

Daily Pilot

Breathing life into the traveling circus legacy

By Heather Youmans

2:46 PM PST, November 30, 2011

An audience from around Orange County and beyond congregated inside a circus tent pitched at the Irvine Barclay Theatre's Cheng Hall for a one-hour extravaganza featuring one man.

Surprisingly, there was never a dull moment.

Stand-alone showman Jamie Adkins gave himself his own drum roll during the Thanksgiving weekend in

"Circus Incognitus," which showcased the range of his mind-boggling circus talents that included pantomime, stunning tricks, juggling and acrobatics.

Adkins was as entertaining and engaging as a cast of 30 in a Broadway musical. His incredible showmanship held the audience's attention from start to finish and left onlookers wondering what he was going to do next.

In "Circus Incognitus," Adkins plays a clumsy character — a clown who is desperately trying to get his act together. Along the way, he stumbles and makes mistakes, but the audience loved it.

Behind their laughter lay a simple truth: No one wants to watch someone who is perfect. Audiences prefer characters who are flawed and quirky, and they thirst for the essence of an ordinary man and a performance that captures moments found in everyday life.

Adkins made the clumsy look easy. In a madness of organized chaos, he performed some astonishing tricks with such ease. But in reality, he was bluffing; the stumbling merely added to the suspense.

In the opening portion of the show, Adkins balanced a piece of paper on his nose for an extended period of time, which made audience members squeal with delight. But soon, those "oos and ahhs" were replaced with silence and dropped jaws as the tricks grew increasingly complicated.

"Le Grand Finale" featured the infamous tightrope walk with a twist. Adkins juggled and balanced on one foot — an unfathomable feat. And just when you thought he finally had regained his balance, he fell and saved himself by getting tangled in the rope.

During another highlight of the evening, Adkins selected volunteers from the audience and gave them each an orange to throw. He then put on a catcher's mask and held a metal fork in his mouth.

As the volunteers threw the oranges into left field, sometimes throwing the fruit off of the stage, Adkins tried to catch the oranges on the fork with stunning success.

Audience members were also left in a daze after the virtuoso performer walked on ladder stilts and even juggled six ping pong balls with his mouth. Looking around, you could see the mischievous look on children's faces, who were obviously getting some ideas. However, the tricks were not the only impressive part.

Adkins showed that he has impressive acting chops of his own. In the show, Adkins didn't speak much, but his little interjections were supported by spot-on physical comedy, which garnered an enthusiastic response from the audience. In addition, his improvisation skills and comedic timing reigned supreme.

Spectacle alone can wow an audience, but skillful acting works like glue putting all the pieces together, making true art.

"Circus Incognitus" breathed life into the legacy of traveling circuses. The production not only echoed an era, but brought the best of circuses to a contemporary audience.

ARTS & EVENTS

The Everyday Spectacular: Circus INcognitus



Jamie Adkins

YOU CAN GO ahead and laugh at Jamie Adkins; it won't bother him. In fact, the performer and star of "Circus INcognitus," which comes to the Kennedy Center this weekend, encourages it.

"I've done it since I was 16," Adkins said. "I was always doing tricks and getting applause, but I was really trying to get that laughter."

Adkins has devoted his life to juxtaposing the drama and theatrics of a circus with the grace and spontaneity of a street performance. He's done this through time with the Pickle Family Circus, Montreal's Cirque Eloize and "Typo," the first theatrical show he wrote. It all began when he saw his first street performances at age 13.

"There's 200 strangers breathing together, laughing together and applauding together, and he would pass his hat and disappear, and it's like it never happened," Adkins said of that experience. "Twenty-some years later, I've retained some of those ideals."

With "Circus INcognitus" — Adkins' second made-for-stage creation that uses a ladder, a piece of paper, a grape and a fork to create "circus numbers out of everyday objects" and encourages the idea of creative solutions — Adkins hopes to draw audiences of all ages.

"I think if people come to the show, they'll be surprised," Adkins said. "You bring your father and your child — all three generations — and they'd be ecstatic. And if you don't like the shows, I give out lemons and you can throw them at me."

Written by Express contributor Roxana Hadadi

Posted By Express at 12:00 AM on March 26, 2009

http://www.expressnightout.com/content/2009/03/the_everyday_spectacular_circus_performe.php