

## 1968 Musical Program from the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus

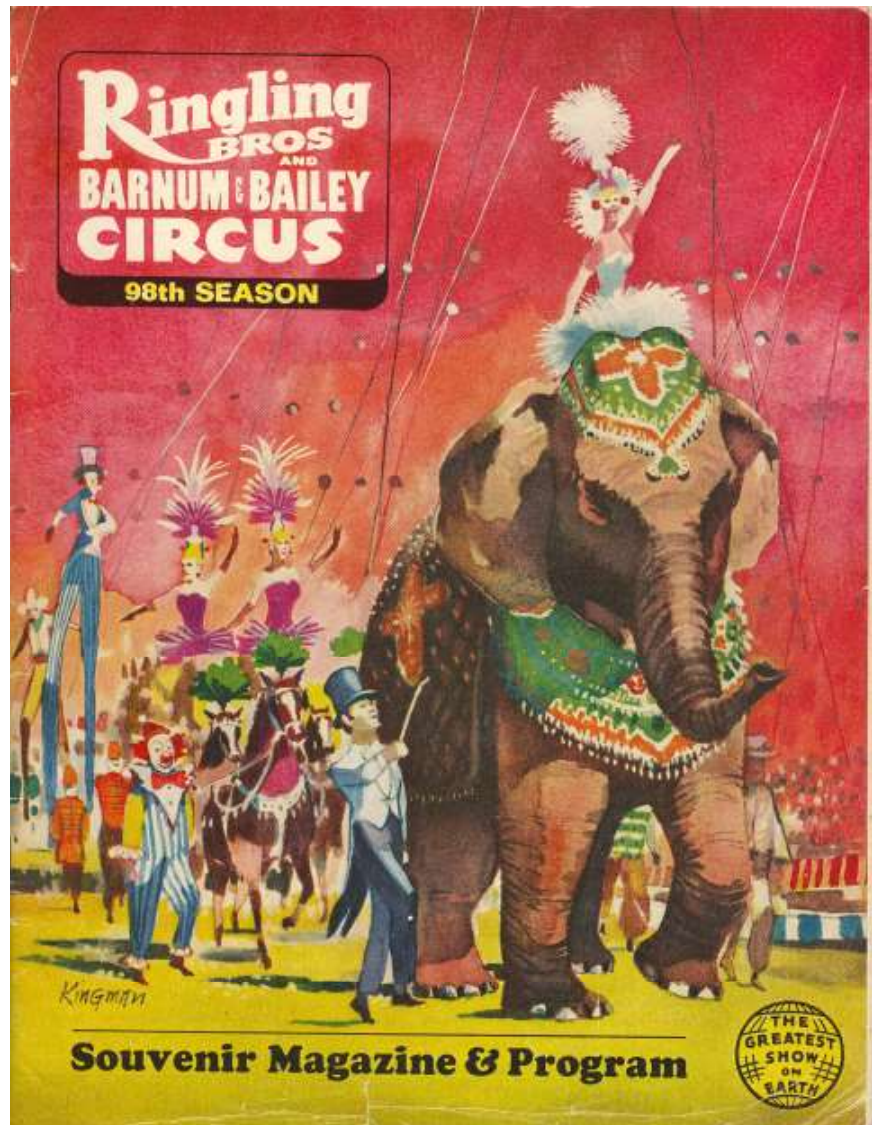
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[Editors Note: All photos this article from Eric Beheim, unless noted. Eric can be reached by e-mail at [cinephonic@aol.com](mailto:cinephonic@aol.com)]

*My earlier series on the Ringling-Barnum musical programs for the years 1969 through 1984 was an attempt to set down for the record some comments and observations about the music that was used by the Circus during the years when Irvin Feld had creative control over the performance. That series began with the 99th Edition Red Unit that first toured in 1969. Even though the venerable Merle Evans was still the Circus' musical director, the musical program that year began to take on a new and different character as Irvin Feld began assuming greater control over performance. (In his book Big Top Boss - John Ringling North and The Circus, author David Lewis Hammarstrom implies that Evans' decision to retire at the end of 1969 was due to Feld's "meddling" in his work.)*

