

IT'S

# CIRCUS

TIME!

**ExHiBiTiON**

October 13, 2021 to  
March 6, 2022





Expert horseman Philip Astley (1742-1814) opened an equestrian school in London in 1768, where he gave demonstrations featuring trained horses and acrobatics. He is considered the inventor of the modern circus.

From the time of the first acrobats in the Middle Ages to the present day, the circus arts have never stopped evolving. The history of the modern circus, as we know it today, began in 18<sup>th</sup> century England with the appearance of equestrian acts, for which a building would be erected around a ring, 13 metres in diameter, which remains the standard size of circus rings today. A network of circuses soon sprang up throughout Europe and the United States. Montréal's first circus building was constructed in 1797, on Notre-Dame Street, near Saint-Pierre Street, not too far from Pointe-à-Callière.



▲ Interior of Astley's Amphitheatre, London, 1808  
Houghton Library, Harvard University



▲ *The Tumblers*  
Museum

# The CIRCUS!

IT'S CIRCUS TIME!

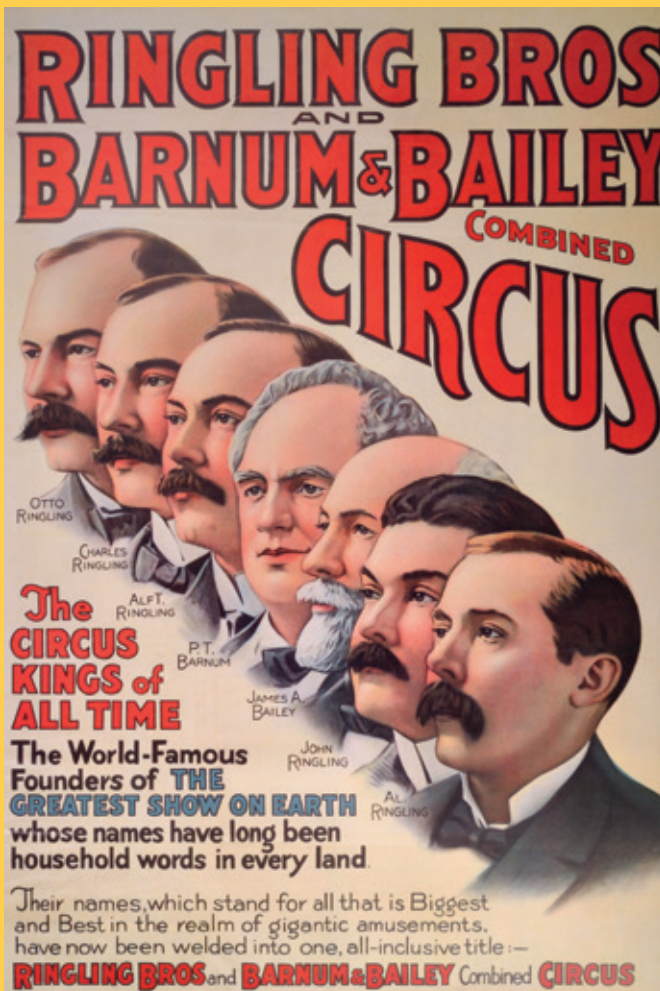
Around 1825, in the United States, canvas circus tents began to replace wood and stone structures, with shows travelling all around the world. When the circus came to town, it was quite the event! Americans elevated circus parades to an unparalleled level of extravagance. Wealthy owners like P.T. Barnum, an unrivalled marketing genius, sought to outdo each other's excessiveness, giving rise to veritable performance empires. Barnum outfitted his enormous tent with three rings instead of the usual one.

▼ Charles S. Stratton and Lavinia Warren  
The Barnum Museum, Bridgeport, Conn.



Famous showman and talent scout P.T. Barnum turned small-statured Charles S. Stratton into the first circus superstar as General Tom Thumb. He enjoyed a long career in the United States, as well as in Europe and Japan. He even visited Québec in 1848 and 1863.

Permission to use this image must be obtained from the Barnum Museum



▲ Sofa belonging to Tom Thumb.  
Manufacturer: John Henry Belter. Dimensions: 87.6 x 132.1 x 76.2 cm  
The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art

▲ Phineas Taylor Barnum and James Anthony Bailey, surrounded by the Ringling brothers.  
Eminent producers during the golden age of the American circus (1880–1930)  
Jacob-William Collection, TOHU/Musées de Chalon



▼ *Blanche Allarty, trick rider with Cirque Molier, performing the capriole with d'Artagnan*

Photo: Louis-Jean Delton, 1911.  
Archives Historiques Hermès



In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, female riders began to demonstrate their skills in the ring. Inspired by ballet, they incorporated the most difficult riding exercises into their acts.



At the circus, horse trainers, acrobats, clowns, and animal tamers bring to life a magnificent world in which the full extent of their art is put on display.

