



*The First
Ten Years
of Raising
Standards
in European
Circus Arts*



ISTVÁN **UJHELYI** dr

*former Member of the European Parliament,
initiator and mentor of the BigTopLabel,
ambassador of the UNTourism,
president of council - Capital European Affairs*



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Almost ten years ago, at a parliamentary conference here in Brussels, I spoke about the need for a European quality assurance system for the circus world, and about the importance of showing the difference between good and bad circuses. Many people in the audience shrugged their shoulders, thinking it was nothing more than empty words from a politician. Since then, we have also had the honor of awarding the BigTopLabel recognition to eighteen outstanding circus companies.

The circus provides millions of people with quality entertainment and tens of thousands with a livelihood. It is an integral part of European culture and of the European economy, and it deserves appropriate attention and recognition. BigTopLabel is only one step – but a very important one – in safeguarding and strengthening the value that traditional circus art represents. Still, further steps are needed.

I consider it essential that greater attention be given to education: that social circuses promoting social inclusion in the EU receive stronger support, and that circus education become part of public education in all Member States. Quality and exemplary performance can greatly support us in this mission. For this reason, I am asking the circuses that have been awarded BigTopLabel recognition to establish a dedicated community to help other circuses catch up – a special community that will also strengthen our collective lobbying power with EU institutions. I believe this initiative can grow into a European program that serves as a model for similar quality assurance schemes in the cultural and artistic sectors.

Circus art is eternal. Good examples and exemplary performances never run out. I thank the BTL-certified circuses for setting an example to others and to all of us through their professional humility, humanity, and artistic courage. It is an honor to have you all as part of the BTL family. And I also thank you for allowing me, as an enthusiastic and devoted outsider, to be part of this wide and wonderful family of circus.

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URS PILZ

As the distinguished President of both the *European Circus Association* (ECA) and the *Fédération Mondiale du Cirque* (FMC), Mr Urs Pilz has long been among the most respected and influential figures in the international circus community. With decades of leadership, vision, and dedication, he has played a defining role in preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of traditional circus across Europe and beyond.

As the Honorary President of the BigTopLabel Committee, Urs Pilz continues to lend his wisdom, experience, and integrity to the development of this unique European quality-assurance initiative for the circus arts. Although not a formal member of the committee, his presence and guidance are invaluable. In cases of tied votes or delicate decisions, it is upon the committee's request that Urs Pilz acts as the final arbiter, ensuring that every resolution reflects both fairness and the highest professional standards.

Beyond his official role, Urs Pilz's continuous professional advice, thoughtful insights, and personal support have greatly contributed to the success and steady growth of the BigTopLabel programme. His name and reputation embody the very essence of what BigTopLabel stands for: excellence, authenticity, and dedication to the art of the circus.

The entire BTL-community owes him deep gratitude — for his leadership, his trust, and for the unwavering belief that the European circus deserves recognition, respect, and a bright future under the Big Top.

THEY MADE IT HAPPEN

The BigTopLabel programme owes an immense debt of gratitude to the *European Circus Association* (ECA) and the *Fédération Mondiale du Cirque* (FMC) for their continuous professional support, mentorship, and partnership throughout its development. While the independence of the BigTopLabel has always been a defining value — carefully safeguarded to ensure the programme's credibility and impartiality — it is equally important to recognise that this initiative could not have been realised without the guidance and cooperation of these two leading organisations in the world of circus arts.

Since the very first proposal to create a European quality-assurance label for the circus sector was presented, the leadership of both the ECA and the FMC — with special thanks to Urs Pilz, Zsuzsanna Mata, and Helmut Grosscurth — has continuously supported the BigTopLabel's establishment, evolution, and professional enrichment. Their strategic advice, institutional backing, and moral encouragement have been indispensable in shaping the project into what it is today.

We remain deeply grateful for the close assistance provided by both associations from the very beginning — as well as for their thoughtful care in maintaining the necessary distance to protect the independence and credibility of the BigTopLabel. It is precisely this balance between partnership and autonomy that has allowed the programme to grow stronger, more transparent, and more respected year after year.

The “Circus Manifesto”, and later the BigTopLabel programme built upon it, were first introduced to the international circus community at the prestigious Circus Directors’ Luncheon, organised by the FMC, during the *International Circus Festival of Monte-Carlo*, as well as at several professional symposiums of the ECA — forums where the BigTopLabel continues to present its achievements and future directions to this day.

Under the leadership of István Ujhelyi and with the coordination of the *Capital European Affairs* (CEA) Brussels team, the BigTopLabel programme works closely with the ECA and FMC not only on quality-assurance and recognition matters but also on strengthening the political and institutional representation of the circus sector at the European Union level — including efforts to improve access to EU funding and enhance public visibility for the circus arts.

This strong professional foundation and ongoing cooperation remain the guarantee that BigTopLabel will continue to thrive as a credible and successful European cultural programme for years to come.

EUROPEAN CIRCUS ASSOCIATION:

Founded in 2002, the European Circus Association is a Germany-based non-profit organisation representing circuses across Europe. It is committed to promoting cultural recognition, animal welfare, equal educational opportunities for circus children, and fair regulatory conditions for the circus sector. The association is widely regarded as the legitimate voice of the circus profession in Europe, advocating for its members before EU institutions and national authorities.

www.europeancircus.eu

FÉDÉRATION MONDIALE DU CIRQUE:

Established in 2008 in Monaco under the patronage of *H.S.H. Princess Stéphanie*, the Fédération Mondiale du Cirque serves as a global professional organization bringing together associations, federations, institutions, circus professionals, and enthusiasts from all continents. Its mission is to celebrate the art of the circus, preserve its traditions, promote its excellence, and represent its interest worldwide.

www.circusfederation.org

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

On the 18th. of October, 2016 a historical conference was held in the European Parliament. The voice of circus people has never been heard before with respect this unique art deserves. István Ujhelyi, Hungarian member of the European Parliament – who was the initiator and also the host of the event – wanted to bring closer the European decision-makers and representatives of the traditional and the new generation of circus art to find out together: how we can preserve traditional circus values, how we can assist in the development of new artistic ways and strengthen the cultural cooperation between the circuses and their associated institutions.

"I shall propose the establishment of a quality assurance and accreditation certificate that would rate ensembles on their traditional, cultural, and artistic value, with special attention on how they meet animal wellbeing standards. Let us call this certificate the "Big Top Label", the Michelin star of circus arts, an independent quality assurance system guaranteeing quality circus art and no maltreatment of animals. I will send an official proposal concerning this issue to the International Organization for Standardization, but I am happy to initiate it individually as well, guided by your professional cooperation of course."

– told by MEP Ujhelyi in 2106.

The second huge step was a successful workshop on the 31st. of May, 2017, in the European Parliament, about the framework for the BigTopLabel with the participation of circus experts and stakeholders. During 2017, the office of MEP Ujhelyi have had negotiations with the European Commission about the cooperation and labeling. It's a huge result, that the BTL-project became an acknowledged part of the official programmes of the 'European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018' (EYCH2018), which means that the European Commission recognized the is-

sue of quality circus art on a high European level. After many consultations and exchanges of view the final framework of BTL has been announced in Monte Carlo 2018 by the head of Mr. Ujhelyi's cabinet, *Tamás Lajos Szalay*. As the person who is responsible for the BigTopLabel-project he finalized the rating system with the support and agreements of circus art stakeholders. Subsequently, the BTL Committee was established as an independent body of renowned circus experts. Over time, with minor changes, it has grown to eight members – they are the ones who discuss and evaluate the reports prepared on-site by Tamás Lajos Szalay and vote on whether the circus applying for recognition deserves certification or not. The BTL Committee meets regularly to deliberate on the programme's development and potential for expansion. In recent times, the co-ordination team's work has been supported by *Susy Eötvös*, serving as Senior Artistic Advisor.

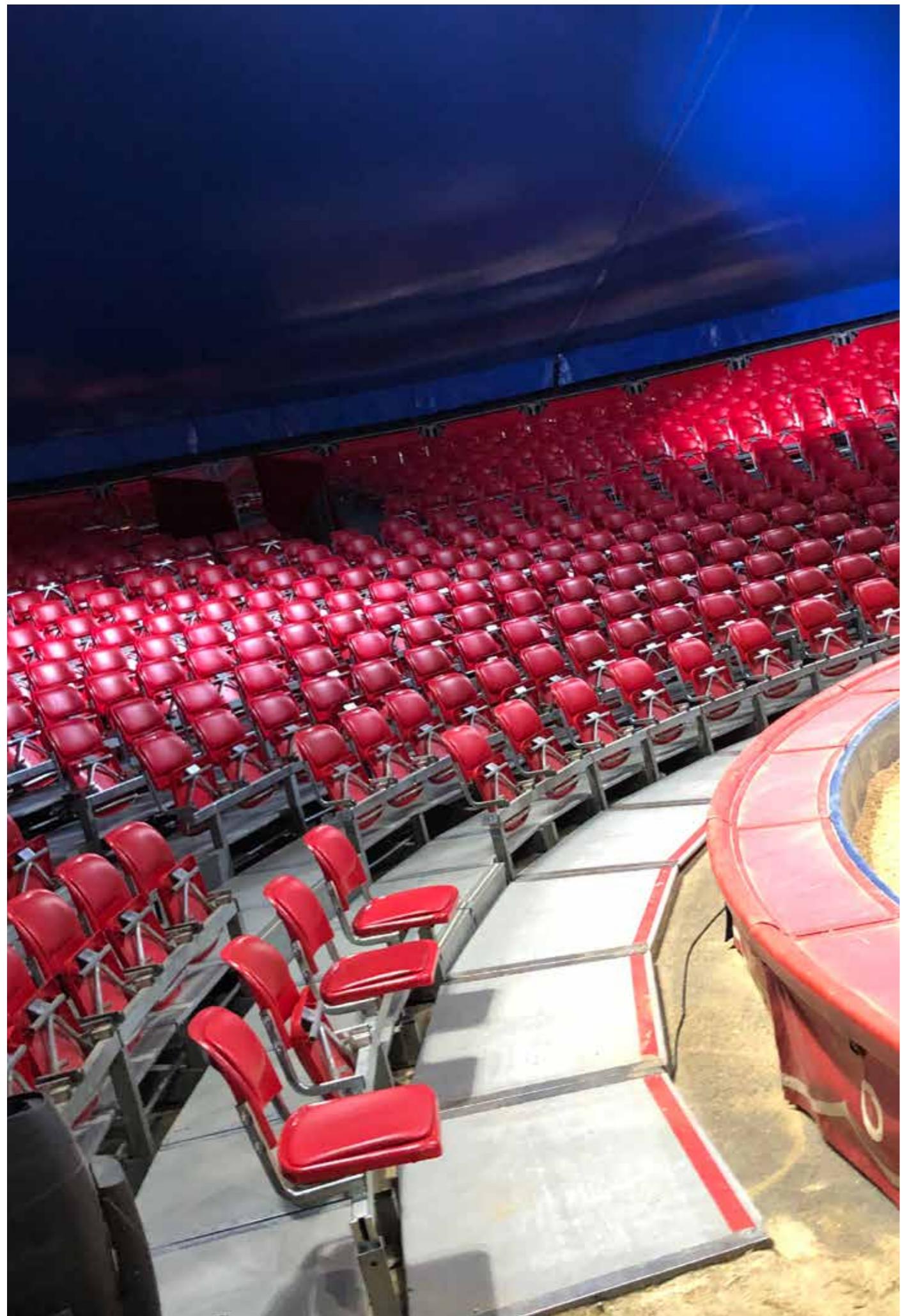
The first inspections were held between June and August of 2018, done by Mr. Szalay at Cirque Arlette Gruss, Blackpool Tower Circus and Circus Krone. The results were announced on the first official BTL awarding ceremony, 28th. of November, in the European Parliament with the presence of European Commissioner for Culture, Mr. Tibor Navracsics.

During the ceremony, MEP Ujhelyi said that awarding the first BigTopLabels is a worthy finale for 2018 – the very year that marks the 250th anniversary of modern circus. „*We must be able to defend our cultural values and artistic traditions while simultaneously fulfilling all the strict contemporary requirements – for instance concerning animal welfare measures. The BigTopLabel system seeks to point out and highlight the good examples which exhibit outstanding quality both from a cultural and humane sentiment*” – noted Mr Ujhelyi.



The **CIRCUS MANIFESTO** represents a key milestone in recognizing circus arts as a vital part of European culture and creative industry. Initiated by MEP *István Ujhelyi* and first signed by *H.S.H. Princess Stéphanie of Monaco*, it gathers the visions, needs, and challenges of the European circus world — from traditional and contemporary companies to community and youth circuses. Presented in 2017 at the Monte Carlo International Circus Festival, it has since been endorsed online by numerous professional organisations and circuses. The Manifesto highlights circus as an art form uniting generations, merging physical skill, creativity, and intercultural values. It calls for greater EU-level recognition, harmonized legislation, and sustainable funding, while promoting social engagement and innovation. It also supports the creation of the BigTopLabel, a European quality assurance system to reward excellence, uphold safety and animal welfare standards, and strengthen public trust in the future of circus.

HOW IT WORKS



STARTING POINTS

- Circus artists and companies need to face present challenges and social expectations.
- Circus must get back and maintain its credibility.
- Quality discrepancies must be screened in order to distinguish between good, average and substandard circus companies.
- Circus stands for values and principles which must be clearly demonstrated by a transparent, operational and credible business approach. It is precisely such transparency that can enhance the credibility of circuses, together with a basis for a reliable policy and corporate image.
- The BTL-project is open for all type of circuses – therefore it could build a common platform for the divided circus industry.

MAIN AND FUNDAMENTAL GOALS OF THE BIG TOP LABEL

- To recognize and accept differences between high quality- and poorer quality circuses
- To warrant that the circus concerned complies with all legal and social requirements, while providing the audience with a high-value artistic experience.
- To develop a strong partnership with the tourism sector and to set up effective promotion for the assessed and recognized circuses.
- To put circus quality assurance on an official European level.
- To build a common platform for all types of circuses and artists to cooperate, learn from each other and ensure the quality of their art.

HOW TO APPLY?

Each year, on-site inspections are carried out at a maximum of three circus companies, selected by the BTL Committee based on the submitted applications. Currently, European circuses can apply for the inspection and certification process via the website: BIGTOPLABEL.COM/CONTACT

PREREQUISITES

- Registration at Chamber of Commerce or similar (e.g. tax number)
- Permanent address and/or winter quarters
- Free from known cases of breaking contracts, unpaid wages, etc.

If applicable:

- License according to national laws
- Permanent winter quarter with adequate stables

Total prerequisites
(any “no” = no quality evaluation)

FINAL SCORE AND DECISION

Based on the results and findings of the on-site inspection, the circus under review is rated on a scale from 1 to 5 in each objective and subjective evaluation category. For the final outcome, the overall average score must not fall below 4; if it does, the circus concerned cannot receive the recognition.

There are also so-called “red line” items: if any of these are observed, they lead to immediate rejection, regardless of the overall score achieved.

The detailed reports, including the scores awarded and the findings, are reviewed by the eight-member BTL Committee. In the end, only they decide on the granting of the recognition, by majority vote. They may also request additional guarantees or commitments from the circus under review, should the need arise.

