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## **Smithsonian Folklife Festival Spotlights Circus Arts**

To mark its 50th anniversary, the 2017 Smithsonian Folklife Festival will highlight the vibrant cultural and artistic expressions of the circus from diverse communities across the country. Featuring a Big Top circus tent on the National Mall, the “Circus Arts” program will take visitors behind the scenes to explore everything from traditions passed down through generations to many of the new expressions that reflect changing social and cultural mores that have always been a hallmark of circus life, work and artistry.

The program will feature intimate workshops, full-scale performances and an interactive Circus School where visitors can meet and learn from master artists from across five major circus disciplines: acrobatics, aerials, clowning, equilibristics (e.g., tightrope walking) and object manipulation (e.g., juggling). Visitors to the Festival can also meet artists and coaches, costume designers, makeup artists, riggers and more.

The Festival will be held Thursday, June 29, through Tuesday, July 4, and Thursday, July 6, through Sunday, July 9, on the National Mall between Seventh and 12th streets. Admission is free. Festival hours are from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day, with evening dance parties at 5:30 p.m. and circus performances at 7 p.m.

Daily matinee performances in the Big Top will include “Wonderland,” a vibrant and dramatic circus adaptation of “Alice in Wonderland” performed by Circus Juventas, a youth circus school in St. Paul, Minn. Afternoons will also feature performances by the Atlanta-based UniverSoul Circus and Sarasota-based Sailor Circus. On Friday, July 7, and Saturday, July 8, visitors to the Big Top can also enjoy open rehearsals and performances by Cirque des Voix, which brings together Sarasota’s Key Chorale with acclaimed orchestral and circus artists.

Nightly circus performances in the Big Top will feature award-winning professional artists from around the world with pre-show showcases presented by major youth circus troupes from across the United States. Seating for all Big Top events is on a first-come, first-served basis, except for a ticketed evening performance Saturday, July 1. Visitors can pick up tickets at the information booth before the show. There are no exotic animals involved in the “Circus Arts” program.

Visitors will also have the opportunity to view master-class demonstrations held daily at the Circus School inside of the Smithsonian’s Arts and Industries Building. These will be led by circus legends, including the National Endowment for the Arts’ National Heritage Fellow and aerialist Dolly Jacobs, members of the world-famous Flying Wallenda family, trapeze artist Elena Panova, juggler Patrik Elmnert of Water on Mars and many others from leading circus arts schools across the United States and around the world. Each brings a unique perspective on the art form and the way in which it fosters a sense of belonging within disparate communities.

“The ‘Circus Arts’ program offers visitors an immersive, hands-on experience—one you cannot get by simply purchasing a ticket to a circus,” said Preston Scott, program curator. “The program brings to life not only the masterful work of the performers, but also the extraordinary effort of every member of the community whose work contributes to make the circus the dazzling multidisciplinary experience that it is.”

“This program highlights the artistic excellence, mutual trust and cooperation reflected in the life and work of these creative communities,” Scott said. “It confronts long-held stereotypes about the circus while underscoring the inclusive spirit with which performers and the people on whom they depend carry out their work.”

### **Program Partners**

The “Circus Arts” program is made possible with the support of the American Circus Educators Association, American Youth Circus Organization, Bindlestiff Family Cirkus, Circopedia, Circus Arts Conservatory, Circus Bella, Circus Center (San Francisco), Circus Harmony, Circus Smirkus, Circus Juventas, Cirque des Voix, Fédération Mondiale du Cirque, Happenstance Theater Theatrical Circus, Imperial OPA Circus, John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art (Circus Museum), Listo Trapeze Volant, Medical Clown Project, New England Center for Circus Arts, Peru Amateur Circus, Sailor Circus, School of Acrobatics & New Circus Arts, UniverSoul Circus, Wenatchee Youth Circus and Wise Fool New Mexico.

### **About the Festival**

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival, inaugurated in 1967, honors contemporary living cultural traditions and celebrates those who practice and sustain them. Produced annually by the Smithsonian’s [Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage](#) in partnership with the National Park Service, the Festival has featured participants from all 50 states and more than 100 countries. Follow the Festival on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

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