
SALTIMBANCO

When it was in town last year *Saltimbanco* was seen by more than 100,000 people. Its literal translation is Circus of the Sun and it is like no other circus you will ever see. What is truly amazing about this show is that it can't really be categorised. The sheer beauty and magical illusion dispel any kind of rationality and there is no choice but to let it cast you in its spell. Saltimbanco is Italian for street clown and is Cirque de Soleil's fifth production, the first to

tour Europe. The Royal Albert Hall was transformed again into a kaleidoscope of colour, the centre stage dominated by a halo of light seeping from a huge square shaped object whereupon the performers would appear as if a space ship had crashed through the roof and its weird and wonderful occupants were determined to dazzle and bewitch. The costumes, designed by Dominique Lemieux, were amazing: bright yellows, scarlets, blues, greens and Lycra of all the colours in between, with most of

the troupe wearing exaggerated masks and wigs. The spectacle was a futuristic fairytale which had travelled back in time to teach us a lesson in circus skills and with not an animal in sight. The troupe even spoke in its own strange alien language of squawks, squeals and laughter and this worked particularly well during the scenes of interaction with the audience and mime consequently became the most important method of communication.

Plans for the French Canadian group, who employ performers from over 21 countries, include a water show which is due to be previewed in Las Vegas in 1998. □

JULIE EAGLETON AT THE
ROYAL ALBERT HALL

BY CIRQUE DU SOLEIL

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
DIRECTOR
COMPOSER

GILLES STE-CROIX
FRANCO DRAGONE
RENE DUPRE

CHOREOGRAPHER
COSTUME DESIGNER
LIGHTING DESIGNER
SET DESIGNER
SOUND DESIGNER

DEBRA BROWN
DOMINIQUE LEMIEUX
LUC LAFORTUNE
MICHEL CRETE
FRANCOIS BERGERON

It is 100 years since Bram Stoker found his classic novel *Dracula*, back in 1897 and *Traffic Of The Stage* are celebrating this century with their faithful rendition of the story.

At this Hampstead theatre there is not much room to manoeuvre but Count Dracula's castle has been built with many nooks and crannies, doubling as exits, which also creates the illusion of space but it is still a tight squeeze.

Harry Meacher plays the Count, gaunt features topped off by a shock of snow white hair cloaked in black. His appearance from the shadows is always preceded by chilling cords and swirling smoke but he is hardly menacing. He has a beautiful speaking voice and I almost expected him to recite a soliloquy from Shakespeare, certainly not lunge at people's necks for his next supply of fresh, innocent blood. Alexandra

JULIE EAGLETON AT
PENTAMETER THEATRE

DRACULA

Brereton is disappointing as Mina Murray. She doesn't have much to do in the first half except support her friend, Lucy, but this carries through into the second half. There is no connection or eroticism between Dracula and her; considering she was the female lead her presence was hardly felt. There was no transition from the prim and proper Mina to the crazed woman cast under the spell of Dracula and, as a result, quite frankly one couldn't care less what happened to her. Making his professional stage debut, Michael Hoskinson gives a wonderful performance as Renfield. Bound in a straight jacket, he is the epitome

of restrained madness. A debut to be proud of.

Although the play sticks firmly to the book, there is no lovestory as in Coppola's film version. Here the Count is a tyrant and a misogynist who wants women without actually desiring them. The audience never sees any of the indecent acts carried out as lights suddenly dim or cloaks are arranged in such a way as to hide the assaults, so the imagination is left to run wild.

The original music works well, coupled with the use of lighting. It was a little too ambitious of the company, however, to try to recreate the story of Dracula. The piece was far too long and it didn't have the shocking dramatics needed to do the story justice. This is a visual, sweeping epic but on this stage the story stagnated. □

BY BRAM STOKER
ADAPTED BY JONATHAN RIGBY

DIRECTOR HARRY MEACHER
MUSIC PAUL BALMER
SET DESIGNER ANNA FAIRWEATHER, JIM FOX

CAST MICHAEL HOSKINSON, JAMES REYNARD, ANTONIA MICHAEL, NICHOLAS CHAMBERS, HARRY MEACHER, ANN WIDEN, GINA FETELSON, JAMES CLARSON, JAMES TUFFS, PAUL BALMER, ANNA FAIRWEATHER, JIM FOX, JOHN DALTON, RACHEL AHERTON, VICTOR FAIR, CLAUDIA ANDREI, JOHN COOPER

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