The recognition is granted for a period of five years. However, if the BTL Committee becomes aware of, or observes, any deviation from the expected standards, it may order a new inspection and, in the final instance, may even decide to withdraw the recognition.

THE BIGTOPLABEL COMMITTEE

ANDREW VAN BUREN

British circus artist known for his mastery of magic, grand illusions, juggling, and plate spinning. He has performed in leading UK venues such as the Royal Albert Hall and Wembley Arena, as well as on international stages. Curator of the Philip Astley Project, preserving the heritage of the modern circus.



ANTONIO GIAROLA

Director of CEDAC and President of the Italian National Circus Arts Association. Founder of the Verona Circus Academy and artistic director of major circuses including Herman Renz and Darix Togni. Consultant to Italy's Ministry of Culture and a leading scholar of circus arts.



HELMUT GROSSCURTH

Managing Director of the European Circus Association and Member of the Board of Directors of the Fédération Mondiale du Cirque. Former CircusZeitung editor and co-founder of the Circus Verlag publishing company. Lifelong advocate of circus culture, constantly travelling to see circus live all around the world.



CHRISTIAN NOLENS

Belgian film and media professional, graduate of RITCS Brussels, and member of the European Circus Association. CEO of On Stage Events, producer of circus documentaries and campaigns. Animal welfare advocate and promoter of Belgian circus heritage.



ZSUZSANNA MATA

Executive Director of the Fédération Mondiale du Cirque and adviser to the European Circus Association. Founder of the Budapest International Circus Festival. Recognized with Hungary's Silver Cross of Merit for her lifelong dedication to circus art and cultural diplomacy.



ALESSANDRO SERENA

Professor of Circus and Street Performance History at the University of Milan. Coming from a historic circus family, he is a writer, researcher, and juror at international festivals. A passionate promoter of global circus culture and its academic recognition.



ARIE OUDENES

Former Director of the European Circus Association and current Chairman of the Dutch Foundation for Circus Culture. Promotes cooperation among professional and youth circuses, museums, and training centres. Enthusiastic historian and collector of circus toys.



ROLAND VERMEYLEN

Co-founder and CEO of Circus School Leuven, board member of Circuscentrum. Organizational psychologist and university lecturer specializing in leadership and cultural management. Editor of De Piste and journalist for De Standaard on circus-related topics.

THE BIGTOPLABEL COORDINATION TEAM

TAMÁS LAJOS SZALAY

Coordinator and on-site inspector of the BigTopLabel program. Former journalist and Chief of Cabinet to MEP István Ujhelyi. Expert in EU communications, branding, and strategy, currently consultant at Capital European Affairs in Brussels. In addition to his bachelor's degree in humanities, he holds degrees in Election Analysis and New Media Graphic Design and is also a qualified graphologist.



SUSY EÖTVÖS // Senior Artistic Advisor

She was born into one of Europe's most celebrated traditional circus dynasties, has built an international career as a performer, artistic director, and creative consultant. She has worked with leading circuses and productions across Europe and major touring companies worldwide. Drawing on her deep knowledge of both classical and contemporary circus arts.



CHECK-LISTS

QUALITY OF THE FRAMEWORK

1) EXTERIOR IMPRESSION

(VEHICLES, ENTRANCE, FENCES ETC.)

Point deductions:

- Difficult accessibility / lack of parking opportunities
- Inconsistent appearance / Deteriorated condition

Extra points:

- Use of traditional circus elements and exteriors
- Unified appearance
- Clear and easily readable information boards
- Cleanliness

2) CONDITION AND COMFORT OF SEATING

(INDIVIDUAL CHAIRS, BENCHES ETC.)

Point deductions:

- Lack of individual seating – benches instead
- Selling seats at full price that don't provide proper view
- Poor quality and cleanliness of seating
- Inadequate seating for disabled spectators

Extra points:

- Individual seating
- Proper price/value ratio between seats sold at different prices

3) AVAILABILITY AND CONDITION OF SANITARY FACILITIES FOR AUDIENCE/PERSONAL

Point deductions:

- No properly separated and equipped sanitary facilities for workers and performers
- Inadequate equipment and cleanliness
- Insufficient number of facilities (in proportion to capacity and audience size)
- Lack of facilities accessible for disabled persons

Extra points:

- Restrooms equipped with additional features
- Substantially separated male and female restrooms
- Baby-changing/nursing facilities when necessary
- Disabled-accessible restrooms usable without assistance

IF APPLICABLE: CONDITION OF TRANSPORTATION VEHICLES, STABLES, AND PADDOCKS

Point deductions:

- Restricted access to vehicles during evaluation
- Poor quality and improperly sized equipment

4) OUTFIT, ATTITUDE AND FRIENDLINESS OF BOX OFFICE, USHERS AND RIGGERS

Point deductions:

- Inappropriate attitude, unfriendly behavior
- Inconsistent or worn-out uniforms

Extra points:

- Proactively communicating staff possibly in multiple languages
- Uniform appearance aligned with brand identity

5) VALUE FOR MONEY (VS. AVERAGE PRICE PER TICKET, ADULTS AND CHILDREN)

Point deductions:

- Significant discrepancy between the quality of the show and ticket prices
- Excessive differences in the quality of seats sold at different prices
- Base ticket prices excessively high compared to the average income of the country or region
- Lack of group discounts, age-related discounts, or discounts for those in need

Extra points:

- Diverse discounts, pre-purchase opportunities
- Affordability of tickets for premium seating

6) ADVERTISING, INFORMATION & PUBLIC RELATIONS (INCL. ONLINE TICKETING ETC.)

Point deductions:

- Lack of online ticket purchasing options
- No card payment option at the box office, souvenir shop, or buffet
- Lack of a multilingual website (at least basic information in English)
- Complete absence of an open doors policy

Extra points:

- Informative and trend-following social media presence
- Own Wi-Fi service / login option
- Multilingual (and affordable) booklet
- Open doors policy

QUALITY OF THE SHOW

1. OVERALL IMPRESSION OF THE SHOW (APPRECIATION BY THE AUDIENCE)

Point deductions:

- Significant differences in the quality and/or presentation of individual acts
- Clearly critical audience reactions (e.g., people leaving before the end)

Extra points:

- Dramaturgical unity
- Conveyance and articulation of a social message
- Value-preserving use of traditional elements

2. ACROBATIC ACTS (FESTIVAL WINNERS, SPECIAL TRICKS, ETC.)

Point deductions:

- Above-average number of mistakes during acrobatic acts
- Complete absence of special/unique acts

Extra points:

- Inclusion of festival-winning acts Unique, special acrobatic performances
- Flawless execution

3. CLOWNING AND/OR COMEDY

Point deductions:

- Absence of clown/comedy acts
- Negative audience reactions (e.g., overly aggressive involvement of audience members)
- Poor dramaturgical placement of clown acts within the show

Extra points:

- Successful inclusion of traditional clown elements
- Diversity, novelty, and active but non-aggressive audience involvement

WHAT WE KEEP AN EYE ON

4. SET DESIGN, DESIGN OF COSTUMES AND PROPS

Point deductions:

- Worn-out or dirty costumes
- Noticeable differences in the quality of props used for individual acts

Extra points:

- Visibly well-thought-out and cohesive design
- In-house tailoring workshop and services

5. LIGHT AND SOUND SYSTEM AND EFFECTS

Point deductions:

- Disruptive lighting that negatively impacts the quality and enjoyment of the show

Extra points:

- Use of environmentally friendly and energy-efficient equipment
- Use of special lighting effects

6. MUSIC

Point deductions:

- Unlawful use of copyrighted music
- Poor-quality speakers that reduce the enjoyment of the music

Extra points:

- Live music

7. ANIMAL-FRIENDLY AND ENTERTAINING PRESENTATION

Point deductions:

- Absence of a veterinary certificate or failure to present it
- Any negative, violent, or suggestive moments during the performance

Extra points:

- Constant veterinary presence
- Active participation in animal welfare or rescue programs
- Full open doors policy regarding animal care



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TIBOR NAVRACSICS

2014-2019: European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport in the Juncker Commission

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for the invitation to speak at this Award Ceremony for the BigTopLabel, this new quality assurance scheme for the Circus sector in Europe. It is a pleasure to celebrate this premiere with you.

Given the highly demanding selection process, I would like to congratulate the three laureates of this first edition, representing each a circus that is meeting the highest quality standards in every regard. You set an example for others. You stand for the long circus tradition in Europe. You ensure its relevance for the future.

Let me also congratulate Mr. István Ujhelyi, Member of the European Parliament, for his determination to create this “Michelin star of circus arts”, to use his words. I remember very well the conference in the European Parliament in 2016 when he first launched the idea to create this independent quality assurance scheme. Circus art is a very good illustration of the dual nature of culture and cultural activities – on the one hand the intrinsic and artistic value of culture and, on the other hand, the economic value, including their broader contribution to creativity, innovation and social inclusion.

I think that the BigTopLabel covers those aspects very well. You know that the circus art is dear to my heart. It is a vivid part of Europe's cultural heritage

with its centuries-long history, in all its forms, from the traditional small family-run companies to the fascinating contemporary circus shows. Therefore, I am also delighted that this important and worthwhile event is taking place during the European Year of Cultural Heritage that we have been celebrating in 2018 very successfully across the continent. To celebrate our shared cultural heritage – both tangible and intangible – we need to reach people, especially young people, in their communities: small villages, towns, cities and capitals all over Europe. Circus and street arts are very successful in this.

This year we have been raising awareness of the many cultural influences that make up our heritage, underlining the link between the past and the future. Again, circus is a good example of combining traditions with innovation, technology and new ways of expression, appealing to the young and to the elders alike. A bridge between centuries and generations. For all these reasons, this Award ceremony has received the label of the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

As a legacy to the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 and in line with your Circus Manifesto, a first overarching study on circus has been launched by the Commission with the objective to gather socio-economic data and to analyse the situation of Circus in Europe. The results will be available at the beginning of June next year. EU Member States shall



28. November 2018. - European Parliament, Brussels

benefit from the findings of the study as they will help to enhance cooperation on circus arts, to facilitate research among organisations, academia and artistic companies and to promote intercultural dialogue through circus activities. As there can be no strong policy without proper funding, the European Commission has presented an ambitious proposal for the next Creative Europe – the EU's funding programme for the cultural and creative sectors. We hope that the European Parliament will support us on that during the legislative negotiations.

The current Creative Europe programme has funded since 2014 a great number of projects in the field of circus arts and street arts worth more than 4 million euros. On top of that, we have launched a first pilot project to promote the individual mobility of artists and cultural professionals this year. Circus artists will be welcome to participate in this new project, which we intend to conduct during the next three years. Investing in culture is vital for the future of Europe. It brings people from very different backgrounds together, enables them to unite in diversity by recognising shared historical and cultural experience. Through this, I hope people come to realise that there is more that unites us than divides us.

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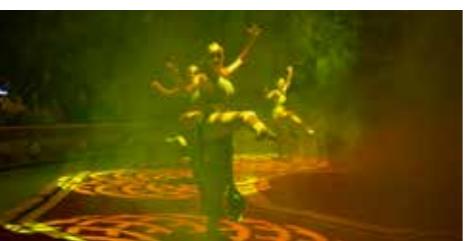
(European Commissioner Tibor Navracsics (left), Kata Tüttő MP, Laci Endrész and István Ujhelyi MEP (right - 2018)

The Blackpool Tower Theatre Circus was established in 1894 and has been open continuously ever since, not even closing during the two world wars. It features a one of a kind hydraulic Water finale, that still operates with the original technology from 1894.

The Endresz Family have been producing and creating the shows since 1991 and Laci Endresz Jr aka Mooky the clown and Bubu Endresz aka Mr Boo are the head liners and also the creative and technical Directors. They are 6 generations of Hungarian circus artists on their Paternal side and 9 generations of English Circus Artists on their Maternal side.

The season starts around mid February and runs until the 1st Sunday in November. This years show is a colourful variety of Circus acts from around the world. There is also a 6 piece Live orchestra and 6 Circusetts. The water spectacular is designed and built by Laci Endresz Jr & this year features a spectacular Laser extravaganza. Each year a completely new show is produced & created, as many of the audience return annually.

The Blackpool Tower Theatre Circus Building is situated under the Blackpool Tower legs and is a beautiful ornate Victorian Building on the Central Promenade, designed by Frank Matcham.





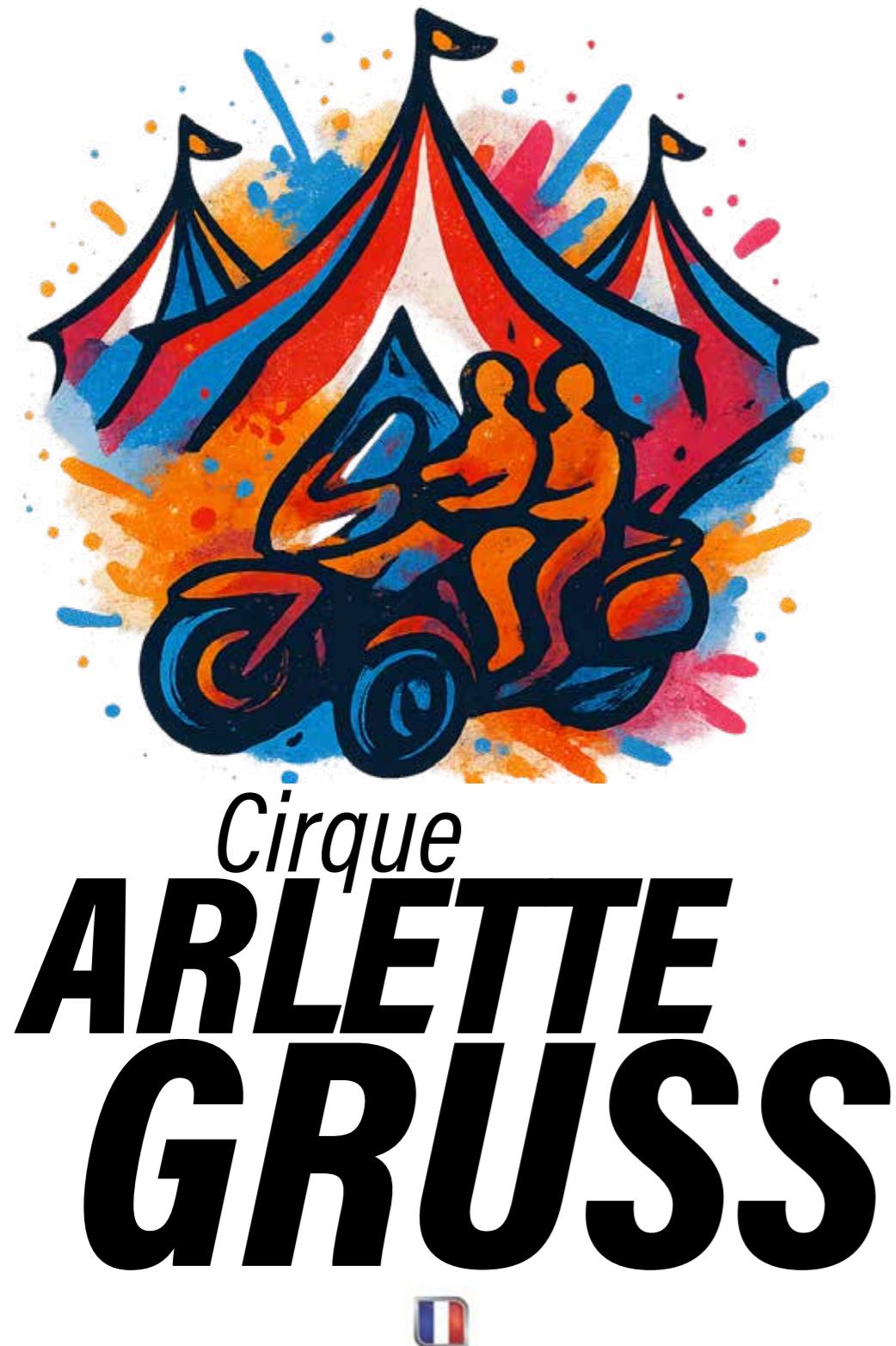
(European Commissioner Tibor Navracsics (left), Jana Mandana Lacey-Krone (middle), Martin Lacey Jr. and István Ujhelyi MEP - 2018)

The story of Circus Krone is far more than mere entertainment – it is living cultural history. In 1870, Carl Krone was born in Osnabrück; in 1872, the “Menagerie Continental” was founded – the cornerstone of what would become the largest circus in the world. From an early age, Krone displayed remarkable talent as an animal trainer. Performing under the name “Monsieur Charles” from 1888 onward, he thrilled audiences across Europe. In 1892, he caused a sensation when a lion rode on horseback – a world first. After his father’s death in 1900, Carl Krone took over the family enterprise, married Ida Ahlers, and in 1905 transformed the menagerie into “Circus Charles”, which in 1913 received its legendary name: Circus Krone.

