

# Cirque Alfonse: Animal review

“Ridiculous, unadulterated fun”

[REVIEW: THE STAGE](#) (London UK) AUG 22, 2022 [UNDERBELLY CIRCUS HUB, EDINBURGH](#)



*Cirque Alfonse: Animal at Underbelly Circus Hub, Edinburgh. Photo: Ian Georgeson*

Québécois family circus elevates joyously silly, farmyard-themed show with refreshing inventiveness

Big top circus so often veers between a polarity of styles: presentations of sincere virtuosity and playful buffoonery. Québécois fringe stalwarts [Cirque Alfonse's](#) latest offering *Animal* is a strange creature in this landscape. Not a black sheep so much as an inflatable cow, if that ox was also a saxophone-playing, rhythmic gymnast. It's a wonderful, family-friendly hour of nonsense elevated by true originality, brazen nerve and a mechanical bull.

Rather than celebrate ostensibly more obvious animals (for example, an anthropomorphic contortionist leopard, or a gravity-defying lemur on trapeze), the Alfonse company instead embodies the inhabitants of an everyday farmyard. Has anyone previously looked at chickens being boxed-up for the abattoir and thought: "Aha, yes, a perfect topic for a juggling routine?" Alfonse have now, and it is pure, joyous stupidity.

There is a refreshing inventiveness here in both the narrative set up and the acts themselves. A perch-pole number becomes a bizarre ode-to-tractors dance routine. A juggling act that sees the company throwing weighty, oversized, metal cow bells overhead while balanced on milk churns feels genuinely dangerous. Less lethal but still risky is a balancing act atop a seesaw with real eggs. It maintains an authentic feeling of risk, even if the stakes are more a mouthful of raw egg rather than death from above.

This is circus with a brass section as the acrobat-musicians punctuate the action with upbeat, original French pop. The sharp result is part experimental tumbling-clown show, part novelty Eurovision entry and all ridiculous, unadulterated fun.

## **The Scotsman, Edimburg, Aug 18 2022**

### **Cirque Alfonse: Animal \*\*\*\*\***

#### *Underbelly's Circus Hub on the Meadows*

Since arriving like a brick through a window with Barbu in 2015, Cirque Alfonse has become a Fringe staple. Very much a family affair, the Quebecois company has a slightly anarchic approach to circus, and probably life, that sets it ever so slightly apart from the crowd. Animal may not have the same intensity as Barbu, but like their show Tabarnak before it, takes a theme and runs with it.

This time around, we're down on the farm and everything they lift, stand on or throw is related to animal husbandry. Milk churns, cowbells, wheelbarrows, feed buckets and even a mini tractor for the 70-year-old patriarch of the family, all come into play. At the core (quite literally in terms of their cast-iron stomach muscles) is a much-practised ability to lift and balance. Body towers on teeterboards, acrobatic balancing atop two milk churns, flips with multiple turns high in the air and a Chinese pole balanced on broad shoulders are just some of the farmyard antics.

Between these impressive feats, in true Alfonse style, there are moments of light relief. A large flock of plastic chickens is turned into juggling batons, three men take part in competitive egg juggling (with grandpa clearing up the inevitable mess) and a whole lot of clucking and wing flapping fills the gaps. All the while the band plays on, delivering catchy and uplifting original songs (in French) and, on occasion, playing and executing a circus skill simultaneously.

This close-knit circle of family and friends has been going for 17 years and, if the curtain call is anything to go by, its future is secure. Joining their family on stage, two children and a baby are individually lifted high in the air by one strong hand without a glimmer of fear. The next generation of Alfonse stars is on its way. **Kelly Apter**

## Divadelni-Noviny, Prague Aug 20 2022

The farm is upside down and the barn is upside down! In the slightly surreal story of a farmer, the chickens have teeth, the ducks are a little creepy and the cows make a lot of noise...

This is the description of the *Animal* show of the Canadian (Quebec) new circus troupe **Cirque Alfonse**. And it fits. It's similar to the Welsh **NoFit State Circus**, which I wrote about yesterday/ *here* /. Acrobatic numbers - mainly floor acrobatics here - and this time juggling, wrapped in a continuous flow of dance music, Irish dance reels supported by electric guitar and drums. But otherwise it is again a showcase of the skills of all the actors and actresses in various invented numbers, within the chosen theme supported by rural (farming) artefacts.

It is a typical new circus performance especially for children, who will enjoy various artificial (sometimes inflatable) animals, juggling with real eggs, buckets of grain or large cow bells. The performers jump and juggle on and with a large tractor tire, use wheelbarrows, wear broadcloths on their heads and boots on their feet, create various imaginative choreographies always with some artistic and content connection with life on the farm. It's happy, it's danceable, it's pop. The leader of the troupe is a sympathetic old man with a beard, apparently a former artist (he has one number on a pole, which is already carried by one of the performers on his shoulder), who manages everything either from a children's tractor, or by personally distributing and transporting props.

For my taste, the ensemble works too much with brutally artificial visual artefacts, both with the rubber chickens with which the actors juggle or make "farting" sounds, as well as with farm animal costumes (a mottled cow with a large udder) or a number with an artificial wild bull. But that does not in any way detract from the freshness and family (community) joy that radiates from all the actors and actresses all the time. And some of the numbers and objects are imaginative and funny (wheelbarrows and acrobatics on them, juggling and working with large milk cans, pleasantly lively dance and musical numbers).

