



CIRCUS ARTS

AT THE 2017 SMITHSONIAN FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL

JUNE 29-JULY 4 AND JULY 6-9, 2017

Marking its fiftieth anniversary in 2017, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival will feature today's rich diversity of circus arts in the United States on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Drawing from generations of circus families and new forms of expression, the program will highlight the life and work of circus artists throughout the country.

Like the circus arts, rooted in the past but always reflecting cultural change, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival has evolved over time. Originating in 1967 as the Festival of American Folklife, it has grown to celebrate living traditions of every U.S. state and more than 100 countries. As a "museum without walls," the annual event enables millions of people to experience and interact with art, music, dance, food, and other cultural expressions from around the world. Coinciding with the July Fourth holiday, the free ten-day event attracts millions of visitors to the National Mall and its website. Products from its programs and associated research have been recognized with Academy, Emmy, and GRAMMY awards.

The 2017 Festival will also feature the programs *American Folk: Celebrating the NEA National Heritage Fellows* and *On the Move*, an exploration of migration and immigration. *Circus Arts* will provide fresh opportunities to experience American circus life, focusing primarily on the lives and creativity of skilled artists and craftspeople.

WHY CIRCUS ARTS?

Since President George Washington attended John Bill Ricketts' circus in Philadelphia in April 1793, circus arts have intrigued generations of audiences in the United States. Walt Whitman once called circus a "national institution," and observed that while it originated elsewhere, it triggered exceptional levels of imagination and creative energy here.

Circus arts have continuously evolved in the United States, benefiting especially from many immigrant communities. While it experienced major declines from the 1930s through the 1970s, renewed scholarly interest in the history, artistic expressions, technological innovations, and growing educational sectors are contributing to a contemporary grassroots revival. Generations of circus families have kept traditions alive while creating new performance styles and outreach initiatives. Veteran performers are opening and expanding circus arts schools. Newcomer artists are "running away with the circus" in ways that add new meaning to the phrase. All are making it possible to expand the experience of what circus arts now offer.

Given the nationwide breadth and historical depth of circus arts, the Smithsonian may be the only U.S. cultural institution with the capacity to present a truly national program. The program will focus on the history, evolution, and development of the circus arts through live performances, narrative sessions, workshops, and direct dialogue characteristic of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

THE PEOPLE

The program will enable visitors to engage with people whose lives are defined by the circus arts, as well as those who use circus arts in new ways. It will enable authentic, stimulating people-to-people experiences that go far beyond what a circus ticket can buy. More than a "performance," the program will create opportunities to learn directly from artists and supporting teams of coaches, costume designers, makeup artists, musicians, lighting and sound technicians, prop and tent designers, poster artists, wagon builders, toy makers, cooks, and many more whose collective creative work makes circus possible.

Mural paintings by Dmitri Stroganov, courtesy of Circus Center, San Francisco

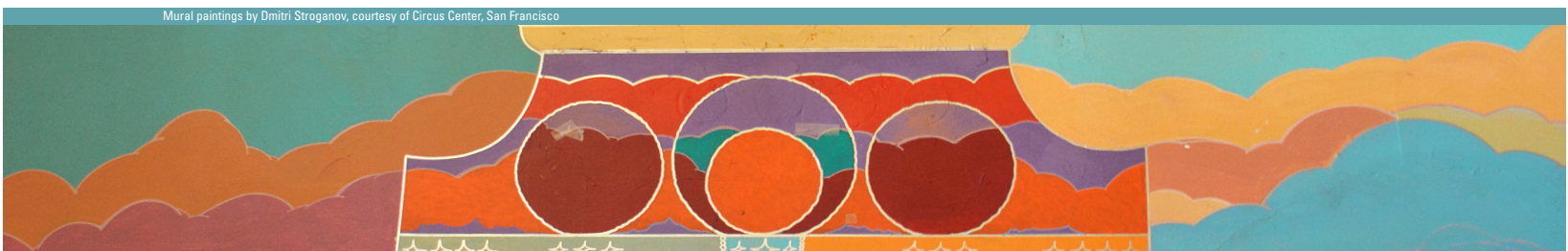




Photo by Jessica Hentoff, Circus Harmony, St. Louis



Photo by Justin Hensley

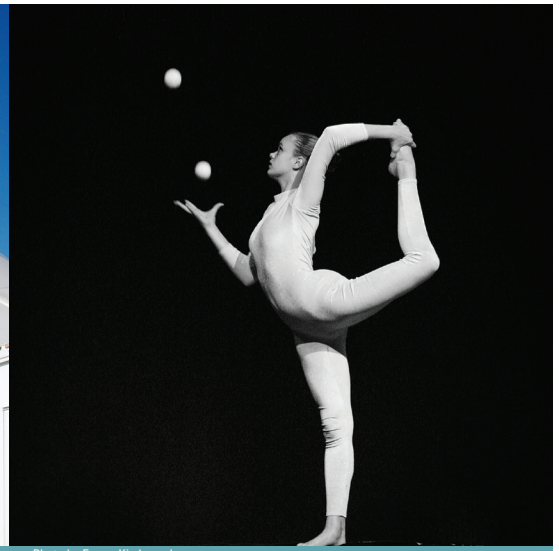


Photo by Emory Kimbrough

Aerialists and acrobats will demonstrate their gravity-defying disciplines, combining strength and skill with grace and daring. Equilibrists and object manipulators will share their arts that date to ancient times, requiring deep concentration, split-second timing, and coordination. Clowns will demonstrate mesmerizing transformations and techniques to evoke shared emotions by exploring many dimensions of the human heart and spirit.

The program will highlight families for whom circus arts have been a way of life for generations, and artists who immigrated to the United States bringing their traditions. The rapid emergence of youth circuses and circus-related schools—many started by veteran artists—is creating grassroots opportunities for new artistic expressions that also will be explored and shared with the public at the 2017 Festival event.

THE SPACES

The program will present the diversity of circus arts in a variety of venues, from open-air structures to tents, theaters, and other evocative interior spaces. Specially designed performance venues will be used for open rehearsals and experiential learning opportunities, including hands-on family activities. No exotic animals will be involved.

While many have attended the circus, few have had the chance to meet and actually participate in the lives and work of circus artists. The program will allow visitors to explore circus life through behind-the-scenes encounters. Narrative stages will facilitate ongoing intimate conversations about contemporary topics, providing further opportunities for the public to meet with and learn from active and retired artists alike.

BENEFITS TO CIRCUS ARTS IN AMERICA

With so many visitors expected on the National Mall and through web/media coverage worldwide, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival offers significant opportunities for recognition by:

- Linking program participants, visitors, cultural institutions, and communities in beneficial programmatic projects of mutual interest
- Attracting funding organizations, agencies, businesses, individuals, and other sponsors for creative networking opportunities and audience cultivation
- Strengthening and expanding recognition and respect for circus artists
- Generating new opportunities for educating the public about circus arts
- Providing opportunities for circus communities, organizations, and artists to sell their arts and crafts in the Festival Marketplace

JOIN OUR COLLABORATION

The 2017 *Circus Arts* program is produced by the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage in partnership with circus arts-related grassroots communities, organizations, and individuals. We welcome additional support and contributions to enable maximum participation by diverse artists and to build an exciting living exhibition space. All contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent permitted by law. For additional information about the circus arts program at the 2017 Smithsonian Folklife Festival and ways to get involved, please contact:

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