

The Clyde Beatty - Cole Bros. 1961 Program

By Eric Beheim



[Editor's Note: This is the seventh in a series of articles on actual circus music programs and the first one by Eric Beheim on the music used by Clyde Beatty- Cole Bros. Circus. A collector of audio tapes of actual circus performances, Eric's hobby includes analyzing those tapes and identifying the tunes played for each of the acts. Eric and his wife live in San Diego, and he often calls on Windjammers VP Don Covington (WJU #119) for assistance.]

I first met William "Boom Boom" Browning in 1967 when I played in the band for the 17th Annual Aladdin Temple Shrine Circus in the State Fairgrounds Coliseum in Columbus, Ohio.

That year, Izzy Cervone was the bandleader and "Boom Boom" was his drummer.



William "Boom Boom" Browning and Izzy Cervone. 1967 Photo by Eric Beheim

At that time "Boom Boom" was living in the Columbus area and was working as a demonstration drummer/salesman for the Slingerland Drum Company. Learning of my interest in circus music, he was kind enough to let me copy some of his 1/4-inch reel-to-reel performance tapes, including those from the years when he led the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus Band. My favorite from among the Beatty-Cole tapes was one that was made on November 1, 1961 during a performance in Orlando, Florida.

The Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus first went on the road in 1959. During its early years, it was owned by Frank McClosky, Walter Kernan, Jerry Collins and Randolph Calhoun. (Clyde Beatty himself was not an owner.)

In the early 1960s, when many truck show circus "bands" consisted of only 2 or 3 players, the Beatty-Cole show carried an 8-piece band of first-class musicians.

Appearing primarily in the Eastern United States, the show moved on a fleet of 32 semi-trucks and used a big top that could seat 4,800 patrons.

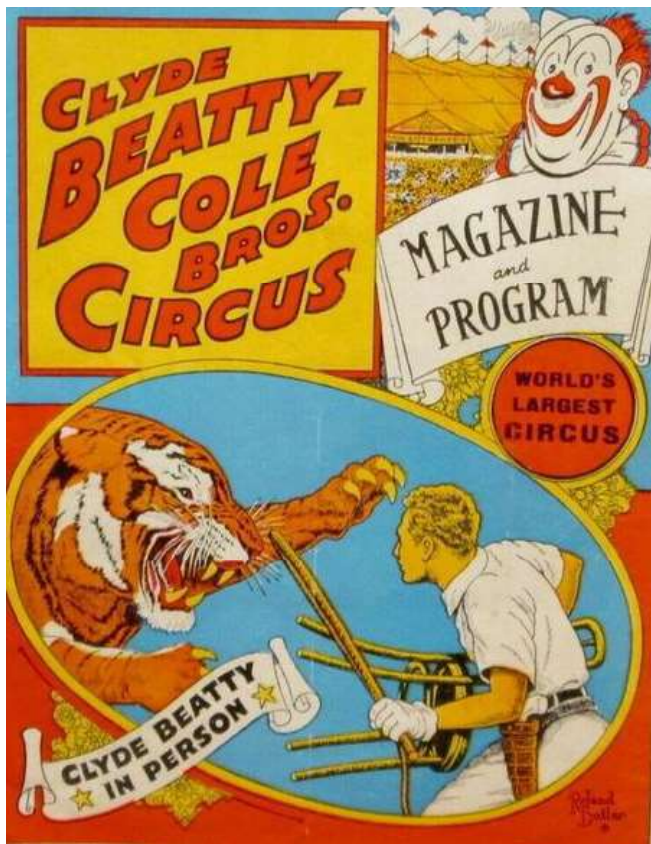
Thanks to good organization and an experienced and dedicated staff, Beatty-Cole quickly became a major player in the circus industry. Those circus fans whose memories go back to the early 1960s remember it as being a beautiful sight when set up on a lot, with its white tents (new canvas was purchased each year) and its brightly painted and well-maintained equipment.

Beatty-Cole bandleaders over the years included Ray Aguilar, Ramon Escorcia, Charlie Schlarbaum, Jimmy Ille and Charlie Bertini. (For more information on the Beatty-Cole Circus Band, see Charles Bennett, Jr.'s article "Fifty Years by the Bandstand: The Traveling Circus Bands" that appeared in the February 2008 issue of *Circus Fanfare*.)

