

Reviews

High Heels and Red Noses

Created by Keith Nelson and Stephanie Monseu. Dirs. Barbara Karger and Michael Preston. With ensemble cast. Palace of Variety (see *Off-Off Broadway*).



CLOWN AND DIRTY Bindlestiff Family Cirkus crosses striptease with slapstick.

No matter how many times you watch Keith Nelson's lisping, louche alter ego Mr. Pennygraft drop a two-foot sword down his throat, your own gorge will inevitably rise in vicarious unease. Conversely, a smile is the only reaction to Tanya Gagne (a.k.a. "Feather"), a charming and well-muscled aerialist whose act mixes male drag, stripping and trapeze tricks. Thus the buttons for pleasure and fear are impishly and alternately pushed by the tricksters of the Bindlestiff Family Cirkus, who for nearly a decade have injected raunch and hipster humor into the dormant world of vaudeville.

The group's latest revue of acrobatics, sword swallowing and juggling is *High Heels and Red Noses*, whose initial (but soon forgotten) conceit is that Kinko the Clown (Nelson) discovers a stiletto-heeled red shoe in a trash can. Somehow, his find unleashes the sequined forces of burlesque and racy comedy, personified by Svetlana (Jennifer McGowan), a Russian hula hoop expert who demands spanking as punishment for dropping a hoop, and the Slapinski Brothers (Adam Kuchler and Matthew Morgan), two hilarious clowns who interrupt their juggling and balancing acts to flirt with audience members. Although past Bindlestiff shows pushed the edge of tastelessness, *High Heels* is surprisingly restrained and sweet, its naughtiness never becoming sleazy. I'd almost recommend taking your grandmother for the show's nostalgia value.—*David Cote*