

NEVER WORK WITH CHILDREN OR ANIMALS - unless of course you have a turkey that can foretell the future!!

GIFFORDS CIRCUS has such a turkey. They also have several horses, a pack of dogs, a goose that lays a golden egg ,a centaur that likes to play the clown and several hundred children packed in for the most fun you can have in a tent.

I went to the Oxford University Parks on Sunday afternoon to see Giffords 2014 Circus show called *The Thunders* which is touring Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. The inspiration for the show was a family holiday in Greece where Nell Gifford's children called the Greek ruins "The Thunders" after a thunderstorm one night. The show opens in a Greek temple and is hosted by the very funny Orpheus and ends with a Greek wedding dance. Nell is the founder of Giffords Circus with her husband Toti and they have been producing different Circus shows since 2000.

A circus isn't a circus without a clown and the star of the show for me was Tweedy. What I liked most about Tweedy was that when he made a mistake it genuinely looked like he was being clumsy and not rehearsed from a script. He tried to pour water over Orpheus's "boyfriend" while they were talking on a bench but every time he tried, he just got even more soaked himself and Orpheus kept falling off the bench at the same time! He really holds the show together. Tweedy has been clowning for twenty years and has received many comedy awards and will be appearing in Panto at the Everyman, Cheltenham this year. We explained to the stage manager before the show that as a WOAPA (West Oxfordshire Academy of Performing Arts) drama student I was doing an Arts Award so luckily I got to meet Tweedy backstage to take a photograph at the end. Tweedy was really cool and funny in person as well! The timing of his sketches went perfectly together with the music and the repetition as Orpheus kept falling off the bench and really added some slapstick humour.



Me with "Tweedy" the Clown



The Circus Ring

This show was extremely well done, the talent of these performers was just amazing and it really made you wonder how long it took them to train to create such great performances. The on stage orchestra added a West-End like atmosphere and the lighting was dramatic and essential to the overall show. The music and the lighting in the show were really good because they added character to all the performances and the acts. The lighting would sometimes flash to the beat of the music and would change the mood. When sinister moments began, the lighting went dark and blue and eerie music played.

In this story based on ancient Greece, Hades, the evil God places a curse on the world and gives everyone black spots until the curse is lifted. They had a really good dog display with two gorgeous spotted Dalmatians doing tricks and then two small crossbred terriers, who were rescued from a Dog Home, jumped on the back of a spotted pony!

The Greek costumes for the performers were so perfectly designed and included tunics and gladiator sandals. Medusa's costume was a slimy snake-like morph suit and her hair was wrapped in a bun at the top with creepy snakes tied to her head. Medusa came through the curtains and as a contortionist, started twisting her body round like she was actually made of elastic. She climbed onto a hoop hung in the air and did some painful looking stunts. Near the end of the show, a HUGE wooden Trojan horse came rolling through the curtains while some sinister music played. The sinister music then changed to a bright funny tune and these strange laughing acrobats all ran out and started playing on a giant see saw. One man stood on one end of the see saw while two others jumped on the other end so that the first man went somersaulting into the air and onto the shoulders of the other two! The acrobatics took my breath away!

The audience was made up mostly of young children as the circus aims for, but as the circus is so sophisticated it appeals to adults as well. *Thunders* was directed by Cal McCrystal who has directed many West End hits and even appeared in *Spider Man 2*.

Giffords also has a travelling restaurant and we looked inside one of the tents and saw an adorable little restaurant that apparently serves amazing food! They also sell candy floss, sweets and mugs in another painted gypsy caravan.

To conclude my review, I thought that it was a really fun day out for all the family. There was nothing about it that I didn't like and I would definitely love to go again.



One of the Gifford Circus caravans.

Ben Cosgrove
West Oxfordshire Academy of Performing Arts
Bronze Arts Award
Part B
Review of a performance.