

ROY "BUDDY ROYE" BLOMSTER

by Bill Armstrong, WJU #3610



Roy "Buddy Roye" Blomster

This issue features an instrument often ignored when talking about circus music.

The Electric Organ, a descendent of the Calliope ("cow-lee-o-pe" in circus jargon), became an integral part of the circus bands and traveling tent shows of the 1940's & 50's. A big change for the "Greatest Show on Earth" occurred when Ringling decided in 1959 to

stop carrying a full band and switch to hiring local union musicians in every town. The Ringling "Big Show Band" then carried only 3 staff musicians: Bandmaster Merle Evans on trumpet, Drummer Red Floyd and Organist Roy "Buddy Roye" Blomster.

Roy Gustaf Blomster was born January 23, 1908 in Lynn, MA, to parents who had been born in Sweden (Alfred S. Blomster & Annie Erickson). He studied classical piano for 15 years with Amy Balch, who was a student of Sergei Rachmaninov. Showing great musical talent at a young age, Roy was soon playing for silent movies and then moved on to vaudeville where he led the band at the Capital Theater in Lynn. Roy became a popular band leader and directed orchestras at several New York theaters. Roy's big break came when World War II broke out and he was signed by The Irving Berlin USO tour.

In 1947, Roy, now known as Buddy Roye, auditioned and was hired by Burlesque Queen, and legendary fan dancer, Sally Rand. The star-studded all-girl review was a part of

The Royal American Shows traveling the country as "The World's Biggest Midway". Sally Rand had this to say about Buddy's touch on the organ: "GOD, you could make me cry when you play that Claire De Lune, you put so much feeling into it."

In 1952, Buddy's wife, Mildred, passed away and he went back on the road for Royal American's Moulin Rouge Show with the stipulation that his son Bunky would come along with him on drums. That summer The Royal and The Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus happened to play the same date at the same town -- Tupelo, MS. This had never happened before. Performers and musicians on both shows visited each other. Emmitt Kelly came to visit Buddy and introduced him to Merle Evans. Merle did not forget.

Seven years later, in 1959, Buddy got the call from Merle to join the Ringling Brother's Barnum & Bailey Circus. He said "yes" and continued to tour with the big show until 1966. The plan of hiring local musicians worked great in big cities like New York and Philadelphia where several regular players with the Philharmonic would be circus musicians for a couple of weeks. Smaller towns often provided musicians who did not have the reading ability nor the chops to cut the show. In those cases, Buddy would play the melody at high volume to help the acts hear the music.

Roye also played one season with the Clyde Beatty Circus. His son Bunky, a drummer who once toured with the Cristiani Brothers Circus under Chuck Schlarbaum remembers: "The band lived in a semi truck with a funnel to take a leak in and it went right out to the ground under the truck."



Buddy Roye and son Bunky



Helen with her Dad at an act's rehearsal



Buddy Roye as organist in the Ringling Bros Barnum & Bailey Circus Band

In August, 1965, the Ringling circus was in Los Angeles when the Watts riots broke out. Daughter Helen, who was touring with her dad at that time, recalled: "We had to move from our hotel to Hollywood for the time the show was there. Snuck out in the middle of the night to escape." Ringling had to cancel several performances.

After his circus days, Buddy continued to play clubs and shows around Florida and New York right up to his death at age 66 in September, 1974. Certainly, his was a full lifetime of sawdust and show business.

I have to say, coming up with these three articles [Rudy Bundy - JAN/FEB; Red Floyd - MAR/APR; and now Roy Blomster - MAY/JUN] has been a fun adventure for me since I have never written anything for publication before even though I was in the publishing business for over 30 years. Many thanks to the families of Rudy Bundy, Red Floyd and Roy "Buddy Roye" Blomster for sharing with me excellent background information, stories and pictures.

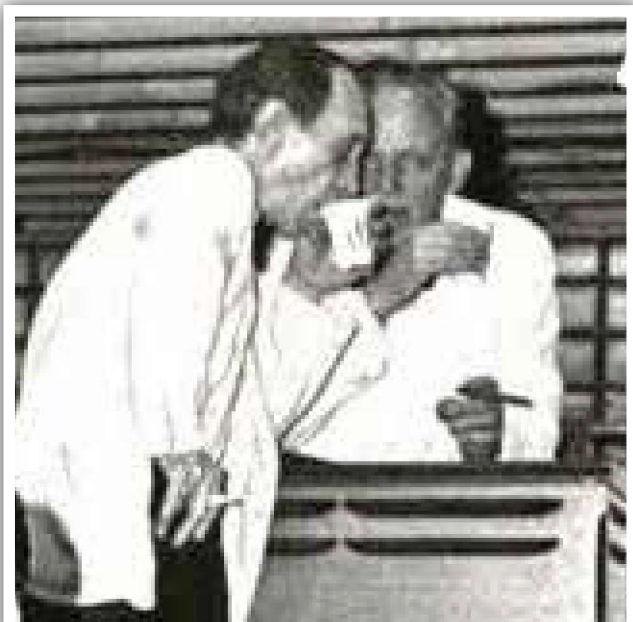
I am indeed fortunate to have discovered all this history of the fascinating circus music business and then to be able share it with like-minded folks. What a thrill to join up with The Windjammers Band and play it live. Good music and good people. Looking forward to seeing you all at Baraboo.



Roy, Red Floyd, Merle Evans, and Ringling Choreographer Dick Barstow pondering a change to the music.



Buddy Roye on "circus" organ



Roy & drummer Red Floyd on a break