Driven by pioneering spirit, the company expanded rapidly. In 1919, the first permanent Krone Building opened on Munich’s Marsfeld, seating 4,000 spectators. By 1924, Krone presented three rings, two stages, and 8,000 seats – a circus without equal. In 1928, Krone became a global brand, showcasing 27 elephants, 650 animals, and over 1,000 employees – a triumph of organization and passion. Despite war and destruction, the dream endured. After Carl Krone’s death in 1943, his wife Ida and daughter Frieda continued his life’s work. In 1962, the third Krone Building opened in Munich – modern, elegant, and unique. The adjacent “Zirkus-Krone-Straße” still honors the founding family’s spirit today. Under Frieda and later Christel Sembach-Krone, the founder’s granddaughter, a new era began. Christel – a true horse whisperer and creative leader – shaped the artistic identity of the circus for more than five decades. Her liberty dressage acts were poetry in motion; as artistic director, she united acrobatics, music, and classical circus art into a single, world-class spectacle. Since 2017, Jana Mandana Lacey-Krone, her adoptive daughter, and her husband Martin Lacey Jr., an internationally acclaimed big cat trainer, have led Circus Krone. Their three sons – Alexis, Charles, and Leonard – are already growing up in the ring, continuing the Krone legacy. A vital part of Krone’s future is the Krone Farm – the only retirement sanctuary for circus animals in Europe, a place where love, respect, and responsibility for animals are lived every day.

Today, Circus Krone remains the largest circus in the world. The Krone Building in Munich is the only permanent circus structure in the German-speaking world, seating 3,000 guests and premiering a new winter program every Christmas Day. In summer, Circus Krone tours with its new, state-of-the-art big top – a traveling city where emotion, precision, and tradition merge into an unforgettable experience. Martin Lacey Jr. is one of the world’s most celebrated animal trainers, having won two Golden Clowns and one Silver Clown at the International Circus Festival of Monte Carlo, along with the Audience Award, the Prix Extraordinaire, the Cristal d’Or in Massy, Gold Prizes in Grenoble and Valencia, and the title Showman of the Year in England. His son Alexis is already following in his father’s footsteps, performing alongside him in the ring.





(István Ujhelyi (left), Gilbert Gruss (middle) and Tibor Navracsics (right), European Commissioner for Culture - 2018)

If the name "Arlette Gruss" is today a benchmark in the circus world, it is because it evokes in the collective mind the idea of family success based on authenticity, the transmission of unique expertise, and a desire for constant renewal.

It was in 1985 that Madame Arlette Gruss, the eponymous creator of her circus, decided to restore the French circus to its former glory. Forty years later, under the direction of her son Gilbert Gruss, it has undeniably established itself in the hearts of the French people and as a global reference in circus arts.

Building on choices that, at the time, were rather bold, the Cirque Arlette Gruss is a company that has never stopped growing. Each year extended stays in at least 20 cities, were favoured and have helped build audience loyalty; Cirque Arlette Gruss became an unparalleled institution. Every year more than 325,000 spectators pass through the doors of the "Arche", one of the finest big tops in the world.

Since its inception, the quality of the facilities and numerous technical innovations have been two truly recognized hallmarks of the Cirque Arlette Gruss. The significant investments, allow it to offer such a comfortable experience that spectators forget that it is a 'traveling venue'.

The performance hall, with no interior poles and its state-of-the-art sound and lighting equipment, unmatched in the circus industry, provides a working tool for the show, the artists, and the spectators. It also boasts a unique feature that allows to offer dinner shows. By expanding from a configuration capable of accommodating 1,260 spectators to one that can accommodate 650 guests for a dinner, this multifunctional circus is the only traveling compa-

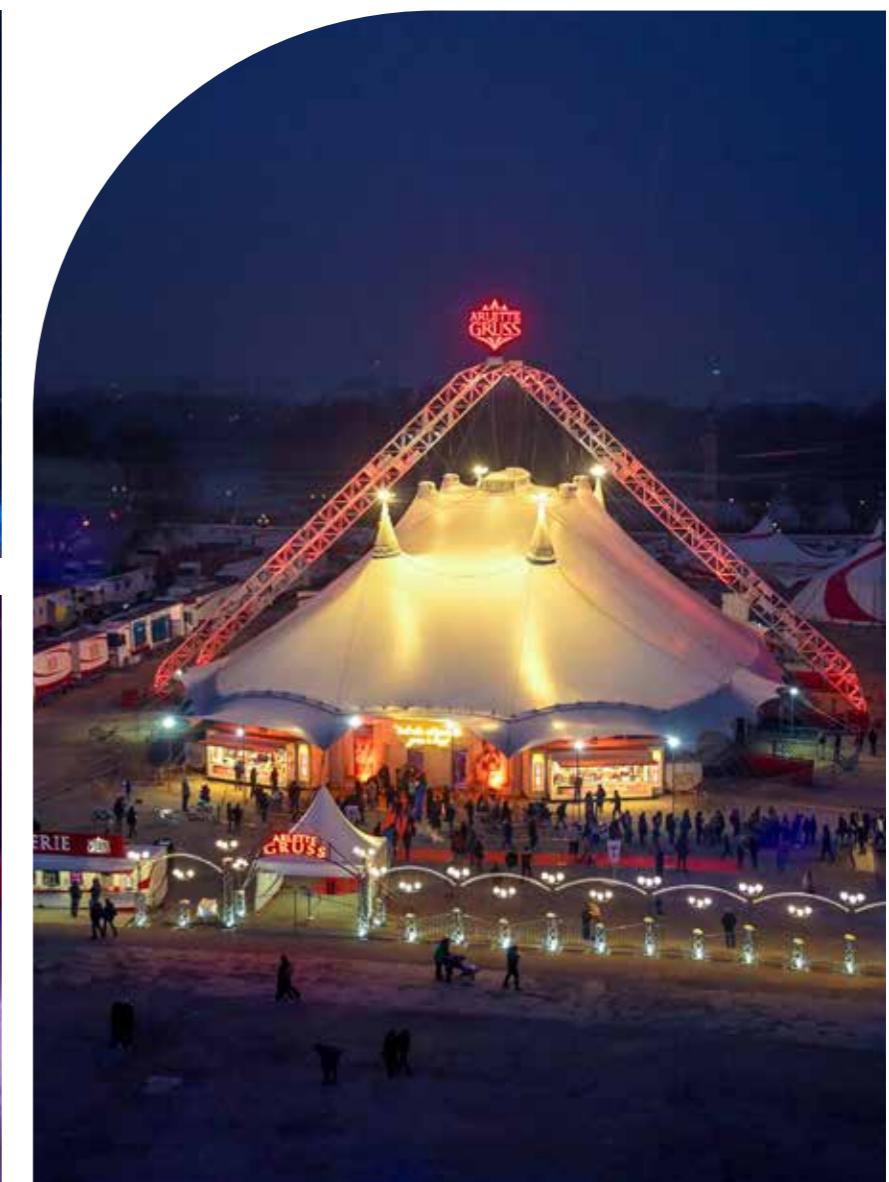
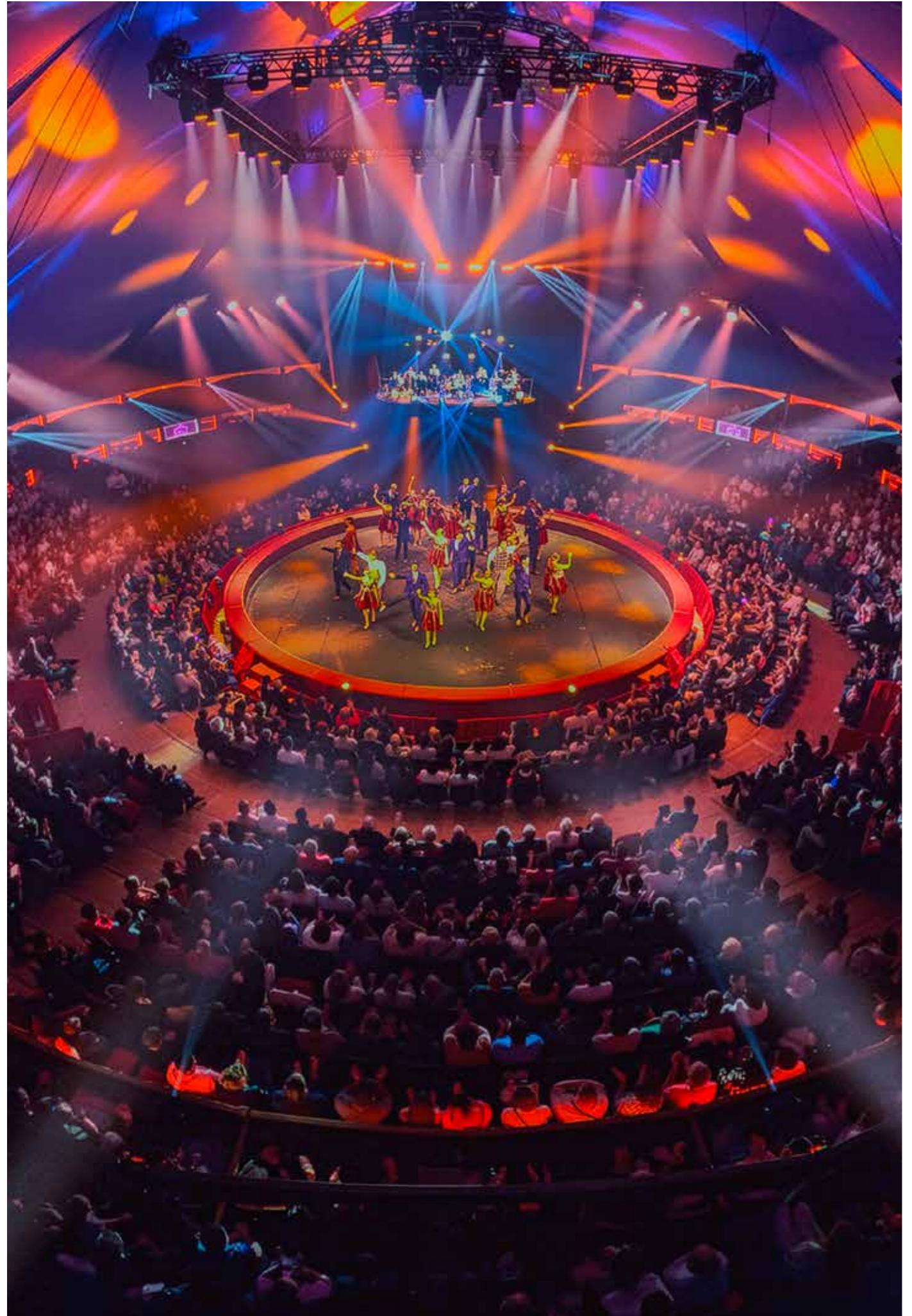
ny in France to offer such an option. Facing the ring, spectators enjoy both a delicious meal and a high-end circus show. Famous culinary chefs are called upon to create a gourmet menu.

Gilbert Gruss doesn't limit the quality of the facilities to what's visible to the public. The 120 employees on tour benefit from remarkable facilities: comfortable housing, restrooms, showers/bathrooms, kitchens, laundry, and even a school for the children; a teacher seconded from the National Education system, is in charge throughout the tour to teach classes, adapted to all school levels. Furthermore, the Cirque Arlette Gruss is committed to the development of a sustainability policy that integrates environmental constraints to meet its operational-, waste sorting-, and transportation needs.

The Cirque Arlette Gruss is a company dedicated to all round entertainment. Technically and through innovating staging, its style gradually took shape. Since its inception, it has incorporated a live orchestra. Each new creation is overseen by a composer for original music scores, by costume designers, engineers for sound, lighting, and special effects and a choreographer for both the group scenes and individual acts.

The Cirque Arlette Gruss has built a solid reputation based on the quality of its performances. It also stands out for its integration of non-circus disciplines.

The Gruss family plays a key role in the success of its shows. The new generation, represented by Gilbert Gruss's four children, proudly carries on this heritage; naturally, and without neglecting its traditions, it aims to be an innovative and modern enterprise for which respect for the audience is paramount.



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BERNADETT **PETRI**

2014-2019: Senior Policy Advisor, member of the cabinet
of European Commissioner Tibor Navracsics

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Commissioner Navracsics responsible for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport I would like to say thank you for the invitation for the annual Award Ceremony for the BigTopLabel, the quality assurance scheme for the Circus sector in Europe. I also would like to express the appreciation of the Commissioner to Member of the European Parliament István Ujhelyi for initiating the idea to create this independent quality assurance scheme and for his commitment to promote circus art, which is a vivid part of Europe's cultural heritage.

Circus culture has an integral part of European culture and economy. Besides its artistic value, it has an important economic impact, including the broader contribution to creativity, innovation and social inclusion. The indicators of the BigTopLabel cover these

aspects very well and we would like to encourage the organisers to create a community among certified circuses and to turn the BigTop Label into a real quality guide. Last year the award ceremony of the BigTopLabel took place during the European Year of Cultural Heritage that we have been celebrating very successfully across the continent.

