



Feral circus spectacular sets scene for festival

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Feral dancers and acrobats ran amok through picnicking crowds to clear the way for a giant circus wheel doing bog laps around the Supreme Court Gardens last night.

The Perth International Arts Festival opened with fireworks and a raucous theatrical bang from Spanish troupe La Fura dels Baus in the midst of an estimated audience of 10,000 people.

The mood was one of a post-industrial tribal gathering as performers encircled the crowd, pounding on 44-gallon drums and waving burning torches.

Rushing into the throng, they seized a man seemingly at random, stripped him to the waist and daubed him in paint as if preparing him for ritual sacrifice.

He was strapped to wings in an aerial rig and soared over the crowd like Icarus, coming to ground to lead a mechanical charge through the crowd as punkish attendants threw water and flour bombs in the air.

It culminated with an eye-popping sequence of more than 50 performers dancing to the techno music soundtrack like marionettes suspended from a crane 70m above the ground.

The evening began with the traditional burning of a grass tree in a Welcome to Country ceremony from Nyoongar elders.

La Fura dels Baus is among 1000 artists from Australia and overseas appearing in the three-week festival, which ends on March 1.

Antony and the Johnsons kicked off the music program last night and theatre productions *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and *Les Sept Planches de la Ruse* open tonight.



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Tribal performance: The festival opened with a circus twist. Picture: Michael Wilson