ARTS AT THE CIRCUS

Even outside the arena it was obvious that this was no ordinary Boston Garden show. Maybe it was the circus music on the sound system that gave it away. Or maybe it was the voice which kept interrupting to announce that “cotton candy candy is delicious and fun for the whole family.” Whatever, The Circus was in town, and Barnum would have been proud.

The show started off with a bang, or more precisely, with “Ladies and Gentlemen and children of all ages,” a bang, a puff of smoke and the Pink Panther? The Pink Panther? Yes, Virginia, the Pink Panther.

Ringling Brothers has adopted a cartoon character. I suppose, as my program says, he is the perfect circus clown. And the show girls do look cute in little pink ears. But it seems sacrilegious, this mixture of fantasies. It’s almost as inconceivable as giving THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH a bad review.

The first display was the Urias Troupe in “The Globe of Death.” The globe is a 16 foot diameter metal mesh sphere within which — by virtue of acrobatic prowess, nerves of steel and inertia — two motorcyclists chase one another at “blinding speeds of up to 60 miles an hour.” The act is truly impressive, and was well produced and performed.

The Urias troupe was followed by a tumbling display, then three rings full of animal acts. Animal acts are rarely spine-tingling, and these were no exception. Kings one and two contained baboons and chimpanzees respectively, who made up for their lack of ferocity with an excess of cuteness. In the third ring, Mark Oliver Gebel presented goats.

According to my program there has never before been an act using trained goats. There may be a reason for this. The time and effort required to train any animal is substantial, and the goats’ performance was without fault. The family’s talent was further made evident by a three-ring horse act presented by Gunther Gebel-Williams (Mark’s father), Sylvi, and Tina Gebel. However, somehow goats are just not glamorous.

Glamor was on its way, however, thanks to three aerial acrobatic acts; Satin, The Fancouri Duo, and Miss Lisa. While all three were equally death-defying, and as breathtaking as anything I saw in the Olympics, it was Satin that stole the show. Satin’s two performers (Denise Aubrey and Pamela Hernandez) are not only brilliant acrobats, they also have a wonderfully choreographed act and an awareness of each other’s bodies. Many performers lacked. Some of the other acts seemed to be going through their paces like Gebel-Williams’ horses. Aubrey and Hernandez had two of the few smiles which did not fade with the spotlight.

Two other shining stars were the Carrillo Brothers, a high wire act from Colombia. The team’s antics on the wire prompted the announcer’s stage-whispered expressions of awe. While it was obvious that the floor below could at any moment be flattened with ex-circus performer, it looked like the Carrillo Brothers’ hardest task was to keep from making it all look too easy.

Gunther Gebel-Williams suffered from a similar handicap. He is reputed to have required more than 500 stitches during his career as an animal trainer. Nevertheless, his tigers looked more cranky than fierce.

Last but not least, there were the clowns. What can you say about clowns? Whether juggling, unicycling, tumbling, breakdancing, being harassed by trained dogs, or just getting children to laugh, they were wonderful.

Even the cotton candy wasn’t too bad.