## RiDerS

Dating back to the very beginnings of the modern circus, the sophistication of the equestrian show made a lasting impression on what we now know as the circus. An entire classical repertoire of figures, jumps, and acrobatics was developed over the years, with one element remaining crucial: the special bond between human and horse.

## ACRoBaTS

Like equestrian performance, acrobatics are an age-old tradition, notably in the Far East. Acrobats embody both daring and grace—they are magicians of contortion and balance.



▼ *Jules Léotard, c. 1867. French inventor of the flying trapeze and the leotard.*

Léon Crémière, Jacob-William Collection, TOHU/Musées de Châlons

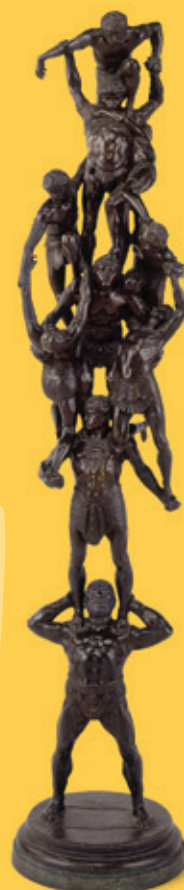


On November 12, 1859, Jules Léotard (1838-1870) soared from one trapeze to another, high in the air at the Cirque Napoléon in Paris. A new circus art was born. The trapeze artist's stage costume, a form-fitting bodysuit that did not hinder his movements, has since come to be known as a "leotard."

▲ *Maud Florees Gruss in an impressive equestrian act premiered in 1827 by the rider Andrew Ducrow, Le Courrier de Saint-Petersbourg or La Poste, 2013*  
© Photography by K

◀ *Static trapeze duo Alexander Taylor and Mélanie Dupuis performing in Demain, a National Circus School show created by Marie-Josée Gauthier, 2016*  
National Circus School/Photo: © Roland Lorente

► *La Pyramide humaine ou Les Acrobates, C. 1880-1883, Gustave Doré*  
The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art





▲ Lou Jacobs in his clown car  
Wisconsin Historical Society, Circus World



◀ Annie Fratellini, 1991  
Centre national des arts du cirque,  
Jacques Richard Fonds, © D.R.

Granddaughter of clown Paul Fratellini, Annie Fratellini (1932-1997) is remembered as one of the first female Auguste clowns. In 1974, she co-founded the National Circus School in Paris. She has had a lasting influence on the renewal and creativity of the French circus arts.

▼ Jumbo the Children's  
Giant Pet, 1882  
The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art



Born in Africa, standing 4 metres tall, Jumbo was exhibited in Paris and London, becoming a true sensation at Barnum Circus in 1882. Though he died tragically in Ontario, his legend continues to fire our collective imagination of the circus.

## CLOWNS

Born in the theatre, clowns flourished at the circus. Through laughter, they help relieve tension between the more perilous acts. With oversized shoes, tiny props, objects used in ways other than intended, made-up or reinvented musical instruments... clowns draw audiences into their world to create surprise.

## Animal Tamers

Elephants, tigers, and lions are undeniable emblems of the traditional circus. First exhibited in menageries that toured Europe and America in the 1830s, exotic animals became true attractions in circuses the world over. A century later, animal well-being has become a growing concern. Exotic animals still have their place, however, if only in the imagination.



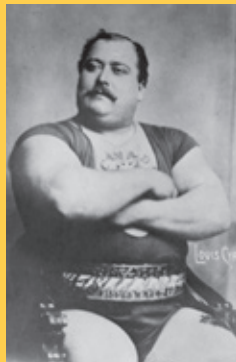
◀ Made to measure coat for Bruno Stutz, the white clown in Swiss duo *The Chickys*, Gérard Vicaire, 1972  
Mucem



► Dralion head, *Dralion*, 1999  
Costumes: François Barbeau  
© Cirque du Soleil. Photo: Daniel Desmarais, 2010



▼ Portrait of Louis Cyr, 1892  
BAnQ Vieux-Montréal, Armour Landry Collection



Legendary colossus and owner of Québec's first circus, Louis Cyr has been part of the collective psyche since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.



► Hat (18.60 x 39.90 cm)  
and boots of Édouard Beaupré  
(25.40 x 14.60 x 39.90 cm)  
Musée régional de Vaudreuil-Soulanges,  
Vaudreuil-Dorion

Beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, just 30 years after its birth in England, the circus took root in Québec thanks to the exploits of a few pioneers. Forces of nature, street performers, and acrobat families began performing in Montréal amusement parks or at agricultural exhibitions and fairs. The circus arts turned professional in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Several Québec-based troupes began to make a name for themselves in the 1980s, both at home and abroad.

