

REVIEWS

Female circus brims with worthiness, vigor and vulgarity

CIRCUS

Death — the Musical

Women's Circus, 62 Macauley Road, North Melbourne, opposite North Melbourne Football Ground, Thursday to Saturday until 3 December.

STEPHANIE BUNBURY

ANYTHING called the Women's Circus suggests more than a whiff of daunting worthiness. A hundred and twenty women of all shapes, sizes and experience learning feats of agility in the balmy warmth of togetherness. You might believe with all your heart that this is a Good Thing but still, somehow, find plenty of excuses for avoiding it.

Don't. The circus, which performs annually, certainly has a feel-good element. Each performance comes to a crescendo of warm fuzzies for the finale, when the performers come out in their raggle-taggle of multi-colored costumes, rip off the white caps that imprison their hair and wave with happily boosted self-esteem. The very ether breathes empowerment.

But there is nothing wrong with feeling good, especially at a circus. And while, for ill and plenty of good, there is a residue of raw amateurism in the performances, the show that precedes this moment of womanquake is circus as it should be: theatrically inventive, shot with moments of spectacle and surprise. *Death — the Musical*

The second half of the show was inside the building. It was more in the style of previous Women's Circus shows: a familiar cast of characters including the queenly oppressor (on stilts), the questing Perdita trying to find her double via cartwheels and rope tricks, and a pack of swinging, twisting bodies in recycled whitewear. Last year's crowd-pleaser, the massed baton-twirling act with firesticks, gets another guernsey. There were, I admit, some excessively earnest longueurs.

But there were also moments to make the kids, even great big ones who work for newspapers, gasp, such as the appearance of four huge Hounds of the Baskervilles with glowing red eyes. And whenever the lost female spirit grew a little too symbolic for comfort, you could always look at the excellent band, which spent the whole performance having far too good a time to be symbols of anything.

Donna Jackson, who puts all these women and their tights together, looms amazingly in my imagination: surely she must be an inspirational angel, supervixen or both at once. Certainly, she deserves congratulation.

Yes, the Women's Circus is worthy. It is a Good Thing. And you remember, once you're there and feeling good, that this is exactly the kind of Good Thing you believe in.



Spectacular and sharp: a cool dudette in the inventive Women's Circus jazzes up the old razor-blade trick.