This year we are working on the creation of the legacy for the European Year of Cultural Heritage. As a part of it, a first-ever overarching study combined with a survey on circus has been launched by the Commission with the objective of gathering socio-economic data and analyzing the current situation of Circus in Europe. The study is now in finalization phase and the results will be presented very soon. The European Commission will keep funding the contemporary circus activities through different programmes and

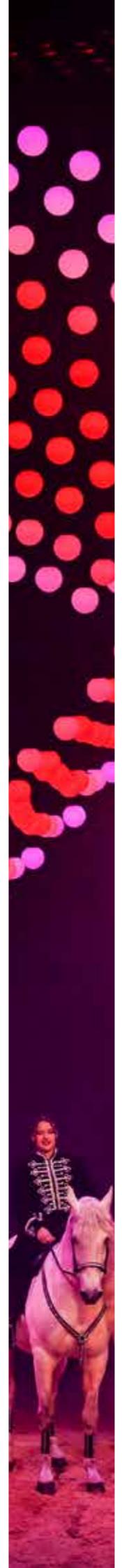
actions such as the Creative Europe programme, the EU's funding programme for the cultural and creative sectors. We would like to encourage the circus sector to keep participating in the policy making process under the new European Commission as well and help our work for a shared cultural heritage by underlining the link between the past and the future and bridging between centuries and generations.

Finally yet importantly, let me convey the congratulations of Commissioner Navracsics to the three laureates of this annual ceremony. It is a great pleasure that one of the BigTopLabel nominated circuses is Hungarian this year. Thank you for your high quality work that can contribute that the modern circus culture get the recognition it deserves due to its distinguished place in common European culture.



02. October 2019. - European Parliament, Brussels

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(István Ujhelyi (left), Mary-José Knie (middle) and Heidi Hautala (right) vice-president of the European Parliament - 2019)

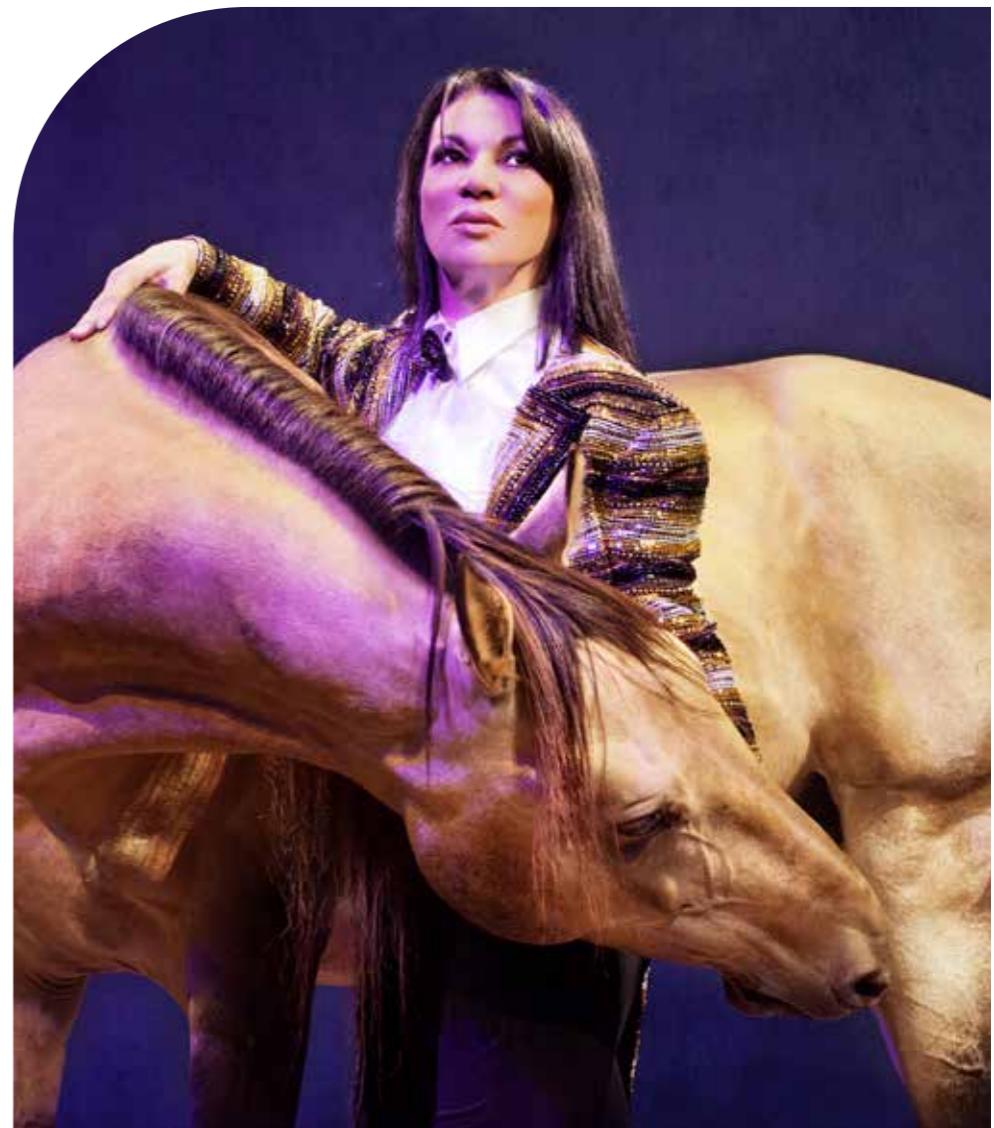
The history of the Swiss National Circus Knie dates to 1803, when medical student Friedrich Knie fell in love with the equestrienne Wilma in Innsbruck. Although the romance eventually ended, his passion for the life of a performer remained. Friedrich founded his own open-air arena and began touring Switzerland for the first time in 1814. It was the fourth generation of the Knie family who fulfilled the dream of owning their own circus tent. In 1919, the Knie family celebrated the premiere of their first performance under their very own big top in Bern – and thus, the Swiss National Circus Knie was born.

Over the decades that followed, the Knie family captivated audiences with international artists and award-winning performances, often with creatively themed productions. The family also earned a reputation for their in-house animal acts, especially with elephants and horses. In 1977, the Knie family received a Golden Clown at the International Circus Festival of Monte Carlo. In 1996, Fredy Knie Jr., his wife Mary-José, and their daughter Géraldine were awarded another Golden Clown at the world's most prestigious circus festival. A Silver Clown followed in 1997 for Franco Knie's elephant act, and in 2003, Franco and his son were honored with a Bronze Clown for their combined elephant and pony performance. In 2020, Ivan Frédéric Knie, along with Maycol and Wioris Errani, received the Golden Clown for outstanding horse acts. That same year, Fredy Knie Jr. was honored for his life's work by H.S.H. Princess Stéphanie of Monaco. In total, three generations of the Knie family have had the distinction of receiving a Golden Clown from the Monegasque royal family.

Today, the seventh generation is at the helm of the Swiss National Circus Knie, led by Géraldine Knie, Doris Knie, and Maycol Errani. Géraldine Knie, as Artistic Director, is responsible for the show and all creative aspects. Her husband, Maycol Errani, serves as Technical Director and has modernized the vehicle fleet and tent systems in recent years. He is also in charge of implementing the technical effects in the show. Doris Knie oversees the administrative side of the circus, managing tour operations, human resources, marketing and public relations.

In the ring, audiences can already see the eighth generation of the Knie family in action. Ivan, Chanel, and Maycol Jr. delight spectators year after year with new equestrian acts. In addition to elegant horse acts, the Knie show features a dynamic mix of acrobatics, aerial and ground artistry, dance, and, of course, comedy. The circus has often collaborated with well-known comedians, such as Emil, Dimitri, and more recently Kaya Yanar and Marie-Thérèse Porchet. Musical highlights have included performances by Bastian Baker and the band Pegasus.

A key focus of the show is the integration of cutting-edge technologies, including drones, kinetic balls, water and fire effects, and a new LED floor, first introduced in 2025. During the tour, the Swiss National Circus Knie employs over 200 staff members and travels throughout Switzerland from March to early January. The company tours with a 45-meter big top supported by arched poles, offering seating for approximately 2,100 guests.





Hungarian National Circus

MAGYAR

NEMZETI

CIRKUSZ



(István Ujhelyi (left), József Richter Jr. (middle) and Heidi Hautala (right) Vice-President of the European Parliament - 2019)

The world-famous Richter family and the Hungarian National Circus have been promoting high-quality circus art in Hungary for 32 years, for which there is growing demand. It is rare to find a venue like their giant tent, where three generations can be entertained at the same time and share unforgettable experiences at their annually renewed international gala performances, which welcome artists each year from 10–12 countries.

Since 1995, as Hungary's largest and most prestigious travelling circus, their nationwide tour has presented world-class performances of more than two hours nearly 200 times at 19 different locations over the course of more than eight months. One of their permanent venues is Balatonlelle, their second home, where the company has performed every summer for two months, in July and August, since 1997. In recognition of the Richter family's achievements, the city named the street next to the circus Richter Street, which has become a popular photo spot for visitors. Each year during the second week of July, Balatonlelle also hosts the most anticipated Hungarian circus event of the year: the Night of Circuses. At this time, everything in the lakeside town revolves around the circus. The programme series opens with a musical parade, features shows directly on the beach by Lake Balaton, and in the evening audiences are welcomed with colourful accompanying events, while guest artists join the company for an expanded gala that runs late into the night. Over the years, the event has grown so much that

uniquely in Hungary, it is celebrated there for three full days, usually with sold-out performances that rival the atmosphere of an international circus festival.

When compiling their ever-changing programmes, special emphasis is placed on the classical elements of the circus, which are the cornerstones of the genre: acrobats, animals, and clowns. The acts and the unmistakable circus atmosphere are accompanied each year by the orchestra of the Hungarian National Circus – also unique in the country – since, as a travelling circus, it is the only one in Hungary where live music enhances the breathtaking performances of the artists.

They take pride in being the first Hungarian circus to receive the Big Top Label award. They are also proud that their work attracts increasing interest not only from Hungarian audiences but also from international visitors who travel from all over the world. The founder of the circus, József Richter, was recognised by the Hungarian state in 2017 with one of the country's highest artistic honours, the Kossuth Prize, for his outstanding achievements. He continues to support the company from behind the scenes to this day. Mr. Richter remains the first and only circus artist to have received such a prestigious honour, while the director of the company, József Richter Jr., has returned from numerous international festivals with six gold prizes, including the Golden Clown of Monte Carlo, as well as the Hortobágyi Károly Prize awarded by the Hungarian state.





(Heidi Hautala Vice-President of the European Parliament (left), Calle Jernström Jr. (middle) and MEP István Ujhelyi - 2019)

Sirkus Finlandia stands proudly as the national circus of Finland — a cherished institution that for decades has embodied the artistry, warmth, and pioneering spirit of Finnish entertainment. Founded in 1976 by Karl-Gustav “Kalle” Jernström Sr. and his wife Leena, the circus began as a small family venture travelling the northern landscapes with a single tent and boundless ambition. What started as a modest dream soon blossomed into one of Europe’s most respected and admired traditional circuses, celebrated for its creativity, excellence, and deep cultural roots.

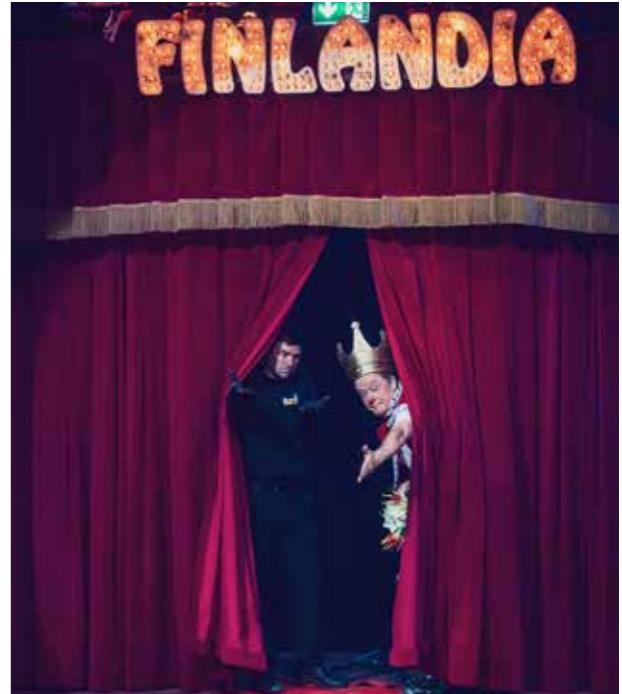
In the early years, the Jernström family faced the typical challenges of touring life in the Nordic climate: unpredictable weather, long roads, and limited resources. Yet their determination, family unity, and belief in the timeless magic of circus carried them forward. Step by step, they built Sirkus Finlandia into a household name — a mark of quality and joy recognised by generations of Finnish families. By the 1980s, the circus had become an annual tradition for audiences across the country, combining world-class acts with the warmth and charm that define Finnish hospitality.

Under Kalle and Leena’s leadership, and later with their children Kalle Jr., Maria, and Anna, the circus grew steadily in both artistic scope and production scale. Their touring fleet expanded, their Big Top grew to seat thousands, and their shows began to feature an international ensemble of top-tier artists — from daring acrobats and skilled jugglers to graceful equestrian performers. Yet despite its success, Sirkus Finlandia has always remained a true family business. The Jernströms continue to manage, direct, perform,

and personally oversee every detail, preserving the intimate connection between artists and audience that lies at the heart of the circus tradition. Through decades of innovation, the company has never lost sight of its origins. Sirkus Finlandia continues to balance the classic charm of the traditional circus with contemporary flair, musical richness, and refined stagecraft. Each autumn, their new production embarks on a grand tour of Finland — from Lapland to Helsinki — bringing laughter, colour, and wonder to communities large and small. Their annual premiere is considered one of the highlights of Finland’s cultural calendar, drawing thousands of visitors and extensive national media coverage.

Beyond performance, the Jernström family has long been active in promoting animal welfare, safety, and high professional standards in circus arts. Their commitment to quality and integrity has made Sirkus Finlandia a model of best practice within the European circus sector. This dedication was formally recognised in 2019, when the circus received the BigTopLabel — the European quality label honouring excellence, transparency, and ethical standards in circus performance.

Today, under the direction of Calle Jernström Jr., Sirkus Finlandia continues to thrive, bridging generations while remaining proudly Finnish and deeply international. Its success is a living testament to hard work, artistic vision, and the unbreakable bond between family and audience.



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12. October 2022. - European Parliament, Brussels

It is an honour for me to be here today, at the BigTopLabel awards ceremony, and I would like to warmly thank MEP Ujhelyi for inviting me.

The Circus is a beautiful art form, and it deserves all our support. It is actually a good epitome of the European Union, a group of diverse people banding together to do something bigger than themselves, connecting communities, one might even say, united in diversity? Circus sets a valid example to society. No matter where you come from, no matter what talent you have developed, if you put enough work behind it, if you learn from a community that has put on a great show for centuries, there is a place for you to shine. To be under the spotlight. To have your self-discipline and humanity admired and respected. The performance of these virtues has made the circus what it is today, an integral part of our culture that we should recognise and support. And this is precisely why we are here today.

