

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large. The press release for the 136th edition of Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey urges us to forget what we thought we knew. About the circus, that is, because it has been redefined. I have seen more circuses than I can possibly remember. Big ones, small ones and the greatest show on earth many, many times. In one way or another I've loved them all.

However, I left Scope on opening night of the show in Norfolk with a feeling of great sadness. Most of the theatrical values that define the circus were missing. There is little pageantry, spectacle, suspense, excitement, derring-do, comedy or fun. The creative team has done what many Broadway directors and choreographers do these days when they discover they have a weak show. They up the decibels of sound to painful levels and let the computers go wild with flashing lights. They try to trick and deceive us. But the show remains vapid at its core. And so it is here. The circus is gone, it's no more. It's been replaced by a vaudeville show and a not very good one at that. I

guess it's " high-tech" and "cutting-edge" all right, but its messy, poorly organized and totally lacking in imagination. Producer Kenneth Feld and daughter Nicole engaged some big-gun talent to put on their new show but they don't get much bang for their bucks.

Kenneth Feld and his father before him have devoted their lives to the traditional circus. Time brings changes in tastes. Entertainment entrepreneurs for the masses must be sensitive to their audiences' desires. This production certainly reflects an attempt to do just that. It also makes you think Mr. Feld is finally giving in to the animal rights folks who don't like animals in circuses. The number of beasts is vastly reduced. One also has a feeling that the bottom line, the dollar sign, was a factor in this conception. There is a trimmed budget feeling to everything except the lighting and the sound. The Vegas type extravagance of days of yore is not to be seen. These concerns of the producer are understandable. It's the skill with which the changes are executed that matters.

The new performing space is like a thrust stage with audience on three sides. There is a 24 foot video screen over head. It looks much smaller in cavernous Scope. Only one act appears at a time. Many are too

small to be main ring attractions or go on too long. There is lots of forced audience participation that you will love if you like reality TV. Even the thrilling Cossacks daring acts lose tension because of big pauses from entrance to exit of each turn dictated by the stage design.

The TV screen is intended to bring the audience into the action. Occasionally you do get a fascinating glimpse of a tense face, but most of the time I found it distracting. There are sequences of talking elephants that are extremely tedious. I saw no one laughing at these and similar antics. The clowns are chaotic without focus or direction. The transitions from act to act are slow and boring.

It's interesting to note that the show stopper of the evening was the old tried and true act of guys on motorcycles riding in the steel sphere at death defying speeds. It was the one time during the whole show children of all ages cheered and applauded with genuine excitement. This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening