

## **Le Devoir** (Montréal Qc Canada)

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Circus Alfonse's "Animal" returns to the farm

The Montreal Complètement Cirque festival is "100% local" this year. And the Cirque Alfonse, that presented the premiere of Animal on Thursday, couldn't have embodied this reality better. The band of merry men from Saint-Alphonse-Rodriguez, in Lanaudière, set up their show in the middle of the countryside, among chickens, cows and bulls.

On the menu, there are songs... traditional songs interpreted and adapted in a rock style. There are acrobatic feats, too. But above all, there is an incredibly communicative joie de vivre in this evening that unfolds like a country vigil. Because it is still through humor that the Circus Alfonse distinguishes itself: the act of the three men juggling eggs on a moving board is particularly successful.

Authenticity is the watchword of Circus Alfonse, a family company that brings together Antoine Carabinier-Lépine, his sister Julie Carabinier-Lépine, her husband Jonathan Casaubon, and the patriarch of the clan, Alain Carabinier, who plays the role of veteran perfectly here, firmly seated in his pedal tractor.

At 74 years old, the grandfather makes a comeback on stage, and his band warmly welcomes him at the beginning of the show by singing the Quebec song Avoine, avoine. "When the man goes to sow his oats..." Geneviève Morin (Antoine's wife) being pregnant, has been replaced here by Justine Méthé-Crozat, who performs acrobatic duets with Julie, including one where they are both perched on milk cans.

It's not cutting edge acrobatics that you'll find here, but rather an atmosphere that's half traditional party and half funfair, somewhere between western and punk.

The Cirque Alfonse, that was born in a barn of their parents' house, has never had any other ambition than to be true to itself and its roots. Its first show, Timber, was inspired by lumber camps; the second, Barbu, by Louis Cyr-style strongmen and funfairs; the third, Tabarnak, delved into the religious world.

The troupe may have been seen around the world (Madonna is said to have attended one of their shows in London), but it is in its own history - and in ours - that it draws its inspiration. And the birth of Animal, twice postponed due to a pandemic, is no exception. If some Quebecers can forget their history despite the motto "Je me souviens" (I remember), the circus artists of Lanaudière are there to revive their memory.

Thanks to them, the Montréal Complètement Cirque festival was finally able to resume its invasion of the streets and theatres of Montréal.