

'The Greatest Show on Earth'

Wild animal acts, children showcase famous circus

By Joel Strauch
Senior Reporter

The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus is celebrating 200 years of the circus in America with an all-new "Greatest Show on Earth" this week at the Omaha Civic Auditorium.

Joan Baillon, public events marketing coordinator for the Civic, said, "The circus is always a very popular event. We've had lines of people at the ticket windows.

"We look forward to Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey every year because it's such a quality show."

In addition to the traditional acts, this special celebration edition of the "greatest show" will feature several new acts involving youth from around the world.

"We've got children performers from Russia, Mongolia and the Chicago area involved in every aspect of the circus," Jake Rothenberg, the show's promoter, said.

Baillon added, "It is an interesting medley of international cultures."

"There are 53 kids who travel with the circus," she said. "They attend classes for three hours every day in the traveling schoolhouse and get to experience being with people from so many other countries."

The children display amazing talents in animal training and acrobatics, including hand-balancing and new artistic heights in rope-jumping.

"It's a dazzling, nonstop production," Baillon said. "They showcase talents from all over the world."

There will also be the animal acts that have helped make the circus famous.

"The animals are always favorites of

circusgoers," she said. "This year one of the acts will feature a buffalo and mountain lions."

The Bogers of Arkansas, including 7-year-old Katie, have trained the two species to ignore combative instincts and perform together, Rothenberg said.

When it comes to circus fame, few can equal that of legendary animal trainer Gunther Gebel-Williams. That tradition continues with the performance of Mark Oliver Gebel, Gebel-Williams' son.

Mark Oliver Gebel will be performing with his rare combination of elephants and zebras, two animals that don't get along in the wild, Baillon said.

Baillon talked about the dedication that circus performers must have to be successful, calling it a lifelong commitment.

"I love the kind of commitment that circus people make," she said. "If you have a pet at home, you can leave and have someone watch it, but what do you do if you have elephants or chimpanzees?"

Rothenberg said another of the show's highlights would be the clown David Larible.

After spending almost three decades with circuses in Italy, Switzerland, England, Germany, France and Mexico, Larible is now the first clown ever to appear as a featured performer in the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

"He's been real popular this season. He's bringing some fun stuff to the show," Rothenberg said.

He also described another crowd-pleaser



Courtesy of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus

Audiences will get an earful from Eric Michael Gillett, the singing ringmaster at the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. The circus is at the Omaha Civic Auditorium today and Wednesday.

— the infamous Globe of Death.

"It's a gigantic steel sphere with motorcycles encircling the inside of the globe," he said. "At one point, a woman stands in the middle with three motorcyclists riding around her at about 40 miles an hour."

The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus will be at the Omaha Civic Auditorium today and Wednesday. There will be two performances daily, at 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. Tickets are available through Ticketmaster.

Quik Facts

Show: The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus

At: Civic Auditorium, Omaha

Times: Today and Wednesday at 4 p.m. and 8 p.m.

Tickets: Available from Ticketmaster

Henri didn't show his Nebraska roots in life or art

By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

Although work by artist Robert Henri is on display at the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery under the auspice "Nebraska's Favorite Son," Henri never revealed his Nebraska roots.

Daphne Deeds, Sheldon Gallery curator, said Henri's past was hidden until his death in the 1950s.

In the late 19th century, Robert Henri and his family, whose real last name is Cozad, fled from Nebraska to Colorado.

Henri's father was a real estate speculator who visited, and later moved to, an area of land in Nebraska presently known as Cozad.

"Things went fairly well for the family in the beginning," Deeds said. "However, there was some ongoing tension between the cattle ranchers concerning water rights."

Deeds said an altercation arose between Henri's father and a cattle rancher. The rancher pulled out a knife, prompting Cozad to pull out his gun. The fight came to blows, and Cozad shot the rancher.

"The father left town to escape the law, and his family came with him," he said. "Everybody in the family had a different name."

Henri's brother, Frank, changed his name to Southern and eventually became a prominent physician.

The family moved again to Atlantic City, N.J. Henri then moved to Philadelphia, where he enrolled in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1891. He moved again to New York City and eventually to Ireland.

The Henri Museum, a museum in Cozad devoted to Henri's work, sits on a boarding house run by Henri's parents, Deeds said.

Even though Cozad and Nebras-

ka are proud to claim Henri as one of their own, Deeds said, Henri "put out that whole chapter of his life."

The majority of Henri's work focuses on scenes from Maine, New York, Ireland, Paris and arcas in the southwest United States, she said.

Henri married twice, had no children and never returned to Nebraska.

Deeds said Nebraska's pride laid in the accomplishments and the notoriety of Henri's work and teaching.

"The essence of his teaching is that each person must find real inspiration for their work instead of emulating the masters as was the trend in the 19th century," she said.

Henri inspired a whole generation of artists to look for self-inspection and personal reflection and to make their own statements in their work.

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The essence of his teaching is that each person must find real inspiration for their work.

— Deeds,
Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery curator

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time were stifling to artists in Henri's view, and he wanted his students to rely on their inner spirit instead.

The exhibit, which runs from Aug. 23 through Nov. 13, features 42 paintings, drawings and letters drawn from public and private collections in Nebraska.

Two special events are planned in coordination with the exhibit. Deeds will give a lecture and slide presentation on Henri's early work

and impact on American art history on Sept. 21 at 7 p.m. in the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery.

On Oct. 15, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m., "Nebraska's Favorite Son and Daughter: Henri and Sandoz" will be presented to examine the influence of these two artists. Artist Mari Sandoz wrote a book about Henri's life in Nebraska called "Son of a Gambling Man."