Beginning in 1960, the Beatty-Cole band was led by its drummer William "Boom Boom" Browning. In addition to serving as band leader, "Boom Boom" also handled the inside ticket exchange booth before the performances and drove the truck that carried the bandstand and Beatty's steel "Cats" arena. In later seasons he also served as the show's equestrian director/announcer while still playing the drums and leading the band.

Early in the 1961 season, noted CFA member Bill Hall was invited to sit on the bandstand during a Beatty-Cole Memorial Day weekend performance in Philadelphia. During that performance, "Boom Boom's" band consisted of Mike Carli, Robert Danks and Tom Nappli, trumpets; Mike Smith first trombone and arranger, Jack Evans second trombone, Roy Gardner baritone & bass trombone, and Tommy Comstock on organ. That day, the show gave four performances in order to accommodate all the people that had showed up to see the circus!

Hall later wrote an article titled "A View from Boom-Boom's Bandstand" that appeared in the December 1961 issue of *The White Tops*. In that article, he gives the running order of the acts and lists most of the music that was played during the performance he attended. This article was reprinted in *Circus Fanfare*, Vol. 36, No. 3 - June 20, 2006. A year later, Hall wrote another "Boom-Boom's Bandstand" article for *White Tops*, and that one was reprinted in *Circus Fanfare*, Vol 35 No. 4 - August 20, 2005.



1961 Program cover by Roland Butler

By the time the Beatty-Cole show played Orlando on November 1st, 1961, the running order of the program had changed. Some acts were no longer with the show and some of the music used in Philadelphia had been changed. While most of the acts appearing in Orlando can be identified by their music, others cannot. Following are the music titles Don Covington (WJU #119) and I were able to identify:

Overture - *Barnum & Bailey's Favorite* (King)

Display No. 1 - *The Circus King* (Duble), *Never on Sunday* (Hatzidakis), unidentified

Display No. 2 featured Clyde Beatty's Wild Animal Act with this music: *Special Beatty Fanfare*, *William Tell Storm Music* (Rossini), *Burma Patrol* (King), *Bolero* (Ravel), *Caravan Club* (King), *The Breeze and I* (Lecuona), *March from "The Love for Three Oranges"* (Prokofiev), *The Breeze and I* (reprise), *High Speed**, *Misirlou* (Demetriades), *The Big Cage Galop* (King)

*The short chaser *High Speed* came from an old 1930's radio commercial for gasoline and was always played after the roll-over tiger had performed. When and how it ended up as part of Beatty's music is anyone's guess.

Clyde Beatty's contract with the Beatty-Cole show was unique in the circus world. He was paid \$1,500 a week to present his act and another \$500 a week for the use of his name. (\$2,000 in 1961 is equal to over \$16,893 in today's



Beatty-Cole Circus Midway and Main Entrance

dollars!) In addition, the show paid all expenses associated with his act including food and veterinary bills for the animals, bedding for the cages, the .38 caliber smokeless blanks that were used during the performances, his whips (which were imported from Germany), new sets of wardrobe for each season, and the salaries for as many as 6 cage hands. The show also paid for a new steel arena in 1960.

There were other perks as well. Every year the show provided Beatty with a brand-new white Cadillac for his personal use, with all gas, oil and maintenance costs included. Every other year, the show provided him with a new 33-foot Airstream trailer for his personal use. Since Beatty did not eat in the show's cookhouse, the show reimbursed him for all of his restaurant receipts.

Display No. 3 - For the Clown walkaround the band played *Won't You come Home* Bill Bailey (Cannon)

Display No. 4 - Dogs Act. *This Could Be the Start of Something Big* (Allen), *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World* (Rodgers), *Anna in Cuba*, *If You were the Only Girl in the World* (Ayer), *Poor Butterfly* (Hubbell), *The Lady in Red* (Wrubel), *Walking My Baby Back Home* (Ahlert), *Swanee* (Gershwin).

For its Philadelphia stand, Beatty-Cole would typically hire a few top name acts such as the Wallendas and the Hannefords to "beef up" its performance. In 1961 Bill Hall reported seeing Victor Julian's celebrated dog act there. For those of you too young to remember Julian's act, it consisted of small dogs wearing different costumes and walking on their hind legs down a runway, accompanied by music appropriate to the costumes. The dog act that appeared in Orlando uses all different music, so it probably wasn't the same act that appeared in Philadelphia.

Display No. 5 - Bob Top & Lauren High Platform Roller Skating's act was performed to *Copa Cabana* (Walters). According to Bill Hall's article, Bob Top was also the show's assistant equestrian director during the 1961 season.



