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London International Mime Festival 2013: Hans was Heiri, Barbican, review

Hans was Heiri, performed at the Barbican for London International Mime Festival 2013, showed the bright and brilliant face of modern mime, writes Daisy Bowie-Sell.

★★★★★



Hans Was Heiri, performed at the Barbican as part of London International Mime Festival 2013. Photo: Mario del Curto

Everything is wonky in this piece by European company Zimmerman & de Perrot, shown as part of this year's London International Mime Festival. Tables collapse, chairs have a mind of their own and door frames are turned on their side. The performers are wonky, too. They contort their bodies into the strangest of shapes, their arms and legs seem to dislocate, and they scuttle about the floor as if they are monsters from another planet.

This is no normal acrobatic **show**. There's not a leotard to be seen and you can forget the wheel of death (currently being employed down the road at Cirque du Soleil's Kooza) – think more the huge square of death. At the back of the stage is a box, split into four rooms, two atop two. The performers stand, bend, flop, hang and run all over it as the contraption turns round, sometimes slowly, sometimes frighteningly quickly.

Although there are moments guaranteed to make you gasp, this show is more about making you laugh. The seven performers are superb clowns, though there are no big shoes and red noses here. They fall about the set and into one another, they hang on things giggling and mumbling, and everything is performed with superb comic timing. There are several impressive set pieces – one of the women clambers in and out of a tiny box, effortlessly bending in and out of it at an amazing speed. A sequence where a group of five take on yoga lessons in one of the tiny box-rooms as it turns is also very funny. The show has not much of a narrative – it is simply made up of these moments where the actors bounce off one another and the set.

The whole thing is accompanied by a thumping and booming live soundtrack, performed by Dimitri de Perrot. The cast also sing rousing and haunting numbers that infuse everything with rhythm.

This, although not entirely silent, is the bright and brilliant face of modern mime. Drawing on age-old mime techniques, modern dance, acrobatics and good old-fashioned ways of making people laugh, the show is a raucous ball of fun.

Hans was Heiri is on at the Barbican until Jan 26. The London International Mime Festival runs at various venues until Jan 27. Details: mimelondon.com