MEP Ujhelyi put it brilliantly when he called the BigTopLabel with “the Michelin-star of circus arts”. Indeed, the BigTopLabel recognises excellence. It recognises that these performances deserve to travel. It recognises that the circus community deserve our support. The label guarantees a quality threshold. Animal welfare and safety. Social responsibility. The promotion of the wholesome values of this beautiful tradition. Not to mention that it promotes the renewal of this art. And this applies to all types of circuses,

from traditional to modern, for those with animal acts or without. The BigTopLabel is a reference for the circus world. I hope it becomes a reference outside it too. And looking at the great names that already got the label, it is without a doubt well on its way. They are all circuses with a long tradition, constantly re-inventing themselves, always open to innovation. That is the same ambition that drives the three circuses we honour today. The Circus Balkanski from Bulgaria and Cirkus Brazil Jack from Sweden are family-run companies with a long tradition where the art has been meeting excellence from generation to generation. Circus Roncalli from Germany has successfully paved the way for innovation in new scenarios since the mid 90's, bringing acrobatic poetry to the circus ring.

Behind the scenes, these three circuses work hard to meet the highest standards. In the ring, their performances show the highest artistic value. They truly enchant us with their magic and poetry. They are great examples of why I am proud to be a part of supporting this community. Through projects funded by our programmes, through mobility opportunities, or through insight, building an evidence base that supports your needs when you advocate and organize for your community.

There are three topics that I would like to develop briefly, which are the European fundings, the support to artistic mobility, and the specific data

MARIYA GABRIEL

2019-2023: European Commissioner for Innovation,
Research, Culture, Education and Youth

needed so that our policies serve your community. Let me start with funding. Between 2014 and 2020, our Creative Europe programme supported many projects on the circus arts with a total of 7 million euros. A majority of our applications come from Nouveau Cirque or from professional circus schools, but I think traditional and family-owned circus should consider applying more often as well. In fact, I am convinced that the circus has a lot to give, and I would like to encourage you all to apply to more projects, not only through the Creative Europe programme, but also through Erasmus+. I believe that circus has real potential supporting inclusive education, fostering virtues all of us need to succeed, from perseverance to teamwork.

Second, mobility. And here, I have exciting news. building on the success of the I-Portunus pilot project, and thanks to the crucial support from the European Parliament, I have just launched “Culture Moves Europe” two days ago. This is a new initiative under the Creative Europe Programme promoting the individual mobility of artists and cultural professionals. Circus artists are welcome to participate in this new programme, especially as this community has such a big tradition of cultural transfers and connecting communities.

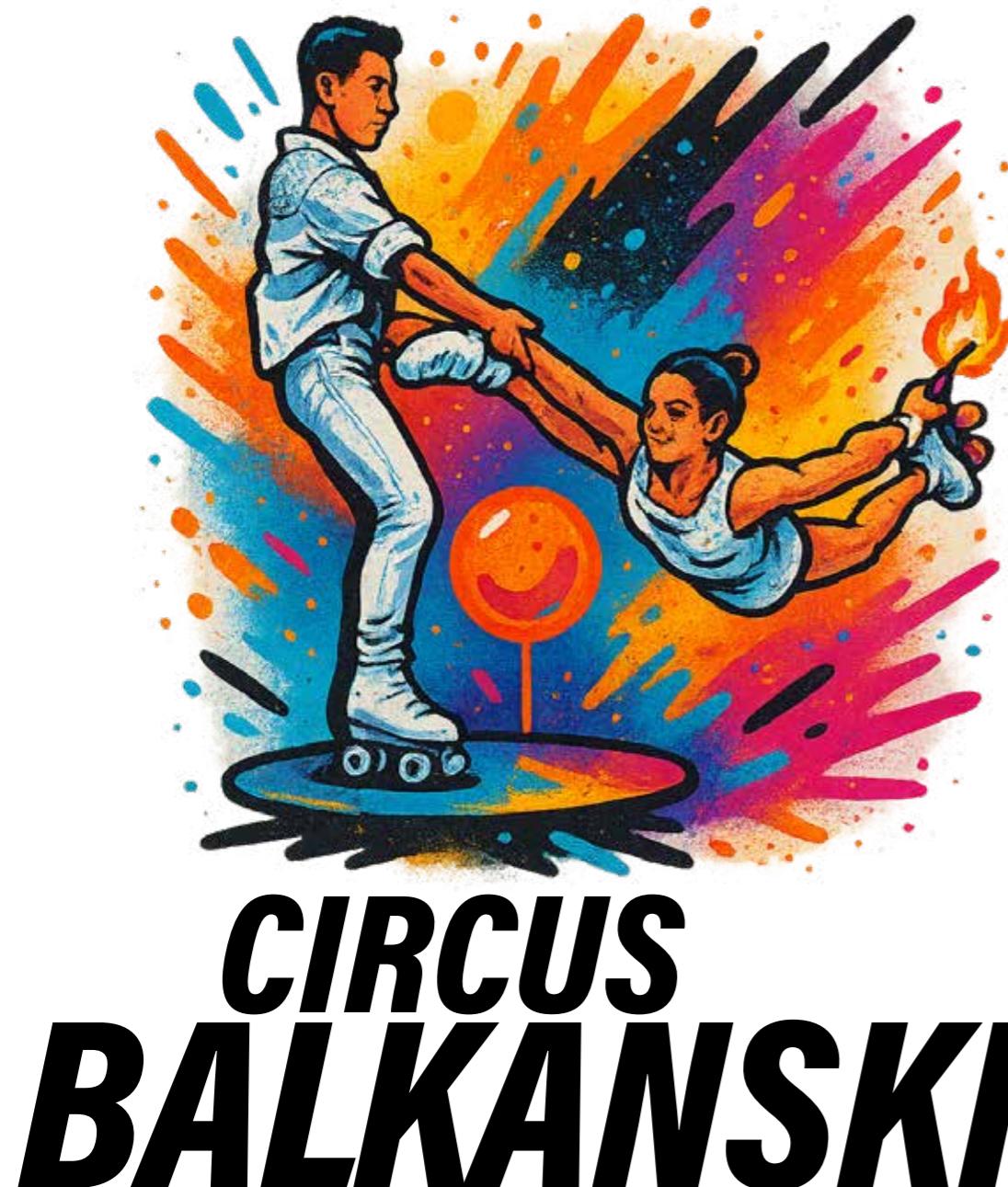
Third, data. As we were celebrating the 250th anniversary of the circus and the European Year of Cultural Heritage, in 2018, we launched an overarching

study on the circus arts in Europe. I know that a lot of you contributed to that study, and I thank you for that. We are very proud of the results. We now have a solid evidence base on many aspects of circus life, from the socio-economic profile of the sector to the educational needs of children whose parents work in circus arts. This is essential for public authorities, from the EU to the local level, to support you the best we can.

Dear friends, as Stéphanie de Monaco, a friend of the circus community, rightly said: “Circus is what real life should be like. It's sincerity, feeling, emotions. All real. There are no lies in circus.” Indeed, the circus teaches us to commit. To work. To help one another. So let me express my warmest congratulations to all those we celebrate today. Your contribution to our rich cultural tapestry is essential.

Thank you for impressing us, for leaving us in awe, for making us smile. Thank you for your attention, and I wish you an excellent ceremony.

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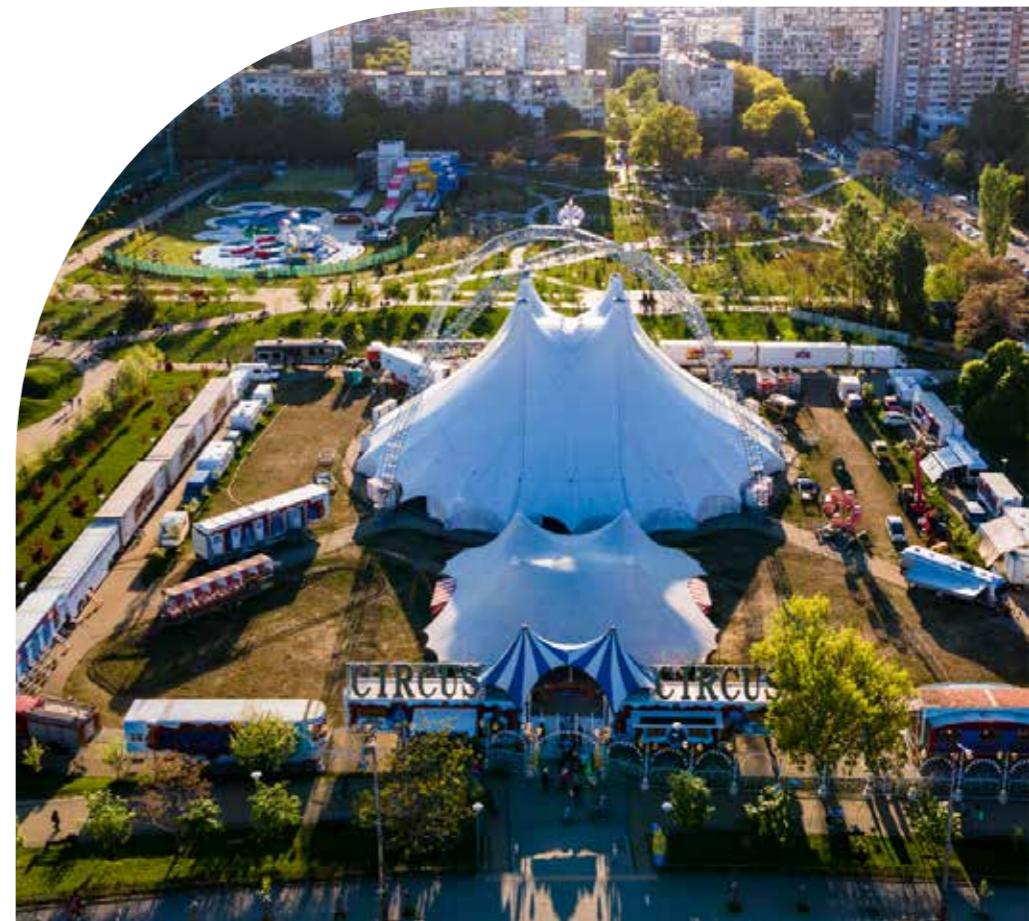
(Urs Pilz (left), Alexander Balkanski (middle), Mariya Gabriel EU-Commissioner for Culture and MEP István Ujhelyi - 2022)

The Balkanski Circus stands as one of Europe's most respected and enduring circus dynasties, carrying more than two centuries of artistic heritage. Their story began in 1820, when Joseph Giuntini, the great-grandfather of Professor Alexander Balkanski, founded the Giuntini Circus in Samara, Russia. After years of travel and hardship, the family settled permanently in Varna, Bulgaria, where the Balkanski name became synonymous with excellence and tradition in circus arts.

Throughout generations, the family built a reputation for talent, resilience, and innovation. Among its most celebrated figures, Professor Alexander Balkanski – Senior and his wife Maria performed the legendary "Flying Trapeze" act more than 350 times at Madison Square Garden, earning global acclaim. In 2000, he fulfilled his lifelong dream by founding the Academic Circus "Balkanski" in Sofia, a modern institution combining classical artistry with contemporary production. Today, the circus operates in a unique, state-of-the-art big top free of support columns, welcoming up to 1,800 spectators.

Under the direction of his sons, Alexander and Nikolay Balkanski, the company continues to deliver spectacular performances blending traditional and modern circus disciplines. Each season they tour Bulgaria with new thematic productions, such as "Once Upon a Time There Was a Circus," celebrating the history and evolution of the art form. The next generation – Trio Balkanski, formed by Nikolay's children Tiziano, Mari, and Natalie – has already earned international recognition, including the Silver Clown at the Monte-Carlo Circus Festival.

Recognised by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Academic Circus "Balkanski" also runs the country's first professional circus school, nurturing young talent and ensuring the continuity of its legacy. With passion and a deep sense of family tradition, the Balkanski Circus remains a symbol of innovation and national pride in Bulgaria's cultural life.





(Urs Pilz (left), Mariya Gabriel EU-Commissioner for Culture (middle), Ashkan Maleki and MEP István Ujhelyi - 2022)

Circus Roncalli is one of Europe's most beloved and artistically influential circuses, renowned for redefining the art of traditional performance with poetic imagination and theatrical elegance. Founded in 1976 by Bernhard Paul and André Heller, the circus made its debut in Bonn, Germany, as a bold revival of classical European circus traditions infused with nostalgia, artistry, and human emotion. Its vision was clear from the start: to celebrate the magic of the circus without relying on spectacle alone, transforming it into a moving, living work of art.

Over the decades, Circus Roncalli has grown into a cultural institution, touring across Europe and enchanting millions with its signature blend of music, mime, acrobatics, and storytelling. Bernhard Paul, who continues to direct the company, created a unique aesthetic universe filled with vintage charm—ornate wagons, warm lights, and romantic atmospheres reminiscent of a bygone era. The Roncalli Orchestra performs live at every show, reinforcing the sense of authenticity and intimacy that has become the hallmark of the Roncalli experience.

In 2018, Circus Roncalli became the first major circus in the world to remove live animals entirely from its performances, replacing them with breathtaking holographic projections of horses, elephants, and fish. This pioneering step toward ethical innovation received global acclaim, setting new standards for humane and sustainable circus art.

Today, Circus Roncalli remains based in Cologne, where its team continues to craft new productions that blend tradition and modern technology in perfect harmony. With a history spanning nearly fifty years, it has earned countless awards for its artistic excellence and social responsibility. Beyond entertainment, Circus Roncalli represents the belief that the circus is not only a show but a feeling, an art form that connects generations and speaks directly to the heart of the people.





CIRKUS BRAZIL JACK



(Urs Pilz (left), Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner for Culture, Trolle Rhodin (middle) and István Ujhelyi (right) - 2022)

The story of Cirkus Brazil Jack is one of Sweden's most remarkable cultural legacies—a bridge between tradition and innovation that has endured for over a century. It began in 1899, when Carl Max Alexander Rhodin, known as "Brazil Jack," established his circus after performing at the Stockholm Exhibition. A showman and adventurer, he combined artistry with entrepreneurship, founding what would become Sweden's oldest continuously touring circus. His pioneering spirit was passed through generations of the Rhodin family, who carried the tent across Scandinavia through wars, economic crises, and social change, bringing circus joy to millions.

Over the decades, the Brazil Jack name became synonymous with Swedish popular culture. In the 1920s and 1930s, the circus expanded nationwide, introducing motorized transport and grand parades that attracted huge audiences from Stockholm to Malmö. After World War II, the Rhodin family rebuilt and reinvented the company, preserving its independence while adapting to a rapidly modernizing new society. Each generation added its own creative vision—from the musical and equestrian spectacles of

the mid-century to the colorful, theatrical revues of the 1980s—keeping Brazil Jack both rooted in heritage and alive to change.

Under the leadership of Trolle Rhodin, the current director and great-grandson of the founder, Brazil Jack has entered a new era—one defined by sustainability and artistic renewal. The circus was the first in the world to power its entire operation with green hybrid energy, replacing diesel with silent, emission-free battery storage and solar-supported generators, cutting fuel consumption by nearly 40 percent. At the same time, Trolle Rhodin reshaped the repertoire, phasing out animal acts and creating a modern family spectacle that blends acrobatics, humor, and live music while keeping the warmth and authenticity of traditional circus art.

