

November 19, 2008

## Unhappy Workers Show the Tricks of the Trade

By [LAWRENCE VAN GELDER](#)

If a production line cranked out adjectives to appraise “Birdhouse Factory,” the results would certainly include exceptional, evocative, eye-catching, ear-catching and, to keep the list short, engrossingly entertaining.

This roughly 90-minute, intermissionless show, intended for audiences 4 and older and presented under the direction of its creator, Chris Lashua, as a production of Cirque Mechanics at the New Victory Theater, provides a refreshing reinterpretation of traditional circus.

Its highly skilled clowning, mime, acrobatics and contortion draw on the sociology of the factory workplace and the visual history created by [Charlie Chaplin](#) in “Modern Times,” the contraptions of Rube Goldberg and the industry murals of [Diego Rivera](#).

Inside a looming gray gate evocative of entrances to gloomy mill-town factories of the 1920s and '30s in the north of England stands the H Rosebud plant. There, intermittent flashes of hellish red lighting and occasional bursts of steam, as well as pulsing beats of music and energetic dancing, accompany the antics of an irrepressible work force supervised by a humorless and pompous black-suited, bowler-hatted, umbrella- and attaché-case-carrying boss (Patrick McGuire) who just happens to be a superb juggler.

Yes, comrades, anarchy may be in the air, and oppressive management may contribute to a closing of the factory. But, hey, in the midst of all the wheels, gears, pipes, spools, industrial light fixtures, wooden walls and metal frameworks, “Birdhouse Factory” — the name given to the plant when it reopens under enlightened and zany new management (the splendid clown Jesse Dryden) — is first and foremost a nifty, high-spirited circus.

Cheers and applause erupt throughout the show. Sagiv Ben Binyamim and Elisabeth Carpenter perform high-peril acrobatics aboard a rope and swinging lamp; he returns with Aloysia Gavre, the show’s choreographer, for a remarkable combination of acrobatics and tango atop an industrial-size spool.

Khongorzul Tsevenoidov, whose spine seems made of rubber, is the troupe’s amazing contortionist. Russ Stark, Wes Hatfield and Michael Redinger amuse everyone as they leap from wall to trampoline and back again, doing a variety of flips and flops along the way. There is plenty more.

Intelligently conceived and expertly executed (more e’s from the production line), “Birdhouse Factory” is, in a word, excellent.

*“Birdhouse Factory” runs through Dec. 14 at the New Victory Theater, 229 West 42nd Street, Manhattan, [newvictory.org](http://newvictory.org); (646) 223-3010.*