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Cirque Alfonse's Animal Review: Beasts of the Stage

The farm is having a good time!

Calf, cow, pig, chickens... it's a complete menagerie that Cirque Alfonse has invited on stage for its latest creation, *Animal*, a delightful agricultural fiesta where music and theatricality prevail over acrobatic prowess.

After juggling with axes in *Timber* and revisiting Quebec's religious heritage in *Tabarnak*, the Lanaudière circus troupe decided to set the scene for its new show on a farm. Better yet, the gang of Cirque Alfonse has chosen to build its acts around a gentleman-farmer character played with bonhomie by the patriarch of the clan, Alain Carabinier, 74 years old and always with a twinkle in his eye.

Whether he climbs to the top of a high mast carried by his son Antoine - without a harness or safety net - or smilingly stares at a bull (mechanical, of course), Alain Carabinier's presence alone reminds us that the circus is not necessarily just about muscles and a perfectly controlled body.

Madness, creative audacity and the bonds forged over the years can be just as important ingredients. And it is on these that Cirque Alfonse has chosen to bet with *Animal*.

Here, the craziness comes from the music, which takes a major place in the show. Revisited by musicians David Simard, Josianne Laporte and Guillaume Turcotte, traditional music (and its 'chansons à répondre') is transformed into irresistible and sometimes improbable funk where banjo and tuba are combined.

Animal is set in a crazy agricultural universe.

In this crazy universe, the five acrobats metamorphose into singers, dancers and puppeteers. The most incongruous props - milk cans, cowbells, tractor wheels and wheelbarrows - become the basis of humorous or poetic tableaux, including several acrobatic duets (the one composed by Julie Carabinier Lépine and Justine Méthé-Crozat is particularly successful). The circus numbers such as where a reclining acrobat twirls a female acrobat with his feet) are particularly impressive. Manipulative acts are also legion: pointed forks are thrown at each other, raw eggs are juggled, buckets full of grain are made part of a dance...

While this creation (presented in Montreal in its World Premiere) does not leave the audience in a cold sweat with death defying performances, it does offer numerous

acts that make you smile, with knowing winks to the audience and barely contained laughter from the acrobats.

The artists clearly enjoy being back on stage after this damn pandemic and the audience is quickly won over by their contagious energy.

No, not everything is perfected to the millimeter. Yes, there are missteps ... but the DNA of Cirque Alfonse has always been to privilege authenticity rather than acrobatic perfection. And *Animal* is without a doubt the most convincing example of this. It is also, it should be noted, the show of the troupe that is most suitable for a young audience.

After Montreal, this creation will be presented in the Magdalen Islands, then in Joliette, before going on tour, as soon as the pandemic allows it.