*In contrast to 1969, the Circus' 1968 Edition provides a fine example of what a typical Merle Evans musical program was like during the 1960s when John Ringling North's creative staff was still in charge of the performance. Ironically, when the show opened that year, it was already under Feld control. However, the actual transfer of ownership had not occurred until November 11, 1967, which would have been much too close to the new edition's opening date for Irvin Feld to have had much influence on the performance. In fact, as part of the sales agreement, North was still credited as producer in the souvenir program, and Harold Ronk continued to say, "John Ringling North welcomes you" during the opening announcement.*

*Today, over 40 years later, memories of the 1968 Edition's musical program have begun to fade with the passage of time. Most of the musicians who played the music have either retired or passed on to "the big lot," taking with them valuable, first-hand knowledge. The following overview - actually a "prequel"*



*to my earlier series - is intended to set down some comments and observations about the music that was played when the Circus appeared in San Diego that year. It also provides a starting point from which to track the changes that would begin to occur the following year under Irvin Feld's management.*

*Certainly there are others who can expand upon the information presented here, and it is this writer's hope that they will come forth and add to our knowledge about Ringling's 1968 musical program.*

Assembling a circus musical program is a unique art form not unlike creating a mosaic, where the artist works with pieces of all sizes, shapes and colors and fits them together to create a composite design that is unique and aesthetically pleasing. Just as a mosaic

reflects the style of the artist who created it, so too does a circus musical program reflect the style of the person who assembled it. Even though they might contain many of the same selections, the musical programs assembled for Ringling by Izzy Cervone, Merle Evans, and Bill Pruyn all had different styles that were unique to that particular musical director.

The 1968 musical program was clearly reflective of Merle Evans' style-- in 1969 this would not be the case, as Evans was all-too-often obliged to use music that had been selected by others.

Today, economic considerations and changing attitudes on the part of circus producers as to what constitutes "show music" have eliminated the type of musical program described below. They have also eliminated the need for the



*Previous Page: Ringling's 1968 souvenir magazine and program was typical of those that the show had offered in previous years. Beginning in 1969, it would begin to evolve into a lavish, full-color publication that featured color photos of the performance along with old-time circus artwork.*

*Photo Left: As befitting his stature as a living circus legend, Merle Evans was given a full-page article in the program that told about his career and his job as circus bandleader.*

special talent that is required to assemble the musical "smorgasbord" that was typical of an old-time, traditional circus musical program. With the passage of time, this talent, like the old-time circus itself, is in danger of being lost to posterity.

In 1968, it had been 12 years since Ringling had last appeared under canvas. Merle Evans had left the show at the end of the 1955 season and had been replaced by Izzy Cervone. (It was Izzy's nephew Jack Cervone who had led the band during that very last performance under the big top on July 16, 1956.)

After working for several large indoor circus producers for 5 years, Merle Evans rejoined the show as musical director in 1961 when the Circus was once again traveling on its own special train. At that time, Ringling was still using a more-or-less traditional wind band consisting of trumpets, trombones, woodwinds, a tuba, drums and an electric organ.

As was the case with ice shows and many big city Shrine circuses, the Ringling show only carried a "nucleus" group of 3 musicians and would hire the rest of the players through the Musicians Union Local in each town where it appeared. The size of the bands varied from city to city, depending upon a particular Local's requirement for the minimum number of players that the Circus had to hire. In some cities, the band might have 30 or more players in order to meet a Local's minimum.

Having to make due with a different "pick up" band in each new town resulted in some compromises in selecting the

music. Many of the arrangements were ones that had been published for high school marching bands and/or stage bands. Traditional circus numbers (written by the likes of Karl King, Russell Alexander, Fred Jewell, etc.) were usually limited to the more familiar ones that Evans had recorded over the years. The special orchestrations prepared for the production numbers were serviceable, but not overly complex or imaginative.