Today, Cirkus Brazil Jack tours Sweden each year for over six months, giving hundreds of performances under its iconic red-and-yellow tent. It stands as a symbol of sustainable entertainment and cultural continuity—a living proof that the spirit of the traveling circus can evolve, inspire, and thrive in harmony with the modern world.



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MARKUS SCHULTE

2023-2024: Head of Cabinet of European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Iliana Ivanova



6. December 2023. - European Parliament, Brussels

Dear Mr Ujhelyi, Honourable Members of the European Parliament, Dear friends, Let me first of all give you the warmest regards from my Commissioner, Commissioner Iliana Ivanova. She cannot be here today and she asked to address you on her behalf.

It is a pleasure to be with you today on the occasion of this fourth BigTopLabel Awards Ceremony. Commissioner Iliana Ivanova has asked me to be here with you on her behalf. The BigTopLabel is a great example of European cooperation. Where there is excellence, we should share it. When someone does it better, we shine a light on their craft, we work together and learn. This is why we are here today. To shine a spotlight on what deserves to be highlighted. So, let me take this opportunity to congratulate the laureates of this fourth edition, Circo Raluy Legacy, Richter Flórián Cirkusz and Zippos Circus.

Each of you elevates your art at a new level. You are setting an example, you are keeping our rich European circus traditions alive, and you bring joy to millions of people across Europe and the world. For centuries, the circus has been a force in connecting people across language and cultures. This art con-

tributed to developing ties and fostering exchanges, creating and circulating our common European cultural heritage. And it did so leaving nobody behind. After all, inclusion has long been a fundamental principle for the circus. This event tonight recognises this work, the ingenuity of your answers to today's challenges. Circuses have real impact in European people's lives. Your organisations deserve our gratitude and our continued support. For this we have the European Theatre Initiative under Creative Europe.

First, the initiative put together a comprehensive study on working conditions. Especially after the pandemic, we needed to listen to performers, to know what the sector needed. Second, it set up regular European Theatre Fora, sparking an important dialogue with policy-makers. Third, it provided dedicated support through Perform Europe.

These grants were created thinking especially of small organisations – in dance, theatre, or the circus. They empower innovative practitioners, performers, and artists to find solutions to the challenges of the sector, from tackling the environmental transition to showing us all the importance of social commitment.

On this matter, I am delighted to announce that on Friday, we will open the Perform Europe 2023 open calls. We are putting forward 2.1 million euro to support at least 35 partnerships.

I can only encourage each of you to seize this opportunity. Just as I encourage you to continue to find good opportunities in the programme's other actions. From cooperation and network calls to Culture Moves Europe, our mobility scheme, these opportunities are there for you. We do not need to look very far to see the results of these opportunities. Look for example at the excellent work of Circocostrada, a Creative Europe network of contemporary circus and outdoor arts professionals. These networks provide invaluable support, solutions, and can sometimes even be invaluable in helping small organisations with funding, through the cascading grant system.

The opportunities are there. The creativity and entrepreneurship is also there. These are key ingredients for success. I look forward to continuing our fruitful dialogue with the Circus art sectors, and to hear news about your work. Congratulations again to the laureates. Thank you.

”

RICHTER FLÓRIÁN

cirkusz



(Urs Pilz(left), Edith Éva Richter and István Ujhelyi MEP with Markus Schulte, Chief of Cabinet of Commissioner Iliana Ivanova - 2023)

Richter Flórián Circus is one of the youngest traveling circuses in Hungary, yet it represents enormous value and embraces great tradition.

In the past decade, the circus has created productions with an ever-expanding repertoire and at an ever-higher standard, which have irrevocably elevated the entire art form to the level of high culture. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it cannot be tied to a specific social group, since it addresses the broadest layers of the audience. For the company, circus life does not merely mean shows and acts, but a community where art, humor, and courage meet. From the acrobats to the clowns, everyone works to provide an unforgettable experience for every spectator.

Richter Flórián, the director of the circus, as the child of the seventh-generation Richter acrobat family, began his acrobat career as a horse acrobat at the age of nine. After many years of practice, he achieved great successes with his equestrian productions. In 2009, he founded his own equestrian show, the Horse Evolution Show, which is about the relationship between humans and horses. After its world premiere, the show was successful throughout Europe, and within a nationwide tour it was also presented in the major cities of Hungary. His nationwide tour began in the spring of 2015, and it has enjoyed unbroken popular success ever since.

Flórián and his wife Edith won the Silver Clown Grand Prize with a two-person equestrian acrobat production at the 28th Monte-Carlo Circus Festival, thus contributing to the successes of the family and Hungarian circus art.

In 2008, Flórián Richter, equestrian acrobat and horse trainer of the Hungarian National Circus, together with his ten-member jockey group, won the Golden Clown Grand Prize at the 32nd Monte-Carlo Circus Festival – the first Hungarian ever in the history of circus art to do so. A fresh and wonderful experience of the circus is that in the autumn of 2023 it received the Big Top Label Award, which placed it among the best circuses in Europe.

Flórián and Edith's children, Angelina and Kevin, despite their young age, can already boast international recognition. In 2021 Kevin won the Golden Elephant Prize with his teeterboard group at the International Circus Festival of Girona, and one year later he received the Golden Pierrot Prize for performing the quintuple somersault at one of the world's most prestigious circus festivals.

Angelina, in 2023, set a Guinness record by presenting the Hungarian Post production with 20 horses, as the only woman in the world to do so. She also presented this production in Germany in the best Christmas circus show.

The company of the Richter Flórián Circus consists of more than 50 members. The large circus tent can accommodate nearly 1,300 people. During the year, the troupe brings the experience of carefree entertainment from city to city in Hungary. A tradition in the life of the circus is that in the summer season it sets up its tent for several months at Lake Balaton, in Zamárdi. A highlight of the lakeside season is the Night of the Circuses, which has been held every July for years.





CIRCO RALUY LEGACY



(Urs Pilz (left), Kerry and Louisa Raluy (middle), István Ujhelyi and Markus Schulte Head of Commissioner Ivanova's Cabinet (right) - 2023)

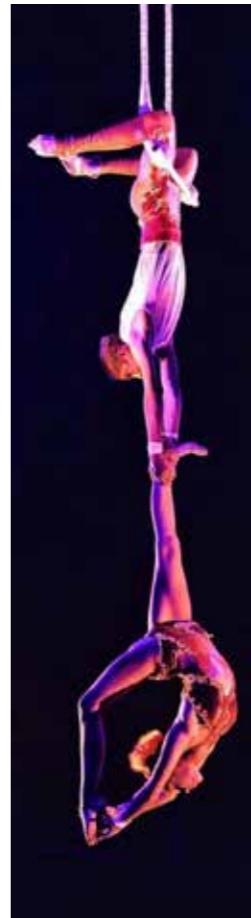
Circo Raluy Legacy is considered the most important and award-winning circus & museum in Spain. Recently awarded with the gold medal granted by the Spanish Academy of Performing Arts (Academia de las artes Escénicas de España).

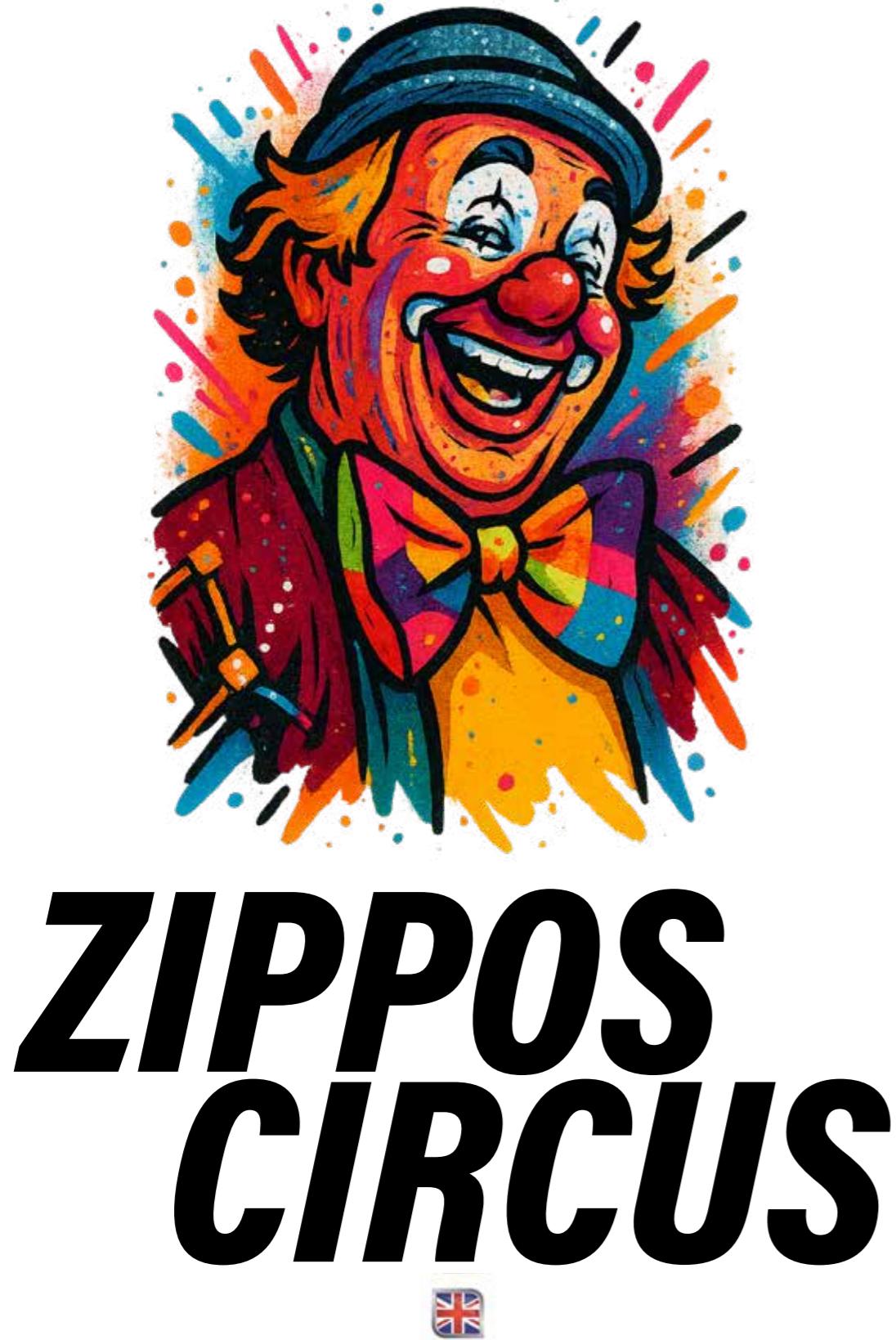
With more than 100 years of history and six generations of circus artists, today it is under the direction of two women, Louisa and Kerry Raluy, who carry the legacy of this magical circus with pride, dignity and devotion, they have inherited the passion and respect for circus arts from their father (Luis Raluy) and grandfather (Luis Raluy Iglesias).

The Raluy family has also just opened "CIRC Experience" a circus space that combines circus school & circus museum. An inspiring place to create, take classes, discover, and bring anyone closer to circus world.

The Raluy sisters aim to take circus art to its fullest splendor, dignifying it with hard work, respect, and always, offering the highest quality shows.

The Legacy is assured.





(Urs Pilz(left), Martin Burton and István Ujhelyi with Beau Denning and Markus Schulte, Chief of Cabinet of Commissioner Ivanova - 2023)

Founded in 1986 by Martin Burton — who began his career in 1974 as “Zippo the Clown” performing on the seafront of Brighton — Zippos Circus has grown from a modest tent and a handful of artists into one of Europe’s most respected and best-loved circuses. Burton’s vision was to create a show rooted in traditional circus humour and craftsmanship, yet open to new ideas and artistic innovation. Guided by this spirit, Zippos quickly became a favourite among British audiences, touring the length and breadth of the UK every year with fresh, original productions. Since 2009, it has also provided the headline Christmas Circus in London’s Hyde Park Winter Wonderland, one of Europe’s largest festive attractions.

Comedy has always been the beating heart of Zippos. From the original “Zippo & Co.” trio to the celebrated in-house clown team, its ring has welcomed generations of world-famous clowns such as The Rastellis, Charlie Cairoli Jr., Totti Alexis, and many others. Even Hollywood legend Paul Newman once appeared under the Zippos Big Top in 2004 for a charity event supporting children’s causes. This deep sense of social responsibility is central to Zippos’ identity: through its Laughtercare hospital programme, Community Admissions Scheme offering free tickets to disadvantaged families, and support for numerous charities, Zippos has continually used the joy of circus to uplift communities.

In 1993, Burton founded the Academy of Circus Arts, the UK’s first travelling circus school, designed to train young talents in both the art and life of the circus. The school’s success — recognised by a National Lottery grant — saw its graduates perform in major productions worldwide, including Cirque du Soleil. Zippos was also honoured in 2003 when Queen Elizabeth II invited the company to perform at Buckingham Palace for disadvantaged children, marking the first time a circus had ever set up a Big Top on the royal lawns. From 1995 to 2018, Zippos featured magnificent equestrian acts — liberty horses, Cossack riders, and vaulting artists — alongside occasional domestic animal performances. Since 2020, the show has evolved into a fully human performance ensemble, featuring top international acts and a new creative concept each season.

Today, Zippos continues to represent the very best of British and European circus. Constantly investing in modern infrastructure and creative direction, the company blends its proud heritage with contemporary production values. Recognised with the Big Top Label award in 2023, Zippos remains a beacon of artistic excellence, laughter, and community spirit. Now led by Beau Denning — a descendant of the historic Fossett circus family — Zippos enters its fifth decade true to its founding mission: to keep circus alive as an art form of wonder, humanity, and joy.



“



6. December 2023. - European Parliament, Brussels

The Circus is a beautiful art form, and it deserves all our support. It is actually a good epitome of the European Union, a group of diverse people banding together to do something bigger than themselves, connecting communities, one might even say, united in diversity.” These were the words of Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Culture, back in 2022 during the BigTopLabel awards ceremony held in the European Parliament.

I find this statement very fitting because European circus arts, with a history spanning over 250 years, are indeed much more than what we see in the ring. Behind the breathtaking performances, the acrobatics, and sometimes superhuman achievements, lies an immense amount of work and perseverance. These feats could never be accomplished without trust-based collaboration and teamwork. For this reason, circus arts not only embody cultural value but also carry significant social and societal messages. This is what makes them unique among art forms.

The European Union has always been committed to supporting and preserving our cultural heritage, including circus arts. Over the past decades, the European Parliament has adopted several resolutions and documents that directly or indirectly address

circus arts and the broader cultural sector. Notable among these is the resolution adopted in October 2021, which focuses on the situation of artists and the cultural recovery of the Union. This resolution emphasizes the importance of the cultural and creative sectors for European identity and the economy and calls for improved working conditions for artists and cultural workers. Although the document does not specifically target circus arts, its measures and recommendations are equally applicable to circus artists, who are an integral part of the cultural sector.

In an interview a few years ago, I stated: “Europe is our future, and our shared cultural heritage is the foundation of European identity. The diversity and richness of European culture give strength to our community, and it is our collective responsibility to protect it.” I firmly believe that the over 250-year-old European circus tradition is a valuable component of Europe’s cultural diversity and, as such, of European identity. It is important to preserve it, safeguard its quality, and showcase its best examples to others.

