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Chouf Ouchouf – review

Queen Elizabeth Hall, London

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Judith Mackrell

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Exhilarating ... Chouf Ouchouf, by Groupe Acrobatique de Tanger. Photograph: Tristram Kenton for the Guardian

When the 12 members of Groupe Acrobatique de Tanger first come on stage, you get no sense of their extraordinary skills. Dressed in baggy tracksuits, their bodies are every kind of gangling, stocky and plump, and they mooch desultorily into view, a few of the men even kicking around a football.

Groupe Acrobatique de Tanger

Chouf Ouchouf

Hall for Cornwall,

Truro

On 28 and 29 April.

Box office:

01872 262466

[Then touring](#)

The image is more Moroccan backstreet than Cirque du Soleil. So when the acrobats suddenly strip off their tracksuits and explode into a joyous, catcalling, virtuoso display, the impact is all the more exhilarating. Clambering and shouldering into human pyramids; criss-crossing the stage in a dazzle of back flips and somersaults – these acrobats are physically the business.

Yet, as with their previous show, Taoub, the group go way beyond daredevilry into a charming, slightly surreal mode of storytelling that evokes scenes of their native Tangier. Directing team Zimmermann and De Perrot use the most basic of sets – a half-dozen, tall, movable boxes – to create images of alleyways, a souk, a night-time square. As the acrobats continue showing off their stunts, accompanied by sounds of motorbikes and yapping dogs, they are also joshing, flirting, and showing us their city

lives.

At times the staging is so viscerally real you almost feel the heat and smell the dust. But the set also prompts delicious visual gags: as the boxes shift position, acrobats appear as if by conjuring trick – one wearing a fez, another strumming a banjo, a third alighting on the top of a box, as if he has flown there. It takes a full moment to realise he has leapt from a concealed trampoline.

The effect is as simple as it is ingenious. That's the essence of this lovely show: creating magic out of nothing but human wit, daring and imagination.

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