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Theatre

Hans Was Heiri Barbican

★★★★☆

This London International Mime Festival show is by the young Swiss company Zimmermann & de Perrot, whose seven-strong cast's background encompasses circus, dance and music, while the piece as a whole is highly theatrical. But it doesn't matter how it's defined except as the kind of fizzy, rollickingly good entertainment that earned cheers on opening night.

The title suits its boisterous, off-the-wall humour. Lasting about 80 minutes, *Hans Was Heiri* was devised by Martin Zimmermann (the skinny, rodent-faced one in the shabby tux and grey fez), Dimitri de Perrot (a composer who moonlights as a DJ) and an international cast. Their free-wheeling, even wayward show plays with scale, dimension and, above all, expectations.

And it's more about character and incident than plot. First seen as beings half-human and half-object, the performers literally grow into their loony roles. For them, instability, disorientation and impulse seem the norm. The behaviour is unpredictable, unbridled. They cavort upon a stage dominated by a giant, sometimes revolving square divided into four rooms. This ingenious framing device is kitted out with trapdoors, plus a few bits of functional wooden furniture.

The actors are impressively giddy, gaga physical comics. A couple of times, for no apparent reason, the men indulge in short passages of yodel-like song. All of them climb into, out of or upon the square, or else hang elegantly or precariously off it. The ensemble's high-spirited skills overcome the show's helter-skelter dramaturgy and occasional excess. Is it trying to say something about individuality versus community? The message might just be that madness can be fun.

Donald Hutera

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