“The Michelin star of circus arts”—this is how the BigTopLabel program is referred to in the cultural sector. It is a fitting comparison. The project’s objectives are clear and straightforward: to guarantee qual-

ity in circus arts based on the strictest professional and legal standards, whether it concerns working conditions, service quality, financial transparency, artistic excellence, or—something particularly relevant today—the welfare of animals. The program’s rightful aim is to highlight circus productions and companies that excel in all these areas, sometimes even challenging justified or unjustified stereotypes about the sector. I wish for the experts to continue their noble mission and spotlight those who deserve recognition. I also hope the BigTopLabel program achieves its long-term goals, such as fostering co-operation among award-winning circus companies, advocating collectively for shared interests, and educating the sector—all plans I learned about from the program’s founders. I am confident that the European community will support them in these efforts.

Congratulations to this year’s award recipients! And if I may add a personal note, I am especially delighted that a circus from Germany is among the honorees this year. “Viva le cirque!” as they say, meaning “Long live the circus!” And I say: Long live Europe, long live the diverse European community, long live the magnificent European culture, and within it, high-quality circus arts!

**KATARINA
BARLEY**

2019- : Vice-President of the European Parliament

”



(Katarina Barley, Vice-President of the European Parliament (left), Are Arnardo (middle) and István Ujhelyi (right) - 2024)

Founded in 1949 by the legendary Arne Arnardo, Cirkus Arnardo has become a cornerstone of Norwegian cultural heritage. For more than 75 years, it has brought world-class entertainment to audiences nationwide, bridging cultural gaps by reaching even the most remote areas of the country.

Cirkus Arnardo emerged from a vision to establish a truly exceptional Norwegian circus. For generations, Arnardo has become the very definition of circus in Norway. This cherished legacy, with its blend of timeless acts – comedic clowns, graceful animals, and breathtaking acrobatics – presented with a contemporary flair, continues to enchant audiences of all ages, offering a fresh, magical experience with a completely new show each year.

The renowned Arctic arena of Cirkus Arnardo has long been a coveted starting point for ambitious young artists, a launching pad to international acclaim. The Arnardo family's own global recognition is underscored by Arne's son, Arild, the sole Norwegian to have twice performed at the prestigious International Circus Festival of Monte-Carlo, in 1976 and 1977.

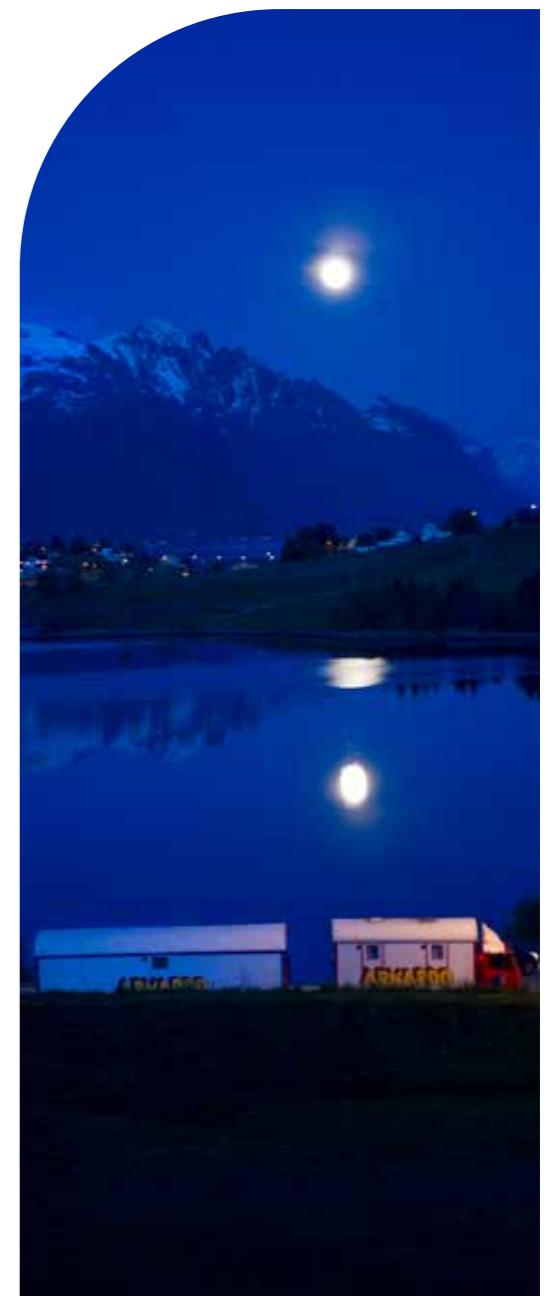
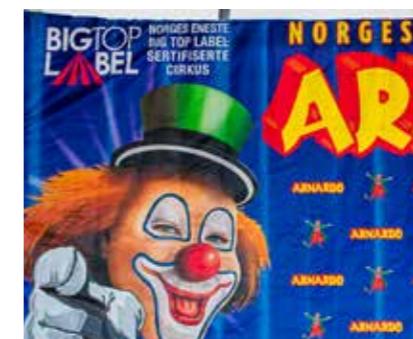
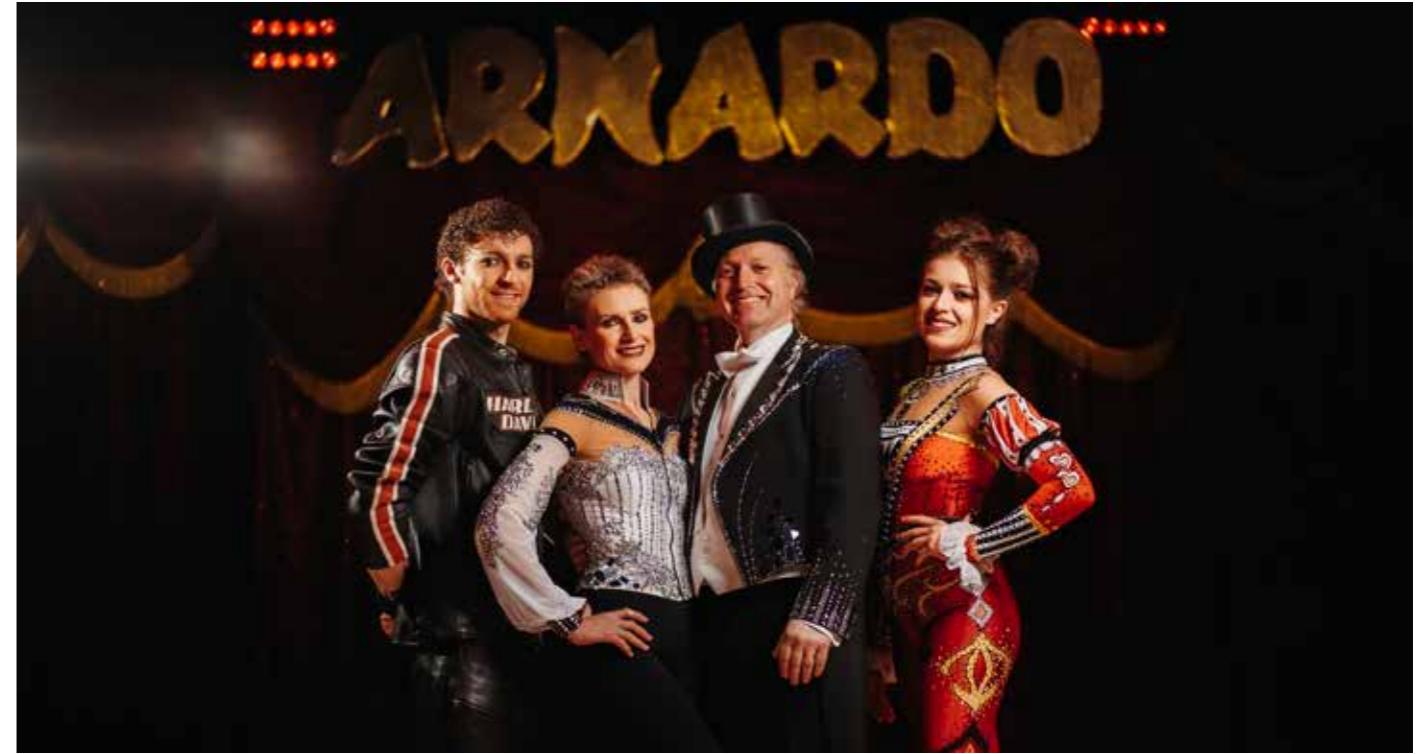
From March to October, Cirkus Arnardo embarks on an extraordinary journey, navigating Norway's ever-shifting terrain and unpredictable weather.

Their route takes them through breathtaking landscapes: along the deep fjords of the Arctic, where the midnight sun dances on the water; across the winding, narrow roads of Western Norway, where roaring waterfalls threaten to invade the trucks; and over high mountain passes, where late-spring snow and ice create formidable obstacles.

In every town, a new generation buzzes with anticipation for Cirkus Arnardo, their excitement building with each passing hour. They're about to step into the same magical world that older siblings, parents, and grandparents have described with such wonder.

Arnardo extends beyond the traditional circus; it's a unique and influential force in Norway's cultural landscape, a place where the country's diverse cultural elements find inspiration.

Having earned the prestigious European BigTop-Label quality certificate in 2024, Cirkus Arnardo continues to thrive under the leadership of its third generation. Are Arnardo, supported by his wife Paola and their children Luigi and Shannon, skillfully manages the circus. Their dedication to upholding family traditions and prioritizing quality ensures a secure and successful future.





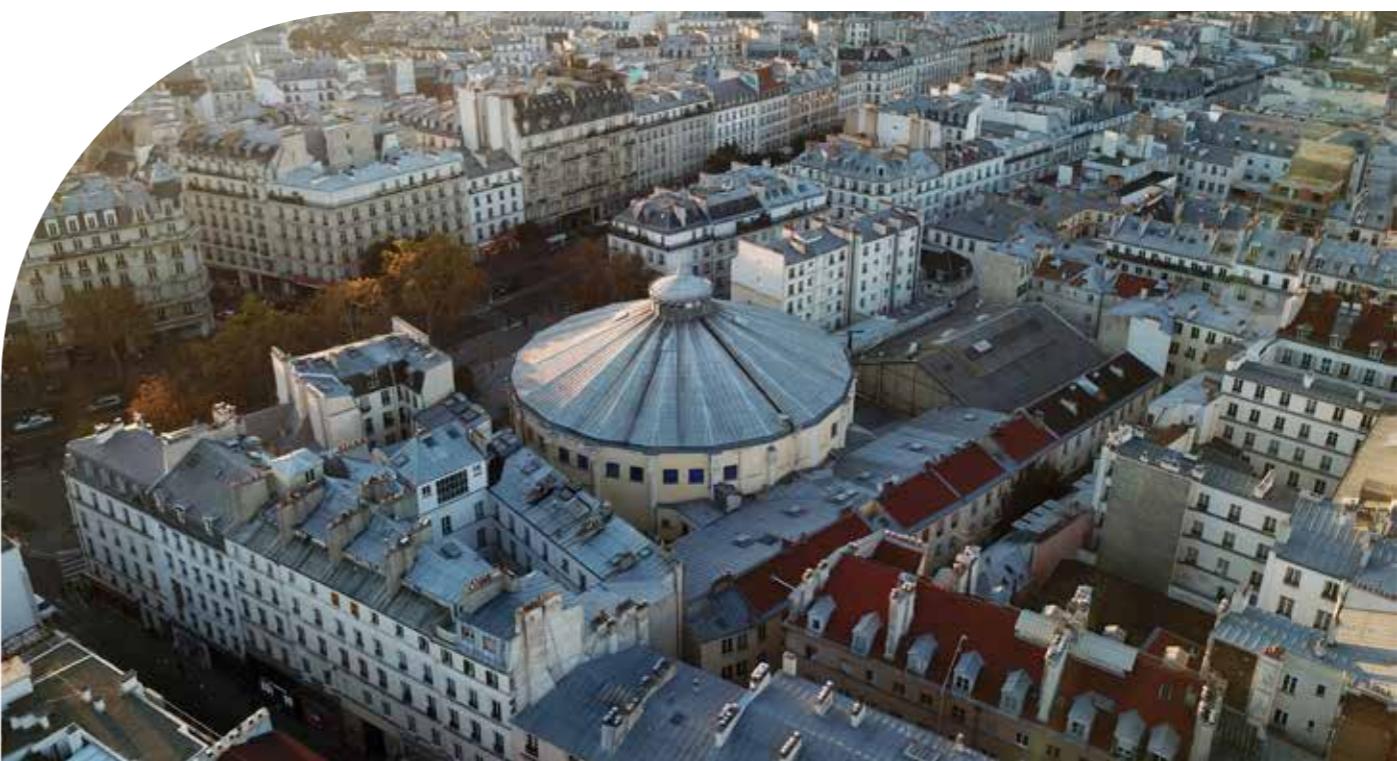
(Katarina Barley, Vice-President of the European Parliament (left), Odette Bouglione (middle) and István Ujhelyi (right) - 2024)

The Cirque d'Hiver Bouglione was inaugurated in 1852 by Louis Dejean, Director of the Imperial Theatres, and remains today the oldest permanent circuses still in operation worldwide. Located in the heart of Paris's 11th arrondissement, this majestic Second Empire-style building, designed by architect Jacques-Ignace Hittorff, has retained its brilliance through the centuries, hosting not only circus performances but also concerts, fashion shows, and prestigious galas. It was also within the Cirque d'Hiver's walls that a milestone in circus history took place: in 1859, Jules Léotard invented the flying trapeze, a discipline that revolutionized acrobatics and went on to captivate audiences around the globe.

Since 1934, the venue has been under the direction of the Bouglione family, an iconic circus dynasty that preserves tradition while constantly reinventing the circus arts. The Bouglione brothers

and their descendants act as producers, artistic directors, and guardians of this living heritage. The season traditionally opens in autumn with a brand-new original production, each year presented under a unique title. Accompanied by a live orchestra, the shows feature a dazzling variety of acts from across the world: acrobats, trapeze artists, jugglers, animal trainers, and clowns. With a completely new program each season, the Cirque d'Hiver continues to enchant both Parisian and international audiences, generation after generation.

In 2024, the Cirque d'Hiver Bouglione was awarded the BigTopLabel at the European Parliament. The Cirque d'Hiver was the second French institution to receive this prestigious recognition.