Display No. 13 - Elephant Act. *Olympia Hippodrome* (Alexander), *The Waltz You Saved for Me* (King-Flindt), *Rock-a-bye Baby* (Traditional), *On the Square* (Panella), *Hearse Song*, *Abdullah* (King), *Cachita* (Marin), *Mambo Jumbo* (Prado), *The Merry-Go-Round Broke Down* (Friend), *Quality Plus* (Jewell), *London Bridge is Falling Down* (Traditional), *Bravura* (Duble), *Grand March from "Aida"* (Verdi), *Royal Degree* (English), *Lohengrin Entrance Music* (Wagner), *Knights of the Road* (Orlik).

Display No. 6 - Ballet Egyptian (Luigini), *Baubles, Bangles and Beads* (Wright-Forrest-Borodin). The pseudo-Oriental music used for this display suggests that it might have featured exotic animals such as camels or baboons.

Display No. 7 - Unidentified jazz number, Muskrat Ramble (Ory), *I've Got Rhythm* (Gershwin).

Display No. 8 - Clown Army Gag with *You're in the Army Now* (Jones), *Tiger Rag* (Baquet).

Display No. 9 - Galasso Finger Stand Equilibrist included *Fanfare*, unidentified, *Tonight We Love* (Tchaikovsky-Martin), *Ebb Tide* (Maxwell), *Serenade from "The Student Prince"* (Romberg).

Display No. 10 - Aerial Ballet with *Sophisticated Lady* (Ellington), *Look for a Star* (Anthony), *Till There was You* (Willson), *Moonlight on the Ganges* (played up-tempo for the spin) (Ewing), *Sophisticated Lady* (reprise), *Giannina Mia from "The Firefly"* (Friml), *Comedown Music*, *You Got to Have Heart* (Adler).

Giannina Mia was the signature music for La Norma, the Danish trapeze star who was featured in this display. The song *Look for a Star* is from the 1960 English film *Circus of Horrors* that featured acts from the Billy Smart Circus. Used throughout the film during the circus sequences, *Look for a Star* became a hit pop recording in Great Britain and later in the United States.

Display No. 11: Clowns. *Kentucky Sunrise* (King).

Display No. 12 - Luis Munpoz, Tightwire. *Fanfare**, *Another Opening, Another Show* (Porter), *Dancero* (Hayman), *Ticket-a-Tasket* (traditional), unidentified, unidentified, *Darktown Strutter's Ball* (Brooks), *Espana Cani* (Narro), *Espana Cani Fanfare*.

*The fanfare that opened this act was later used by Bill Pruyt to introduce Ringling-Barnum specs during the Irvin Feld era.

During the Elephant Act, which lasted less than 6 minutes, the music changes occur in rapid succession one after another.

Display No. 14: Everything's Coming Up Roses (Styne), unidentified, *Who?* (Kern).

Display No. 15 - Clowns. *The Billboard March* (Klohr).

Display No. 16: Chinatown My Chinatown (Schwartz), *Limehouse Blues* (Braham).

This display most likely featured Ola Ming, hair suspension artist. During the Philadelphia engagement, she had been in one of the side rings during the Galazzo finger stand equilibrist display. "Boom Boom" referred to her as "Our Tokyo Rose."

Display No. 17 - Huberto Weber Slide for Life. *Fanfare*, *Walkup Music*, *Fanfare*. The Walkup Music used in Orlando is quite similar to the special "walkup" music that Merle Evans prepared for Harold Alzana's wire act and might even be that same number.

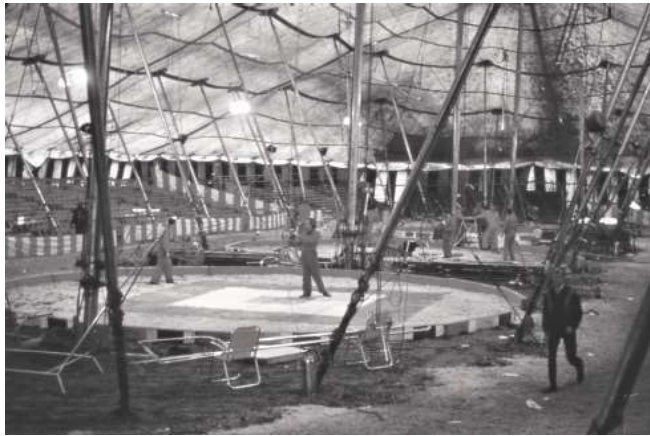
Display No. 18 - Clown Washer-Woman Gag. *White Heat*

Display No. 19 - Flying Trapeze. *Fanfare*, *Under the Big Top* (Lauder), *The Sleeping Beauty Waltz* (Tchaikovsky), *Belle of the Ball* (Anderson), *You are Love from "Showboat"* (Kern), *Great Day* (Youmans). *You are Love* was arranged to synchronize perfectly with the passing leap that concluded this act.

