps.

THE CIRCUS DIARIES



The Elephant in the Room

Katherine Kavenagh



International company Cirque Le Roux have produced the most complete fusion of narrative theatre and top flight circus skills ever to grace our shores in *The Elephant in the Room*, an exquisitely crafted whodunnit farce of tell-tale acrobatic excellence.

Monochrome regency decor that makes me think of a Malmaison hotel lobby subtly shifts as the show progresses, warming up as stakes intensify. Initial projected credits set the tone of an old classic movie and, although not ideally positioned against the flocked wallpaper and gilt framed oil-paintings, are still clear enough to introduce us to the cast.

Lolita Costet is the volatile Miss Betty – recently turned Mdm. Barick – just married, yet deeply unsatisfied with the situation. To what ends will she go to get her way? Husband John is played by a stern Yannick Thomas, who emanates unspoken mafia threat; Philip Rosenberg is an American stranger, determined to seduce at least one member of the party this evening; the butler is the bumbling stumbling (in the most elegantly honed way) Grégory

Arsenal. I want to say there is something John Cleese about his comic performance, but Cleese never had this exceptional physical acuity.

Everything about this show is tight, from the creative lighting design of Herve Dile (Royal de Luxe), to the musical compositions of Alexandra Streliski and the vocal composition around the text, using both French and English to great effect. Director Charlotte Saliou (credited in the show by her clown name Jackie Star) has drawn upon an array of cultural tropes and arranged them with an eagle's eye – I am pleased with myself for recognising a little rose adagio homage!

The acrobatics are deeply entrenched within the whole story-telling and characterisation, so a run down of specific technique seems inappropriate. But let me just say: 'four high'. There is also a huge amount of creativity involved in the choreography, especially in the ensemble Chinese pole work. The company are pushing the limits of everything that can be done with their technique, sliding and balancing into ensemble pictures as smoothly as sipping a glass of champagne.

There is sexuality, and a noir ending that are subtly enough to allow younger audience members into the show, and I am pleased to see the Albert & Friends youth company in the audience; the next generation of circus performers getting to see the heights of excellence in incomparable daring, skill and vision. And the eponymous elephant in the room? I have to admit, I'm unsure. Not that it matters. I wonder if it's sex... the undertones and overtones of one woman onstage with three men... Regardless of my uncertainty in that titular matter, I'm sure in saying this is a groundbreaking work of the highest quality.

THE STAGE



The Elephant in the Room

Nick Awde



Darkly decadent depiction of greed in high places couched in circus drama

In a sumptuous mansion during the decadent 1930s, a glamorous gold-digger plots to get rid of her new husband, a hoodlum in black tie desperate to impress his high society guests who include a libidinous American, all waited upon by a bumbling butler. Everyone knows that everyone else is out to grab something – sex, money, murder, even – but social niceties mean that they are never mentioned, hence the elephant in the room.

It's an excellent premise for the near non-verbal theatre of this darkly decadent piece from Canada's Cirque le Roux. In between the plots and subplots, circus skills and slapstick integrate with the plot – like a physical musical – replacing dialogue with sleight of hand, balancing duets on a sofa or desk, swivelling atop a tailor's dummy and an energetic sexual duet/duel between the American and the butler.

A powerful and exquisitely designed setpiece is the Tchaikovsky ballet quartet where the gold-digger is flung high into the air as two corps of frilled lamp shades join in the mayhem. Meanwhile, a steady soundtrack neatly sets the mood from Billie Holiday to Frank Sinatra.

Directed by Charlotte Saliou and choreographed by Brad Musgrove, the team of Gregory Arsenal, Lolita Costet, Philip Rosenberg and Yannick Thomas never once break out of character even when hamming it up for laughs or focusing on the climactic Chinese pole routine that justly earns a standing ovation.

With such an ambitious and complex show there are logically niggles – the narrative can be overwhelmed by the physical side, and the set acrobatic pieces are not always as polished as they should be. But this is an intelligently conceived, stylish crowdpleaser that also pushes theatrical boundaries.



The Elephant in the Room

Hannah Wright



The Elephant in the Room is a theatrical circus show presented by Cirque Le Roux and staged in Underbelly's new Circus Hub on The Meadows.

The show combines elements of classic film noir with breath-taking acrobatic feats and physical theatre. We are introduced to the characters in the style of a film with a projection rolling the credits, making for a very entertaining beginning, and showcasing how well this company blends styles together. There are only four members of the cast (Philip Rosenberg, Gregory Arsenal, Yannick Thomas and Lolita Costet) and they all excel at acting, dialogue and the physically demanding nature of the roles. They perform hand balancing, partner acrobatics and they all scale a Chinese pole that the performers rig themselves; they're multi-talented and the action is non-stop.

The production is slick and full of very funny moments. Slapstick movements are very well choreographed and each performer has an unbelievable control of their body, ensuring that each move is absolutely precise.

At times the plot is a little hard to follow as the action dissolves more into the surreal but with this level of precision and world-class circus, it's not something that matters. The success of this show is that it blends storytelling and circus together seamlessly. All the performers are very watchable as they embody film noir characters and the physical feats they perform are enough to make your jaw drop.



The Elephant in the Room

Tig Land



The cast of Cirque Le Roux have created something very special here. We discover quite quickly that it is, in essence, a love story within a love story – one told through composed, almost balletic circus skills. And the elephant in the room, though always present, shifts its focus from time to time.

We meet the fickle and rather heartless Miss Betty (Lolita Costet), who is pursued by the dashing John Barick (Yannick Thomas). But there is also another suitor in the wings, Mr Chance (Philip Rosenberg). He is indeed a Chance by name and chancer by nature, and it seems that he really can't make up his mind who he really wants to be with. Throw into the mix a nervous and people-pleasing butler, Gregory Arsenal (Jeune Bouchon), and you have a recipe for some real fun and games.

The only real flaw of this production is most evident in its early scenes: the action seems too frantic, and often there is simply too much happening on stage. But hang on in there, because it settles down, and there are some lovely elements to this humorous but touching story. It is a real ensemble piece, with each performer totally dependent on the skills and reliability of the others. I particularly admired Thomas, provider of the strong solid base which all the others balance, stand on and hang from – and look out for his extraordinarily lifelike gorilla impression too, because it will blow you away.

Bouchon's Chaplinesque antics held me mesmerised as he tripped and flung himself around the stage, his clowning skills and sense of comedic timing creating some pure moments of magic. Rosenberg proved just how versatile a tailor's dummy can be (when it's used imaginatively), and an old-time circus act involving all four members of the cast in constant motion was sheer brilliance. The fearless Costet allowed herself to be thrown around and caught in all kinds of different combinations, a display of trust and agility that was staggering to watch.

I absolutely loved the use of music, costume and lighting, all three adding so much to the enjoyment of the action on stage. A beautiful piano solo allowed for a sublime piece of acrobatic mirroring between Bouchon and Rosenberg, as they danced their way delicately amongst lampshades that were dangling gracefully from the roof.

But they saved the very best till last: a finale involving all four characters, and nothing else but a pole reaching from floor to ceiling. As the four acrobats climbed, balanced and hung, with only each other as their safety nets, I found myself gasping with anticipation at the apparent risk of what they were doing. It was a truly breathtaking way to end the show. Forget Billy Smart: this was circus with a difference, and if you want an evening where you will not fail to be impressed, then get yourself down to this big top this festival.