

February 8th, 2008

THEATRE REVIEW

Circus Incognitus

Manitoba Theatre for Young People



3.5 out of 5

To Feb. 22

Tickets: \$13

JAMIE Adkins' one-man Cirque du Soleil act leaves young spectators talking to themselves.

At a school performance of *Circus Incognitus* staged at Manitoba Theatre for Young People this week, the Montreal-based acrobat/clown had students muttering out loud more than once, "How does it do that?" The grades 5 and 6 kids in attendance were marvelling at how he juggled ping pong balls by blowing them out of his mouth, balanced a sheet of paper on his nose and stilt-walked with a pair of ladders.

The Montreal-based American vaudevillian made his MTYP debut in 2006 with the screwball duet *Typo*. This time, the loose-limbed, swivel-hipped Adkins is on his own in *Circus Incognitus*, a Chaplinesque demonstration of physical comedy that charms while it astonishes. He balances precariously on a chair that seems to have a mind of its own, a not-so-tightrope and a ridiculously teeny-weeny bicycle.

Adkins' stage persona is that of a geek -- outfitted in flood pants and suspenders -- who is too shy to speak in public. Other than issuing a nervous laugh, he hardly says anything during the hour-long variety show and lets his physical prowess talk for him. Everyday items like a cardboard box, a chair and ping pong balls become sophisticated circus props for Adkins.

He invited some audience participation that wasn't as successful as it might have been due to the youngsters' wayward throwing abilities. Adkins passed out fruit to patrons and invited them to throw it at him from their seats in the hopes he could impale it with the fork he had sticking out of his mouth. Some of the participants couldn't reach him and others fired the fruit far over his head, prompting him for some inexplicable reason to don a catcher's mask. Eventually, he did manage to spear a large melon with the top of a cymbal.

The show works best when Adkins makes simple discoveries and through seeming improvisation comes up with a funny, new routine. At one point he tried to discard a crumpled piece of paper that suddenly bounced back off the floor at him and he began a series of tricks with balls.

Adkins wasn't at his best at this school show and needed a second attempt at some of his juggling and balancing feats. But his fallibility did nothing to take away from the enjoyment of *Circus Incognitus*.



Adkins is the strong, silent, silly and, at times, spectacular type in *Circus Incognitus*.