By the time the show appeared in San Diego, the running order of the acts was somewhat different from that indicated in the printed program.

**Display #1** "On With the Show" was billed as "a Parade of Beauteous Ringmistresses in Traditional Red Coats and Silk Hats" and was used to open the performance and allow late-comers to find their seats. This was somewhat of a departure from previous years, when the performance opened with only a band fanfare and an announcement from Harold Ronk before going immediately into the first display, usually three rings of wild and/or exotic animals. To his credit, Irvin Feld would later expand this opening into a flashy mini-spec that concluded with an elephant long mount (on the Blue Unit) or (on the Red Unit) Gunther Gebel-Williams coming into the arena riding in a chariot, doing Roman post riding on two or more horses, or riding on an elephant with an uncaged tiger.

In 1968, the opening was still a modest affair and was accompanied by a medley that included *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, fragments from *The Greatest Show on Earth* movie theme, *The Most*

*Beautiful Girl in the World* and *The Circus on Parade* (both from the 1930s musical *Jumbo*), *I Love a Parade*, and a short theme (attributed to William "Bill" Pruyn) that, in a jazz arrangement, would later be used as an opener on both the Red and Blue units under the title *It's Circus Time*.

**Display #2** offered three rings of mixed animals with a pony drill in the center ring. The music consisted of *The Cantonians*, *Pahjama*, *Royal Bridesmaids* and *Excelsior Galop*.

**Display #3** "The Ringling Charivari" was accompanied by the galops *Circus Echoes* and *Winter Sports*.

**Display #4** featured the Hergotti Troupe performing a "Death-Defying Whirling Exhibit" using what looked like a cluster of three sway poles. In addition to special material brought with them from Europe, their music included *In the Hall of the Mountain King* from Grieg's *Peer Gynt*.

**Display #6** was a 3-ring juggling display featuring Ugo Garrido in the center ring. The music was a special arrangement of mambo music that Evans would later include in the concert of circus music he conducted at the Midwest Band Clinic held in Chicago in late December 1968.

**Display #7** was a Clown number that provided Evans with an opportunity to program *Kentucky Sunrise*, a number he had recorded with the under-canvas Ringling band.

**Display #8** was a three-ring display featuring a risley act, a bar act, and a trampoline troupe. In addition to some fast Latin music, the music included another old standby *Copa Cabana*.

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**Display #9** "Race Course Rarity" was a clown number that the souvenir program described as "Three Horse-Men compete in the Great Florida Fedora Steak (sic) Race." The music included *Pony Boy* and *Sunshine Galop*.

**Display #10** featured three rings of bareback riders who worked to a medley of fast, but unfamiliar Hungarian music. The act concluded with *Galop Go*.

**Display #11** was the aerial ballet for 1968 "Winter Wonderland." In 1962, the Mills Bros. Circus had used this same title for its aerial ballet. The music score included a swing arrangement of *Skaters' Waltz*, *Winter, On a Wonderful Day Like Today*, *Winter Wonderland*, *Love Makes the World Go Round*, and *Fascination*.

**Display #12** was a center ring liberty horse act that worked to *Symphonia March*, *Champaign Waltz*, *Ringling Bros. Grand Entry*, *Americans We* (Fillmore) and *The Big Cage Galop*.

**Display #13** "Whirlwinds on Wheels" featured 3 rings of bicycle troupes reflecting a Broadway influence—including opening music from *Mame*; *That's Entertainment* and *It's a Small World* from the musical *Gypsy*.

**Display #14** (Lou Jacobs miniature auto) used no music, which gave the bandsmen a few moments of rest.

**Although John Ringling North's photo was still prominently featured in the souvenir program, the Felds saw to it that they received the lion's share of the coverage as part of their campaign to establish themselves as "the first family of the circus."**



**Display #15** "Wondrous Wire Wizards – The Incomparable Wire Ballet from Budapest" used *Among the Roses* and *Offenbach's Can-Can*.

