

Timber!



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Southbank Centre
Belvedere Road, London, SE1 8XX

Show booking until: 31 July 2013
Show Genre: Entertainment
Running Time: 90 minutes (no interval)
Age Recommendation: 8+

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The UK premiere of a joyous, log-balancing, wood-chucking, axe-juggling spectacular from a family of lumberjack circus-performers.

Blending circus with theatre, dance, live traditional music and the folklore of their native Quebec, Cirque Alfonse take the audience on a wild ride of gravity-defying acrobatics and thrilling tricks with metal saws, axes and logs from the family farm.

Including phenomenal feats of agility and strength, Timber! stars the whole family from 66-year-old granddad Alain to two-year-old grandson Arthur.

Founded in 2005, members of Cirque Alfonse have worked with some of the world's most renowned companies including Cirque du Soleil, Cirkus Cirkor and Les 7 Doigts de la Main.

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Feature Review - Celia Watson



I'll be honest: when I think of rustic Canadian wilderness, French banjo folksongs usually don't come to mind. But all that has changed after seeing Timber!, the Southbank Centre's current circus-style production. Hailing from Quebec and making their UK debut, Cirque Alfonse presents its own take on physical theatre by combining two of their undeniable loves: family and the forest.

We open to a wooden, dusty set and are met with a flurry of toe-tapping country songs, axe juggling, and jumpy dancing. It takes only a moment to realise that there will be very few words of English spoken throughout this performance, which in turn forces the audience to pay extra attention to the physical movements onstage. Not like that's difficult. A mix of sweeping acrobatics and thrilling stunts provides a satisfying spectacle that transcends any pre-show qualms. For a performance somewhat out of the typical box office label I was impressed by the quality of both the physical tricks and pumping energy onstage. The ensemble, composed of multi-generational members and friends of the Carabinier family, make a commendable effort to instil a friendly, feel-good notion in the audience.

Particular members shine, such as Julie Carabinier Lépine, the bouncy dancer and daughter of Alain Carabinier, the lovingly grumpy old man. Julie's off-stage boyfriend, Jonathan Casaubon, also boasts fierce promise. The strength of Casaubon's abilities are particularly evident in the masterful balance acts with his other male counterparts, most notably the powerful Antione Carabinier Lépine and hardy Matias Salmenaho. But of course, each performer is necessary for the hearty, often jovial nature of the routines.

The scenes feature an appropriate balance of daring, yet sometimes sensual, solo acts and thumping ensemble numbers. There are a few places in which the slapstick jokes with Alain and his outhouse can whittle down the enthusiasm of the audience, but this is forgivable as Timber! promotes itself as a family-friendly show. Some stunts may appear dull to serious gymnastics enthusiast, but for the common audience member they bring a pleasing dose of amazement. I was personally impressed by the inventive way in which the company manipulated forest logs into an acrobatic playground, and how effortlessly these wild elements blended with what can be seen as sterile equipment such as bungee ropes, swings, and trapezes. I do wonder what more the ensemble could have done with a bunch of logs had the show ran for longer than 90 minutes, but I gather that this may be a common predicament of many circus acts.

Nevertheless, Timber! went above my apprehensive expectations and gratefully reinforced how satisfyingly entertaining acrobatics shows can be. By the end of the performance, I was tapping my feet to every sprightly rhythm, breaking for pauses of a silly joke. The production impresses for the everyday theatregoer looking for mindless yet uplifting entertainment, particularly to please fickle family members. A bit like a wooden version of STOMP, the production is firm enough to crack a smile on any tough nut.

Celia Watson

















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