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## Petit Mal

### At the Nuffield Theatre, Southampton

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**For some time now, circus performers have been leaving animal acts behind to create shows that fuse traditional physical skills with all the ambitions of modern drama.**

With Petit Mal, Race Horse Company, from Finland and here beginning a British tour, use trampolines, a Chinese pole, break-dancing, daredevil acrobatics and kick-boxing to dazzle the audience with their physical ability.

But in showing us what th

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ey can do they also build mood and atmosphere. The show opens in an urban wasteland of car tyres, chains and building-site junk.

Three young men play-fight and test each other out as they compete to show off their bravado.

Everything is turned into equipment to be mastered and used to bring off a brilliant display of tricks.

This aggressive playground is soon reshaped by the anarchic imagination of the performers to become increasingly surreal.

It would be the worst kind of spoiler to tell you just how the show transforms. Suffice it to say that Donald Duck and a blow-up shark are involved.

There is a lot of humour; dark at the beginning, but becoming more and more bonkers as this constantly surprising show progresses.

Even at its most daft, the comedy is always far too cool to be called mere clowning.

And these three guys are the essence of cool.

*Until tonight.*