Display No. 20 - Clowns. *Broadway One Step* (King).

Display No. 21 - Captain Astronaut Human Cannon Ball. Shot from the mouth of a canon, Luis Munoz traveled 220 feet into a net. Introduction, *French National Defile March* (Turlet), *Tannhauser* (Wagner), (post-landing) *Fanfare*.

Exit Music - There's No Business Like Show Business (Berlin).



Between shows shot of the Beatty-Cole Big Top

Post-script -

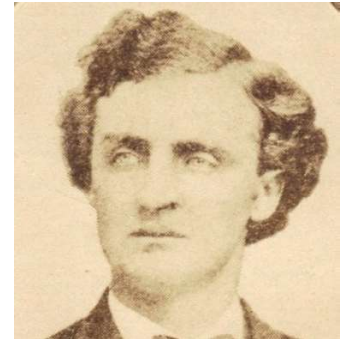
I would like to thank Roger Smith, wild animal trainer, steel arena historian and a member of Clyde Beatty's "cat crew" for sharing his memories of Clyde Beatty and the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus as it was during the early 1960s.

One of Roger's jobs with Beatty was working the tunnel door, a critical position for a cat act since it involves letting the cats in and out in a specific order. His instructions were not to watch the cats but rather Beatty's eyes for any commands for their entrances and exits. Later, while presenting lions and tigers for Hubert Castle in 1972 and 1973, Roger worked in Clyde Beatty's last arena.

After Clyde Beatty's death in 1965, his steel arena was sold to Dave Hoover, who later sold it to Hubert Castle. In 2004, Clyde Beatty's name was dropped from the show's title and it became simply Cole Bros. Circus.



Cole Bros. was founded by **William Washington Cole** in 1884, premiering as "W.W. Cole's New Colossal Shows".



As of 2015, it could legitimately claim being America's oldest, continuously operating under-the-big-top show.

However, after 132 years of providing circus entertainment using varying "Cole" names, the Cole Bros. Circus ceased touring following the 2015 Season. The show was not only a victim of an explosion of competing entertainment choices, but also the debate over the care and use of captive animals.

The Cole Bros. organization still maintains a Facebook presence and many hope there will be a rebirth in the future.



Windjammers Center Ring Concert in the Cole Bros. Big Top on July 15, 2015.

Photo by Paul Gutheil

When Windjammers Unlimited held their Summer Meet in 2015 in conjunction with the World Circus Summit at the Big E Expo Center in West Springfield, MA, the Cole Bros. Circus was present on the lot and held several circus performances as part of the Summit events. Windjammers played a Center Ring Concert prior to the Wednesday, July 15th evening show. This turned out to be the final season of the COLE BROS. CIRCUS.

William “Boom Boom” Browning & His 1961 Clyde Beatty - Cole Bros. Circus Band



1961 CB-CB Circus Band. Photo from Buster Bailey Collection

Beginning in 1960, the Clyde Beatty - Cole Bros. Circus band was led by its drummer William “Boom Boom” Browning, a well-known trouper who had played in Merle Evans’ under-canvas Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus band as well as in a number of other first-rate circus bands.

In 1961, “Boom Boom” used a drum set consisting of four various sized drums and two cymbals, all of which had been custom-made for him by George Way Drums, Inc. of Elkhart, Indiana. (The only other set like it was used by Ringling’s drummer “Red” Floyd.)

“Boom Boom” Browning became an early member of Windjammers Unlimited and, when his schedule permitted, attended meets and conventions as a percussionist and to talk about his circus experiences. He served a term as a WJU Trustee, starting in 1976.

Born William Reed Browning, Jr. on March 16, 1925 in Wichita Falls, TX, he died April 22, 1996 as a result of an automobile accident in Grinnell, IA, while traveling on business as a sales representative for the Slingerland Drum Company.



William “Boom Boom” Browning. 1967 Photo by Eric Beheim

The circus is the only ageless delight you can buy for money. It's the only spectacle I know that, while you watch it, gives the quality of a truly happy dream.

Ernest Hemingway