**Display #16** was another clown number accompanied by *The Walking Frog*.

**Display #17** offered a 3-ring presentation of trained dogs featuring Stephenson's Dogs in the center ring. The music they worked to included *I'll*

*Always be Irish* (from the Disney film *The Happiest Millionaire*), *Half-a Six Pence* (from the British musical of the same name), *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines*, *Cabaret*, and *Homestretch Galop*.

**Display #18** music was selected to match Ingeborg Rhodin's center ring presentation of dressage riders, which used pseudo American Indian wardrobe. The "Indian music" that accompanied this display included *Passing of the Red Man* (Karl King), *Dagger Dance* (Victor Herbert), *Indian Summer* (Victor Herbert) *Rose-Marie* and *Totem Tom-Tom* (both from Friml's operetta *Rose-Marie*) and a reprise of *Passing of the Red Man*.

**Display #19** "The Comics Come to Life," three clowns dressed like Popeye, Olive Oyl and Baby Sweet-pea made their way leisurely around the hippodrome track while the band vamped *I'm Popeye the Sailor Man* for what seemed like an eternity. Despite being one of the weakest clown routines of all time, the "Popeye" walk-around was used almost continuously on the Ringling show during the 1960s. In 1968, it appears to have been used to stall for time while the spec was being lined up.

**Display #20** "The Inauguration Ball." According to photos in the souvenir program, the big spec that closed the first half of the performance had costumes suggesting a Ruritanian or fairy tale theme. It is quite possible that it was originally conceived as "The Coronation Ball" (as in Prince Charming's Coronation Ball.) The music score seems to bear this out. Many of the selections are of the European ballroom variety, with frequent quotations from Meyerbeer's *The Coronation March*. However, 1968 was a Presidential election year, and apparently someone decided at the last minute that it would be more appropriate to call the spec "The Inauguration Ball." The music score included the above-mentioned *Coronation March*, *Belle of the Ball*, *More* (from the movie *Mondo Cane*), *Waves of the Danube* and the waltz from the operetta *Sari*.

**Intermission/ Entr'acte:** Fans of the Cecil B. DeMille film *The Greatest Show on Earth* immediately recognized this

number as the music heard when the circus paraded through downtown Sarasota after the big train wreck sequence. It was, in fact, published under the title *Standby March*.

**Display #21** (Spanish web): *Alzana Walk-up Music* followed on manuscript with a European sounding slow blues.

**Display #22** (Big Cats) In his autobiography *Tiger, Tiger*, Charly Baumann makes it clear that he had definite ideas as to the type of music he felt was best suited for his tiger act. His preferences did not include the more traditional material that Merle Evans had used earlier for Trevor Bale's tiger act. Baumann's music in 1968 represents a sort of compromise between his ideas and Evans': *Serenade for Lovers* (Jackie Gleason's old theme song), *Quanto Quanto*, *Patricia*, Oscar Straus' *Vilja-Lied* (used when several tigers walked to special pedestals and pivoted around in unison), *Caravan* (played at a slow tempo) *The Sheik of Araby*, and *Walsenburg Galop*. The following year, Bill Pruyn completely revised Baumann's music. This new material must have met with Charly's approval, since most of it would be played for his act almost until he retired from performing.

**Display #23** "Horse and Tiger" First appearing on the Ringling show in 1966, the Althoffs' horseback riding tiger offered American audiences an animal act that had not been seen in this country for many years. (The following year, Gunther Gebel-Williams' combining together of tigers and elephants would cause an even greater sensation.)

By 1968, the act was being presented by Evy Althoff, wife of horse trainer Franz Althoff. According to some circus authorities, Evy had been a professional model in Germany and had had no wild animal handling experience prior to her marriage to Althoff. (Charly Baumann would always be close at hand whenever she presented this act.)

The music consisted of special material that had come with the Althoffs from Europe and which had been played for their act since 1966. (Merle Evans would later include this music in his concert at the Midwest Band Clinic in Chicago.)

