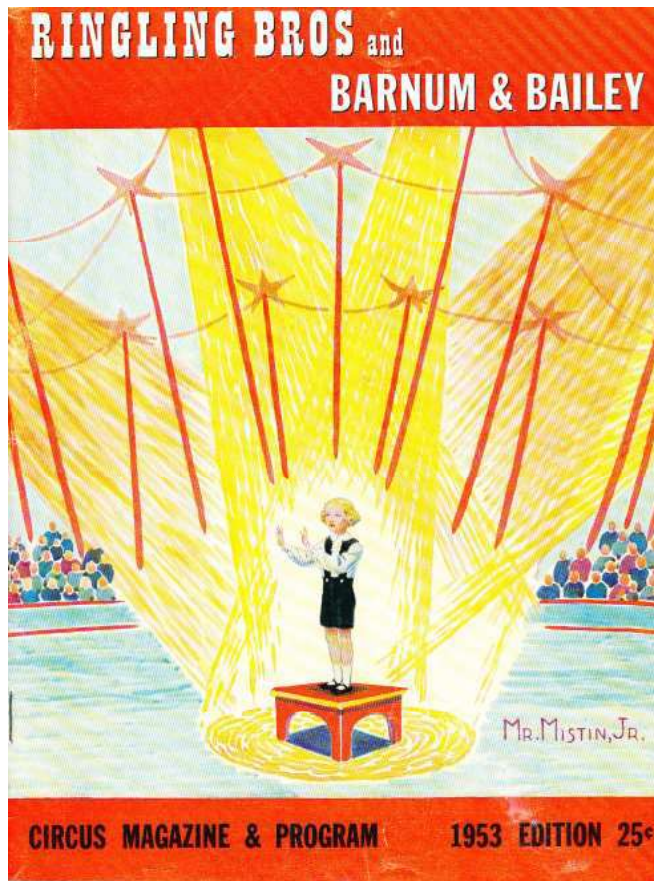


A CIRCUS MUSICAL ODDITY

By Eric Beheim WJU #66



Mister Mistin, Jr.

The featured center ring attraction of the 1953 Edition of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus was described in that year's souvenir program as the:

"PRODIGIOUSLY PROCLAIMED PHENOMENON John Ringling North's Latest and Greatest Importation The Tiny Musical Prodigy Who Has Astounded Millions In Europe, Asia and Africa MR. MISTIN, JR. THE CHILD WONDER OF THE WORLD First Time in America."

The object of this ballyhoo was a mere lad of five or six who, accompanied by Merle Evans and his band, played Suppe's *Poet and Peasant Overture* on the xylophone, and then a medley of popular tunes.

Harold Ronk is the one who introduces Mistin. At this stage in his career, Ronk only appeared as Ringling's announcer and "singing ringmaster" during the New York, Boston and Philadelphia

stands. Others took over those tasks once the show began playing elsewhere.

North had encountered Mistin at a circus in Stockholm and was captivated on the spot. Not only was Mistin featured on the cover of Ringling's 1953 souvenir program, but he was also the subject of an article written for the program by Roland Butler which described him as weighing thirty-six pounds, standing thirty-six inches tall, able to speak five languages fluently and who practiced from one to two hours daily. Reportedly, he could hear a tune played through and then could repeat it flawlessly on his xylophone.

As a performer in Sweden, the boy went by "Baby Mistin", but Ringling dubbed him "Mister" to emphasize the child's prodigiousness. His real name is Roland D'Haeveloose and he later performed in Europe as Roland d'Avell.

The reactions to this offbeat act varied from "so-so" and "what's this doing in a circus?" to "I think that's rather exciting." Ringling's General Manager Art Concello, while not a big fan of the act, conceded that it went over "fairly well." (However, what Merle Evans thought of it has been lost to posterity.) Like most novelties, however, Mistin only lasted a single season.

Fortunately, a recording was made of Mistin's act while Ringling was appearing in Madison Square Garden in New York. **Members of Windjammers, Unlimited can now listen to Mistin's xylophone act on our website at MYWJU.ORG, Preservation tab, Circus Music subtab.**

NEW TO THIS CONTINENT —
Astounding Array of Amazing Acts and Artists
Culled From The Cream of Creation, including
The Prodigiously Proclaimed Phenomenon,
MISTER MISTIN, JR.
The Tiny Musical Prodigy Who Enthralled Millions in Europe, Asia and Africa.
NOW PRESENTED FOR THE
FIRST TIME IN AMERICA
1953 Mobilization of Marvels
Colossal Congress of the Earth's
Foremost Riders, Aerialists, Acrobats,
Gymnasts, Jugglers, Equilibrists,
Contortionists and Big Top Sensationalists.

**MARVELOUS MISTER MISTIN, JR.,
THE CHILD WONDER OF THE WORLD**



The Gilded Cage

By Robert J. Schoenberg May 18, 1953
The Harvard Crimson - REPRINT

In the spotlight his name is **Mister Mistin, Jr.**, and he is a little boy of five-going-on-six. As the star of the circus he is the envy of all who ever gummed spun sugar. His blond hair is long and in curls, and his Lord Fauntleroy suit shows no wrinkles. But who would dare call the confidante of lion tamers a sissy?

Since he is the star, Roland, as he is known to such intimate dependents as his mother, father, and big brother, pretty much calls the shots around the bigtop, even with interviewers from newspapers. "I talk English good," he said, when we were first introduced. "And I talk five languages too: English, my own French, Flemish--write this down," he broke off, pointing sharply at my notebook. "And, let's see, Flemish and Dutch and Swedish." Then he began to stretch.

"Come Roland," his mother said. "Time to dress for the act. You can talk afterwards." "No!" he shot back. "Please, Roland, you don't want this gentleman to think that you are not a nice little boy. Let me dress you." "NO!"



Mr. Mistin, Jr.'s 5th birthday. On the circus lot August 5, 1953 with Allen Pivotti, son of an aerialist. Sverre Braathen photo; ISU Milner Library Collection.

"All right, Mama," the older brother said. "Let him talk while he dresses." Roland unscrewed his face from the brink of a tantrum and flashed a truly Continental smile. "Come," he told me. "I will tell you more. Will that man take my picture?" He turned to the photographer. "You can use the bright light that goes BOOM."

He let his mother undress him, only balking when she rubbed oil on his face and hair. "I have two friends here I play with," he sputtered through the wash-cloth. "One is French, too, but you know," pointing to his head, "he's not so smart, and he is afraid of the animals. But the English boy whose father has the lions, is good. He knows what to do when a snake comes by. Do you know that?"

I admitted I didn't, but before he could explain, his brother came to take him into the arena. "Come with me," Roland commanded, so I joined the entourage. On the way we went by performers returning from the rings. They evenly divided between smiles and mutterings as Roland jostled past them.

While waiting for his cue, Roland told me about his act. "I play the xylophone." When he finally stepped before the audience that's about all he did. Everyone else feels that Mr. Mistin, Jr. would make a fine side show feature, but John Ringling North thinks it's a great act.

His mother came for a final check-up, but he waved her aside. "Go away, over there," he said, pointing towards infinity. She shrugged and left. Before he went into his act, Roland flashed me another beatific smile and said, "You can talk more when I'm alone," then walked off in the brilliance of converging spotlights.

"He's a real little devil, like all boys," his mother said, smiling. "But he has the genius, and that makes a difference. It makes it all right--don't you think?"