If we compare the group to pop music, it's like new circus ABBA, ZZ Top or Greenhorns. They are decorated with zz-top stylization into raw bearded men and erotically attractive Abbese leggy women with high boots and are accompanied by Greenhorn comfort and family. But don't look for much more in the production.

The familial nature of the ensemble was underlined by the final thanksgiving, when all the actors (including the musicians) came on stage with their children and always performed a mini-number with them. And who wants to remember the ensemble and its poetics, he was a guest at Letní Letné in 2019, at that time with a show called *Tabarnak*

## Animal, Sabotage – Farm cabaret and imaginative reconstructions in the hands of acrobats

Every year Letní Letná brings foreign guests to the Czech audience. According to them, this event occupies a specific place in the world of new circus festivals: an attractive location in the middle of a park in the center of Prague and a warm audience; moreover, there is a certain coziness that creates an almost communal character. All of this is the reason why foreign guests like to come back to Letná so much, and it is no different for the ensembles Cirque Alfonse and NoFit State, which visited Prague again.

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Animal. Photo: František Ortmann.



Author **Barbora Truksová**

### Agricultural funk Animal

Quebec's charming bearded men Cirque Alfonse brought their farm show to the third visit of Letní Letná. The theme is not accidental, this family company comes from a farm in the village of Saint-Alphonse-Rodriguez, where the beginnings of their efforts took place in a barn. *Animal* doesn't offer bombastic effects, a wide variety of elements, and certainly not a deep (or any) story. On the other hand, it brings a farm cabaret at a frantic pace, accompanied by a stylized funky-folk band. Canadians simply have fun with the circus, and whoever joins their game will have fun too.

The basically simple scene, where the back plan consisted of a wall made of corrugated iron with a large fan, was supplemented with only a few props: large milk barrels, but also rubber animals, eggs, a tractor or cow bells. Farmers were also evoked by denim costumes, bell bottoms, and flannel shirts. All stylized and inspired by the world of the animal kingdom. We often don't even know who the characters are. Is it the playful farm staff? Or are they animals? The motifs of the daily routine are in some contrast with the ride that the acrobats start together with the musicians.



From the circus disciplines, in addition to juggling with eggs and pitchforks, the Canadians performed strength acrobatics with a strong emphasis on balance, using pyramids or riding on a giant tire. The highlight number (both in terms of creative processing and the built-up atmosphere, which had an almost sacred character to the sound of the bells) was the tossing of giant cow bells while standing on barrels and the final band of small acrobatic ascents on an electric bull, which even the oldest member of the ensemble, his almost an eighty-year-old principal.

Unfortunately, the entire performance was conceived from the front, so the experience of the individual artistic performances was somewhat reduced from the side sectors of the marquee. The acrobats directed their communication towards this part of the audience all the more intensively. However, the acrobatic stunts were noticeably less legible from the sides and it would be worth considering whether to choose a different venue in the case of a performance conceived in this way.

Is *Animal* by Cirque Alfonso a piece that I will still remember in a few years and need to discuss its individual details with friends? Most likely not. However, it struck me with its simplicity and comprehensive adherence to the chosen form, which at that moment washed away all other thoughts and worries.





### **Sabotage without dramaturgy**

While Cirque Alfonse is a family circus created by the snowball effect, the Welsh troupe NoFit State is an international group that has been operating for 50 years. Its members created a specific style that the visitors of Letní Letná could already see a few years ago in the spectacular performance *Bianco*.

Similar to then, in *Sabotage*, instead of a complete piece, we watch a band of individual acrobatic ascents, interspersed with usually comic fillers during the rebuilding period. The group is extremely diverse, it includes an artist with a growth anomaly (but with breathtaking strength), small and muscular acrobats, female acrobats taller than most men and those who, despite their immense elegance, would be considered too corpulent in the world of dance. Variety and diversity is what makes the circus world unique. And it was this that allowed the creators to include a large number of acrobatic disciplines in *Sabotage*. Aerial acrobatics is the most represented. We can see ascents on several types of bars, on scarves, various constructions, ropes, but also, for example, "hair hang", a hanging on the hair. You can also see couple acrobatics, juggling, and a great tightrope walker performance at the end of the show received great acclaim.



Sabotage. Photo: František Ortman.

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A specific feature of the ensemble is work with securing and weights during all reconstructions, but also vertical movement of props or artists. If an actor needs to be brought up, another must climb down the central structure and vice versa. Thanks to this, the entire performance becomes a living, moving organism, when you do not know whether you are looking at a technician, a musician, or an acrobat. This whole principle gives the creation of NoFit State a unique dynamic.

The Welsh group has among them exceptionally experienced acrobats who can cover the whole range of activities, so many of them join the live band by singing or playing musical instruments shortly after their performance. Nevertheless, I left feeling embarrassed. The main problem of *Sabotage* is the obvious absence of a dramaturg. The creators tried to cram everything possible into this show, so I felt like I was in the harrowing years of interwar Europe, stuck in New York's Studio 54, and I have no idea what's going on... The old saying is, too much is too much. it's too much. Too many disguises, too many numbers gradually coming together, too many conclusions.