

OBITER

THE MOSCOW STATE CIRCUS. The Grand Parade of Artistes, with which the Moscow State Circus opened, entered the ring out of step and clad in the kind of costume which even a provincial pantomime would think a little sub-standard; the muscular ladies with artificial flowers pinned to bad permanent waves, the muscular gentlemen with nervous smiles nailed to their faces made one's heart sink at the prospect to come. Which simply went to prove what a mistake it is to judge from appearances, for nearly the whole performance turned out to be prodigiously lively and almost as exhilarating as the Chinese People's Theatre which, in fact, it does a little resemble.

It started with something original in circuses if not in strip cartoons, for they launched a space-ship into the air above our defenceless heads—a little tactlessly, one could not help feeling, for after all V.I.S were something we knew too much about—and from this in no time dangled Sinovska and Lisin who circumnavigated the ring at speed hanging upside down from inadequate supports such as ankles or teeth. Hardly had we dried our palms after the strain than we saw jugglers rotating flaming torches on their feet, tough young men jumping on to the backs of square T'ang-ish horses at improbable angles—as always in England the one who made the mistakes got the loudest applause—four girls who did horribly dangerous things on the trapeze and two splendid acrobats in pale lilac. The best thing of all, though, was the all-male high-wire acrobatic troupe; each member of the Tsovkra of Daghestan had the same long dark hair and wide cheek-bones, and they danced and leapt and hurled themselves on to each other's shoulders, all many feet up in the air and all with incomparable grace and gusto; one was breathless with enjoyment. In between these and the other acts, and sometimes indeed during them, the clowns wandered about; the entrancing Oleg Popov whom Paris took straight to her heart, and his two companions Mozal and Sawitch, all three not only uncommonly funny but unusually endearing too. Mr Popov could hardly be better: small, young, hardly made-up at all, with long flopping flaxen hair and wide blue eyes, he is the ultimate Simpleton, the enduring Youngest Brother who wins hands down in the end. Resourceful, intelligent and courteous, brilliantly co-ordinated in juggling and acrobatics, he yet has those moments of sudden pathos which every great clown needs. The other two, one large and curly, the other small and smooth and neither looking at all as one had imagined Russians ever could look, engage in a wide easy non-intellectual slapstick which works up to a wonderful climax with a

boxing match in which Popov referees; at his peril, it may be said.

The second half of the performance is devoted to what is called *The Circus of Bears*, in which a number of charming animals do almost all the tricks which the humans have performed in the first half, with an engaging geniality and an off-hand poise which is irresistible. In addition, they also ride bicycles, scooters and even motor-cycles, climb ladders and walk about arm-in-arm with Mr Filatov (*not the eye-specialist*), who is their tutor, one feels, more than their trainer. Lucky Princess Anne to have been given Nikki, if he is likely to grow up into just such another.

MARYVONNE BUTCHER

SIXTY YEARS OF CINEMA. The Cinema can seem the most ephemeral of arts: its achievements could be destroyed altogether in a very few minutes and even its masterpieces are a façade for every sort of device and improvisation. It is appropriate, then, that the exhibition sponsored by *The Observer* to celebrate the sixtieth birthday of films should itself be so engagingly impermanent. Messrs Hamptons' placid showrooms in Trafalgar Square, so long the home of comfortable armchairs and sensible carpets, have been transformed into the very image of the Cinema's febrile genius. Richard Buckle, who directed the Diaghilev exhibition, has gathered a team of artists and designers whose use of plaster, wire and coloured cut-outs exactly evokes the evolution of the Cinema from its peep-show days to the elaborate studio sets of a present-day production.

The entrance hall is decorated by sculptures by a young Polish artist, Astrid Zydower, on the theme of a 'film studio invaded by angels'. This improbable event—the fun, Mr Buckle says, is as essential to his exhibition as the instruction—prepares one for a series of fantasies which, while treating the Cinema's history seriously, at the same time exploits its amazing capacity for extravagance. The designs for the individual rooms are brilliantly contrived: Jean Hugo has given to the French room the proper quality of elegance and wit, Osbert Lancaster provides the mordant commentary for the section on animated cartoons, and David Evans' huge photo-montage design exactly fits early Hollywood, with the famous stars (Valentino, Chaplin, Mary Pickford) seen in their own homes against a neo-Spanish patio of the period. The exhibition's last room is a shadow theatre, designed by John Piper, where the visitor ends—as he began—by looking at the shadows cast by his fellow. And that after all is what the Cinema does.

While the heavier aspects of the Cinema are by no means ignored, it is refreshing that the *Observer* exhibition makes no attempt to persuade us of the social importance of the Cinema. It does not compete with the