ZIRKUS CHARLES KNIE



(István Ujhelyi (left) Sascha Melnjak (middle) and Katarina Barley, Vice-President of the European Parliament (right)- 2024)

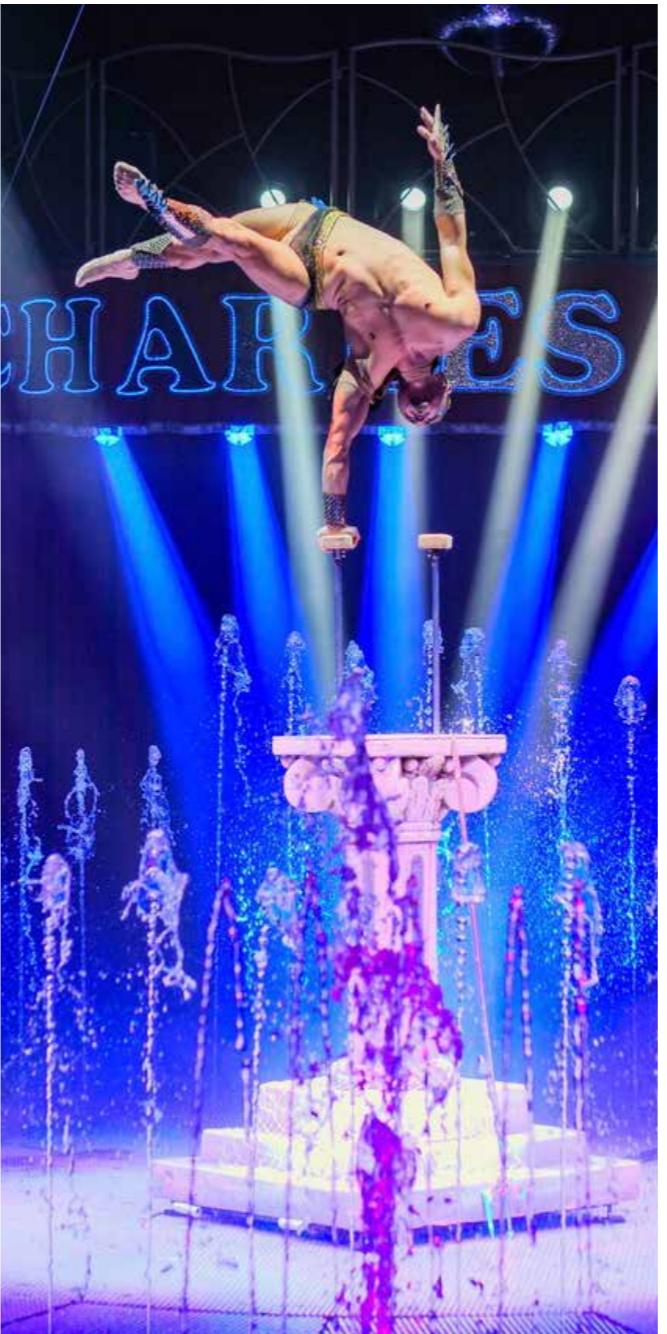
In 1995, Charles and Doriana Knie founded Circus Charles Knie in Germany. Since then, the company has stood for a strong piece of circus culture – and today ranks undisputedly among the country's leading travelling circuses. With its distinctive programme, the circus combines tradition and modernity, classical artistry and innovative productions that have been astonishing audiences for decades.

In 2007, ownership changed hands: Sascha Melnjak took over the circus along with the naming rights. To this day, he remains managing director and sole shareholder of the specially established Charles Knie GmbH. Under his leadership, the company has continuously evolved and is now considered one of the most innovative enterprises in the industry.

Highest artistic quality, regular production changes every two years, a coherent visual identity, first-class service and professional management are among the fundamental principles of the circus. With this standard, Circus Charles Knie has become a trendsetter in the European circus scene, shaping the image of modern circus art far beyond Germany with its shows.

After two challenging pandemic years, the circus dared a restart in June 2022 with a completely new concept – impressively proving how flexibly it can respond to changing market conditions and visitor expectations. With spectacular productions, including the use of 100,000 litres of water and just as many emotions, the circus has once again thrilled its audiences ever since. Acrobatics, comedy and animal acts form the core of a cutting-edge circus experience that sets new standards and fascinates across generations.

The tireless work to preserve and further develop European circus culture was honoured in 2024 with the awarding of the prestigious BigTopLabel – another milestone in the company's history. Proud and grateful to hold this high-quality and exclusive distinction, Circus Charles Knie sees this recognition as both an incentive and an obligation to carry the idea of the “good circus” into the world and to the people with passion and dedication in the future.



“



14. October 2025. - European Parliament, Brussels

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the European Commission and to congratulate the laureates at the 2025 BigTopLabel Award Ceremony. Circus is one of Europe's oldest and most beloved forms of popular art. We cannot overstate how much it represents Europe's living cultural heritage. Across centuries, you have travelled from towns to villages bringing entertainment, art, humour, laughter and beauty, embodying—long before the European Union existed—the very idea of Europe's unity.

The BigTopLabel does something essential: it celebrates high-quality service while supporting transformation and responsiveness to contemporary challenges—digital, environmental, IT-related, and animal welfare—by setting and foregrounding high standards. I understand the award is seen as a “Michelin-star” for circuses; that recognition matters. Use it. Speak about it. Make clear that it is recognised at European level. This prize has now existed for ten years; thank you to those who initiated it, have accompanied it and continue to drive it forward.

Let me say a few words about Creative Europe. We have been partners of the circus world for many years and will remain so. Creative Europe fosters cultural exchange across borders; it does not fund national or local projects as such, but brings artists, cultural sectors and industries together at a pan-European level—something the circus world has done for centuries. Within this, circus holds a special place. We support numerous projects with strong circus contributions, notably the Circus Strada network, bringing together 150 organisations from 45 countries to exchange and collaborate. Over the years this has generated many excellent ideas. Other supported projects include Beta Circus, a participatory experiment co-creating new ways of doing circus with audiences; EPICIRQ, enabling a local circus family from the Baltic countries to tour Europe and perform for international publics; and Circus Streets, run with the European Capitals of Culture, which demonstrates that the street is a stage with an enduring role. I would also highlight “*Act Autism Friendly Cultural Transformations*”, a small yet beautiful project showing how circus can be inclusive for communities facing life's difficulties—an example of art and culture making a tangible difference.

GEORG HÄUSLER

2023- Director for Culture, Creativity and Sport
in the European Commission (DG EAC)

In challenging times—here in Brussels and in many Member States—the circus embodies positive values: creativity, courage, cooperation and, above all, joy and laughter. It is uniquely intergenerational—there is no “old” or “young”, it is for everyone—and uniquely multilingual by being non-linguistic, speaking to all in the same way. This nurtures the hope that Europe is a space of imagination, freedom and shared emotion—precisely what circus represents. Let us hope for more of that joy and positivity in the coming years, and let us show the importance of culture—and here, of circus—in bringing fresh positive energy to the European project, which needs it so much. Once again, congratulations to the laureates for your outstanding achievements, and my best wishes for the future.

”



World Christmas Circus - Royal Theatre Carré Amsterdam

WERELDKERSTCIRCUS CARRE



(Urs Pilz (left), Monica Strotmann and Henk van der Meijden with István Ujhelyi (right) - 2025)

The World Christmas Circus, which will celebrate its 40th anniversary next year, gave its first performance in December 1985. The Royal Carré Theatre was originally opened in 1887 as a circus theatre by its founder, Oscar Carré. From that year until his death in 1911, he presented performances there. For a total of 24 years, Christmas programs were also staged! In 1940, the Strassburger family revived the circus tradition in Carré, also performing during the Christmas season until 1962 – a total of 22 years!

After the Strassburger period, it seemed as though the curtain had fallen on circus in Carré for good. But in the early 1980s, Carré once again briefly became a circus palace. Wout van Liempt (†) and Henk van der Meijden brought the Russian State Circus with Oleg Popov to Carré for several weeks. It was such a success that the Russian State Circus returned with a new program, once again drawing full houses.

Van der Meijden and Van Liempt then felt the time was right, after Oscar Carré and Strassburger, 23 years later to revive the Christmas circus tradition in Carré. In December 1985, the very first World Christmas Circus premiered, thanks in part to the support of Carré's then-directors, Bob van der Linden and Hubert Atjak. Now, 39 years later, the World Christmas Circus has become a national institution. Last year, 72.000 people attended in just 20 days Carré, which has 1.450 seats. Never before in Carré's 138-year history had so many visitors come during the Christmas season. The World Christmas Circus is already looking forward to next year, when it will celebrate its glorious 40th Jubilee!



GANDEYS CIRCUS



(Georg Häusler (left) director of DG EAC, Urs Pilz with Carol Briggs Gandey (middle) and István Ujhelyi - 2025)

Gandey World Class Productions is one of Britain's most cherished names in live entertainment — a true ambassador of creative excellence and heartfelt showmanship. With roots stretching back to the early 1900s, the Gandey family has built a legacy defined by imagination, artistry, and the ability to unite audiences from all walks of life under the shared wonder of performance.

At the heart of this legacy stands Gandey's Circus, a dazzling celebration of acrobatics, choreography, and humour that continues to tour across the United Kingdom. Every performance carries the warmth of traditional British circus spirit while embracing a fresh, modern edge. Its international cast, breathtaking stunts, and joyful atmosphere make it a highlight for families year after year.

Beyond the Big Top, Gandey's creative vision extends into an extraordinary variety of productions. Cirque Surreal merges contemporary theatre and circus artistry in visually stunning narratives, often featured at leading arts festivals. The Chinese State Circus brings the discipline and beauty of authentic Chinese performance to global audiences, while Spirit of the Horse celebrates the timeless bond between humans

and horses through powerful, choreographed equestrian art. The enchanting SnowStorm combines world-class circus acts and professional ice skaters in a mesmerizing fusion of movement and music.

Equally important is Gandey's commitment to social inclusion through the founding of Circus Starr, a charitable circus designed for children with disabilities and families facing hardship. These performances offer a safe, joyful space where everyone can laugh, dance, and share in the magic of the circus — a true embodiment of compassion through art. From Europe to the Middle East, from Asia to Australia, Gandey productions have illuminated stages across the globe, always respecting and celebrating local cultures while maintaining the highest standards of creativity and professionalism.

Today, Gandey World Class Productions continues to uphold its proud tradition: bringing people together through the joy, artistry, and timeless wonder of live performance — representing the very best of British cultural excellence.





TOM DUFFY'S CIRCUS



(Jamie Duffy (left) and István Ujhelyi with Tom Duffy (middle) and Candice Taylor (right) - 2025)

On 5 April 1979, Tom Duffy Senior, his wife Gertie, and their son David raised a modest two-pole tent that seated just 400 people. With four lorries, a team of twelve, and a wealth of determination passed down through generations, Tom Duffy's Circus began its journey. Yet this was far from the beginning of the Duffy story — Tom Snr and David represented the fourth and fifth generations of a proud circus dynasty whose roots date back to the 1850s, when the first Duffy family show took to the road. At one time, three separate Duffy circuses toured Ireland simultaneously, carrying the same spirit of joy and artistry that endures today. Through wars, hardship, and division — from the Irish War of Independence and the Civil War to The Troubles — the Duffy family circus remained a place of unity and laughter. Welcomed on both sides of Ireland's political divide, their shows offered light and escapism when people needed it most.

When Tom Snr founded his own circus on his fiftieth birthday, he marked both a personal and professional milestone. Breaking away from his six brothers, who each ran their own Duffy shows, he forged a new chapter for his branch of the family — one built on passion, excellence, and resilience. Performing alongside his young son David, he created an enduring bond that audiences came to cherish. Over time, Tom Duffy's Circus grew to become a beloved part of Irish popular culture — celebrated by artists and poets, and recognised today as one of Ireland's leading traditional circuses, known for its world-class productions and high professional standards. Now led by David Duffy, his wife Stephanie, and their sons Tom and Jamie, the family continues to innovate while remaining faithful to their heritage. Both Tom and Jamie have earned in-

ternational acclaim for their thrilling Wheel of Death act, winning awards in Monte Carlo, China, and Germany. In 2024, Tom and his fiancée Candice welcomed their daughter Charlotte, symbolising the sixth generation of Duffys dedicated to circus artistry. Together, the brothers not only perform but also design, direct, and produce the entire show — from sound and lighting to creative concept and touring logistics. Each year, they present two new productions: a national tour from February to October, followed by a festive season in South Dublin. The circus itself has evolved from a humble two-pole tent to a 37-metre Scola Teloni Big Top, introduced in 2022. With its elegant entrance foyer, awnings, and 800-seat arena, the venue represents the Duffy family's investment in excellence. The custom-made Italian ring fence, glowing with the Tom Duffy's Circus logo, and the fleet of 20 hand-painted red, blue, and gold vehicles form a striking visual identity wherever they go.

Today, Tom Duffy's Circus stands as both a thriving modern entertainment enterprise and a guardian of Ireland's intangible cultural heritage. Their productions unite award-winning Irish and international artists, continuing a 150-year tradition of excellence and innovation. Though they operate without significant state support, every investment they make reflects their unwavering dedication to the art of circus and their determination to secure its rightful place within Ireland's cultural landscape.

For the Duffy family, this mission remains profoundly personal. Every mile travelled, every performance, and every smile shared is a tribute to the generations before them — and to the loving memory of Tom Duffy Senior, whose vision and courage continue to guide them forward.





MARTIN LACEY JR.

Circus Krone (European Parliament - 2018):

“ (...) We believe the BigTopLabel will bring out the best in each professional circus and authenticity in its business (...) BigTopLabel has given us confidence for our circus and the future of the circus world. BTL, thank you for believing in this project, thank you for bringing us to Brussels. We will support this project by running our business to the highest possible standards. As we say, the show must go on. BigTopLabel most go on! ”

ODETTE BOUGLIONE

Cirque d'Hiver Bouglione (European Parliament - 2024):

“ (...) The Big Top Label is more than just an award. It is a celebration of tradition, creativity, and resilience. For us, the circus is not just a profession; it is a way of life, a family heritage, and a source of endless joy. (...) To everyone who has ever stepped under the big top as a performer or sat in the audience as a dreamer, this award is for you, too. Thank you for believing in the magic. ”



ARE ARNARDO

Cirkus Arnardo (European Parliament - 2024):

“ (...) The Big Top Label inspires us to continue evolving while staying true to our traditions, ensuring that future generations experience the same magic that defines our art form. ”



**BIGTOP
LABEL**

CIRKUS ARNARDO

SIRKUS FINLANDIA

CIRCUS BRAZIL JACK

TOM DUFFY'S CIRCUS

BLACKPOOL TOWER CIRCUS

GANDEYS CIRCUS

ZIPPOS CIRCUS

WINTER CIRCUS CARRÉ

CIRCUS RONCALLI

ZIRKUS CHARLES KNIE

CIRCUS KRONE

CIRQUE ARLETTE GRUSS

MAGYAR NEMZETI CIRKUSZ

CIRCUS KNIE

RICHTER FLÓRIÁN CIRKUSZ

CIRCUS BALKANSKI

CIRCO RALUY LEGACY

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It is also important for us to extend our sincere thanks to **MEP ANDREAS SCHIEDER**, who has hosted the BigTopLabel award ceremonies in recent years. We are deeply grateful for his support and look forward to further cooperation.



For further information and to inquire about participating in the program, please contact the coordinator of the BTL-project: **TAMÁS LAJOS SZALAY**, who is the senior creative consultant at Capital European Affairs: tamaslajos.szalay@capitalaffairs.eu

2026/01

BIGTOP SPOTLIGHT AWARD



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ZIRKUS
CHARLES
KNIE

CIRQUE D'HIVER
BOUGLIONE

NORGES STØRSTE CIRKUS
ARNARDO

Tom
DUFFY'S
CIRCUS

GANDEYS
CIRCUS