▼ The giant Édouard Beaupré  
(1881–1904)  
Archives UdeM



Born in Saskatchewan in 1881, Édouard Beaupré, a "giant" measuring 2.52 m tall, was the tallest Canadian ever. He toured with the Barnum & Bailey Circus until his death in 1904 at the age of 23.

# IT'S SHOW TIME!

▼ The Dupree and Dupree duo  
(Léon and Adrienne DuPerré), c. 1914  
Léon DuPerré Collection, Library of the  
National Circus School, photo: C.F. Gairing & Co



At the age of 20, trick cyclist Léon DuPerré caught the eye of the Baker Troupe and toured the U.S. with them, headlining several circuses, including the legendary Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.



► Acrobatic bicycle belonging  
to Léon DuPerré  
Loan from the National Circus School

# Let's GO!



A strongman of the calibre of Louis Cyr, Oscar Marineau, along with his children, founded the well-known trapeze act The Flying Marinos. He later passed on his knowledge to the next generation of Québec aerialists.

◀ Feat of strength by circus artist Oscar Marineau  
Jenny Bell/Marineau family

This family troupe from the Lac Saint-Jean region criss-crossed Québec with a varied program that included acrobatic acts, along with mimed and sung skits, dance, and magic... sometimes they even threw in a speech on temperance, ensuring that their show respected the moral codes of the Catholic church!

► Balancing on a pyramid of chairs, winter 1942  
Société d'histoire du Lac-Saint-Jean, Adrien Tremblay Collection



In winter, the Auger brothers, specializing in aerial acrobatics, performed in arenas and auditoriums. In summer, they set up their huge aerial structure that rose 26 or 35 metres, performing outdoors at festivals and fairs around Eastern Canada and the U.S.

◀ The Auger Trio (Normand, Gaston, Robert), Granby baseball stadium, September 5, 1949  
Auger family



The winds of change that brought about the events the Quiet Revolution in Québec stirred a renewal of the circus arts. In the 1960s, on television, the poetical clowns Sol and Gobelet followed in Paul Buissonneau's footsteps dressed up as Picolo the clown.

▲ Clown duo Sol and Gobelet  
Radio-Canada/Photo : André Le Coz

Unlike Europe, Québec had no circus dynasties to train the next generations of performers. But with the opening of the National Circus School in 1981, Québec could offer high-level training to future circus artists.

► National Circus School training studio  
National Circus School/Photo: Sylvie-Ann Paré





# QUÉBEC ON THE WORLD'S CIRCUS STAGES

Since the year 2000, Québec circuses have become world leaders in the field, renowned for virtuoso acrobatics, an innovative spirit, and dramatic ingenuity. Here are 7 Québec troupes whose reputation reaches well beyond our borders!



## Cirque du Soleil

Created by a group of street performers in 1984, Cirque du Soleil broke with circus tradition to transform the art form, creating a "nouveau cirque" (new circus) of the Americas. With no animal acts, its extraordinarily creative shows feature elements with great emotional and visual appeal.

◀ *Alegria*, 2019  
© Cirque du Soleil. Photo: Marie-Andrée Lemire

## Cavalía

Founded in 2003, this troupe celebrates the age-old bond between humans and horses, showcasing sensational acrobatic feats that make for an incredibly moving experience.

▶ *Odysseo*, 2011  
© Cavalía. Photo: Jak Wonderly



## Cirque Éloize

"Éloize" is the term for heat lightning in the Magdalen Islands, where this touring circus, with no permanent venue, hails from. Founded in 1993, Éloize presents captivating shows that include elements of theatre and dance.

◀ *Cirkopolis*, 2016  
© Cirque Éloize. Photo: Valerie Remise

## Flip Fabrique

Founded in Québec City in 2011, this collective creates shows that are wild yet moving, in which acrobats and jugglers delight and amaze audiences with their zany and dizzying performances.

▶ *Blizzard*, 2019  
© Flip Fabrique. Photo: Sébastien Duracher



## Les 7 doigts de la main

Founded in 2002, this group of Montréal creative artists uses the "auteur circus" form to connect with audiences, its virtuosity emerging from scenes of everyday life.

▶ *LOFT*, 2002  
© Les 7 doigts de la main.  
Photo: Christian Tremblay

## Machine de Cirque

Founded in 2013 and based in Québec City, this troupe tours internationally, presenting shows that blend acrobatics and humour in a poetic setting, featuring brilliant set design and live music.

▶ *Machine de Cirque*, 2015  
© Machine de Cirque.  
Photo: Loup-William Thériberge



## Cirque Alfonse

Since 2005, this family troupe hailing from the Lanaudière region has been flaunting its Québec roots with feats that showcase its earthy, self-deprecating humour.

◀ *Timber!*, 2011  
© Cirque Alfonse. Photo: Jane Hobson

# WOW!