

# THE STAGE LONDON, UK

## Cirque Alfonse: Animal review

“Ridiculous, unadulterated fun”

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UNDERBELLY CIRCUS HUB, EDINBURGH



*Cirque Alfonse: Animal at Underbelly Circus Hub, Edinburgh. Photo: Ian Georgeson*

Québécois family circus elevates joyously silly, farmyard-themed show with refreshing inventiveness

Big top circus so often veers between a polarity of styles: presentations of sincere virtuosity and playful buffoonery. Québécois fringe stalwarts [Cirque Alfonse's](#) latest offering *Animal* is a strange creature in this landscape. Not a black sheep so much as an inflatable cow, if that ox was also a saxophone-playing, rhythmic gymnast.

It's a wonderful, family-friendly hour of nonsense elevated by true originality, brazen nerve and a mechanical bull. Rather than celebrate ostensibly more obvious animals (for example, an anthropomorphic contortionist leopard, or a gravity-defying lemur on trapeze), the Alfonse company instead embodies the inhabitants of an everyday farmyard. Has anyone previously looked at chickens being boxed-up for the abattoir and thought: "Aha, yes, a perfect topic for a juggling routine?" Alfonse have now, and it is pure, joyous stupidity.

There is a refreshing inventiveness here in both the narrative set up and the acts themselves. A perch-pole number becomes a bizarre ode-to-tractors dance routine. A juggling act that sees the company throwing weighty, oversized, metal cow bells overhead while balanced on milk churns feels genuinely dangerous. Less lethal but still risky is a balancing act atop a seesaw with real eggs. It maintains an authentic feeling of risk, even if the stakes are more a mouthful of raw egg rather than death from above.

This is circus with a brass section as the acrobat-musicians punctuate the action with upbeat, original French pop. The sharp result is part experimental tumbling-clown show, part novelty Eurovision entry and all ridiculous, unadulterated fun.

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