

Theatre

AURELIA'S ORATORIO

Lyric Hammersmith

LONDON ★★★★★

As artistic pedigrees go, they don't come much better than Aurélia Thierrée's. The playwright Eugene O'Neill was her great-grandfather, Charlie Chaplin her grandfather and her parents, Victoria Thierrée Chaplin and Jean-Baptiste Thierrée, created the celebrated *Le Cirque Imaginaire* in the Seventies (in which a four-year-old Aurélia starred as a walking suitcase), which later became *Le Cirque Invisible*.

Now a grown-up Aurélia Thierrée takes centre stage in her own show, directed by her mother, which has returned to the Lyric following a sell-out run last year. *Aurélia's Oratorio* is a 70-minute surreal spectacle, combining physical theatre, comedy, magic and dance, all set to a quirky soundtrack of Gallic crooning, Gypsy jazz rhythms and jaunty accordions.

The first glimpse of Thierrée comes in the shape of a disembodied, elegant hand, wielding a cigarette as it pokes out of a chest of drawers. It is followed by more limbs, which protrude from drawers in physically impossible combinations. The offbeat comic timing and

acrobatics of this first trick set the tone for the rest of the show, which sees the flexible and tireless Thierrée swing from trapezes made of coat hangers and scale the curtains.

We are introduced to her topsy-turvy universe, where ice creams burn, shoes hang on hat racks and an alarm clock trills when it is time to sleep. Particularly successful and funny is Thierrée's human interpretation of a Punch and Judy show, watched by an audience of applauding puppets. The dancer Jaime Martinez provides amusing interludes as he waltzes with coats and dresses that have taken on a life of their own.

It is all touching and funny and saved from twee-ness by Thierrée's know- ingness. She pushes the boundaries of "normal" theatre, playing with the fabric of the performance space as the proscenium arch wobbles and sways and the red-velvet curtains become characters in their own right, as they coyly fall in love with one another.

In the age of the all-conquering Cirque du Soleil, which grew out of the "new circus" pioneered by Thierrée's parents, the pyrotechnic- and harness-free trickery of *Aurélia's Oratorio* provides a refreshing reminder that the best circus tricks are timeless.

Alice Jones

To 17 June (0870 0500 511)