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**Display #24** Clown wedding used a bouncy hit from the early 1950s *If I Knew You were Coming I'd a Baked a Cake* in addition to Wagner's *Bridal Chorus*.

**Display #25** (Perch Act) In addition to *More* from the movie *Mondo Cane*, this 3-ring equilibristic display worked to one of the most over-used pieces of show music from the 1960s – the theme from the movie *Exodus*.

**Display #26** (Seals and Chimps) Music included *Don't Let the Parade Pass You By* from the Broadway musical *Hello Dolly*, and *Jungle Queen*.

**Display #27** (Elephants) Titled "Carnaby Street," the elephant number was an obvious attempt to appeal to the young adults in the audience. Forty some years later, a little explanation is needed to put it in proper perspective. Beginning in the mid-1960s, American pop culture was heavily influenced by British pop culture including British pop music (the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Donovan, etc.), British movies (*Alfie*, *Help*, *Georgie Girl* and the James Bond films) British television (*The Avengers*, *Secret Agent*, *The Prisoner*), and British fashions (as epitomized by the clothing designs worn by the British model Twiggy.) The 1968 elephant number reflects this "British influence" and derives its title from an actual street in London's Soho district noted for its large number of fashion boutiques.

Accordingly, the wardrobe copied the "mod" fashion styles of late 1960s London. Hippie body painting was given a token nod by having large stars painted onto the elephants. Surprisingly, the music score was much more mainstream American than one would have expected. After opening with quotes from *I Think I'm Going out of My Mind* and *Georgie Girl* (the theme from the hit British film of the same name) the elephants made their entrance to *Entry of the Gladiators*. Other music in the score included quotes from *Let's Spend Some Time Together*, *Standing on the Corner* (*Watching all the Girls Go By*)- which is actually from the 1950s, *Music to Watch Girls By*, *I'm a Brass Band* (from the Broadway musical *Sweet Charity*) *Step to the Rear* (from the Broadway musical *How Now, Dow*



**PHOTO Above:** Former model Evy Althoff presented the Althoff's Equestrian Tiger during the 1968 tour.

**PHOTO BELOW:** Wardrobe for the Carnaby Street elephant number was heavily influenced by the "mod" British fashions of the late 1960s.



*Jones*), and *Tiger Rag*. In later years, as the Felds targeted their performances towards young adults in their early 20s, the entire musical program was selected to appeal to this specific age group. In 1968, it appears that the Circus' creative team was still trying to come up with a number that really would appeal to children of ALL ages.

**Display #28** Teeterboards: After opening with an up-tempo rendition of the *Rakoczy March*, the music segued into what is now commonly referred to as Merle Evans' *Hungarian Goulash*, a medley consisting of bits and pieces of Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* plus themes from the Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsody*, all played at a very bright tempo.

**Display #29** The clown walk around that filled in while the nets were being raised for the flying acts, was accompanied by another Merle Evans standby, *Trombone Blues*.

**Display #30** Flying Trapeze: made their entrance to *Circus on Parade*, flew with the greatest of ease to *Sunnyland Waltzes* and made a thrilling come down to *Eclipse Galop*.

**Display #31** Described in the souvenir program as "The Hullabaloo and Fanfare During a Presidential Election Year," the music arrangement for the closing number included *God Bless America*, *Yankee Doodle*, *Brotherhood of Man*, *Born Free*, *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, and *The Greatest Show on Earth* movie theme.

**Exit Music** *Oklahoma* from the famous Broadway musical.

As an interesting side note, while the show was in San Diego in 1968, Gunther Gebel-Williams flew over from Germany to see first-hand how Ringling cared for its animals while on tour. (We can assume that he also saw at least one performance while he was here.) The contracts for him to come to America the following year had already been negotiated, but had still not been signed. Perhaps it was this visit to San Diego that proved to be the deciding factor in him joining the *Greatest Show on Earth* and bringing his own special brand of circus magic to the American public.

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