

Arts

BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE NOVEMBER 11, 2012 | BOSTONGLOBE.COM/ARTS



ROLLING STONES ARCHIVE/HBO

From left: Charlie Watts, Keith Richards, Bill Wyman, Mick Jagger, and Ronnie Wood in HBO's "Crossfire Hurricane."

STONES AT 50, STILL SATISFYING

Documentaries, 3-CD set look back and forward

By Sarah Rodman

GLOBE STAFF

On the occasion of its 50th anniversary, what do you get the band that has everything?

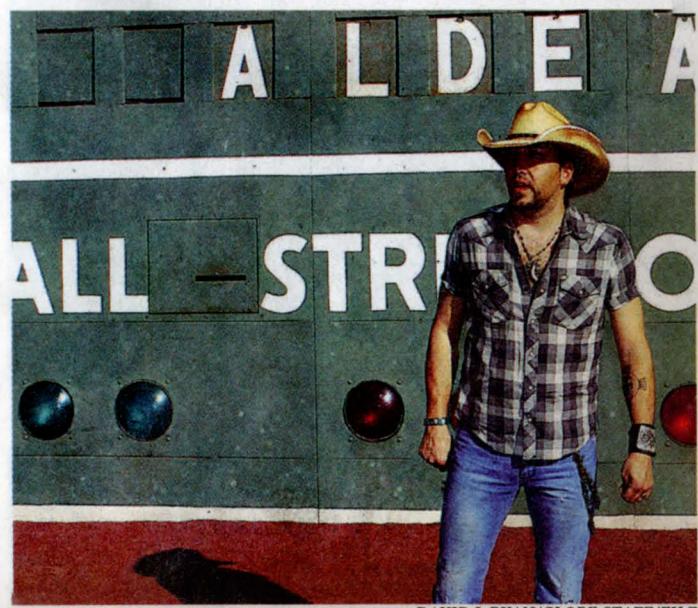
In the case of the Rolling Stones, who are celebrating this golden milestone, they actually have a few gifts for their fans.

While guitarists Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood have hinted that more tour dates may be in the offing in 2013 — and recent rumblings, including a Paris club date, do feel like the band warming up — the only shows the group had on the books at press time are two gigs at the O2 Arena in London later this month and two at the Prudential Center in Newark in December, all of which sold out instantly, even with a top ticket price of \$750.

Meanwhile, Stones fans can stroll down memory lane and take a peek into the future with a trio of new/old offerings from the band: two documentaries and a three-disc hits retrospective featuring two new tracks called "GRRR!"

For a band that has been packaged and re-pack-

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DAVID L RYAN/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Jason Aldean at Fenway Park, where he'll play a pair of sold-out concerts next summer.

Country now right at home in the city

Local radio, ardent fans
drive surge in Boston

By Sarah Rodman

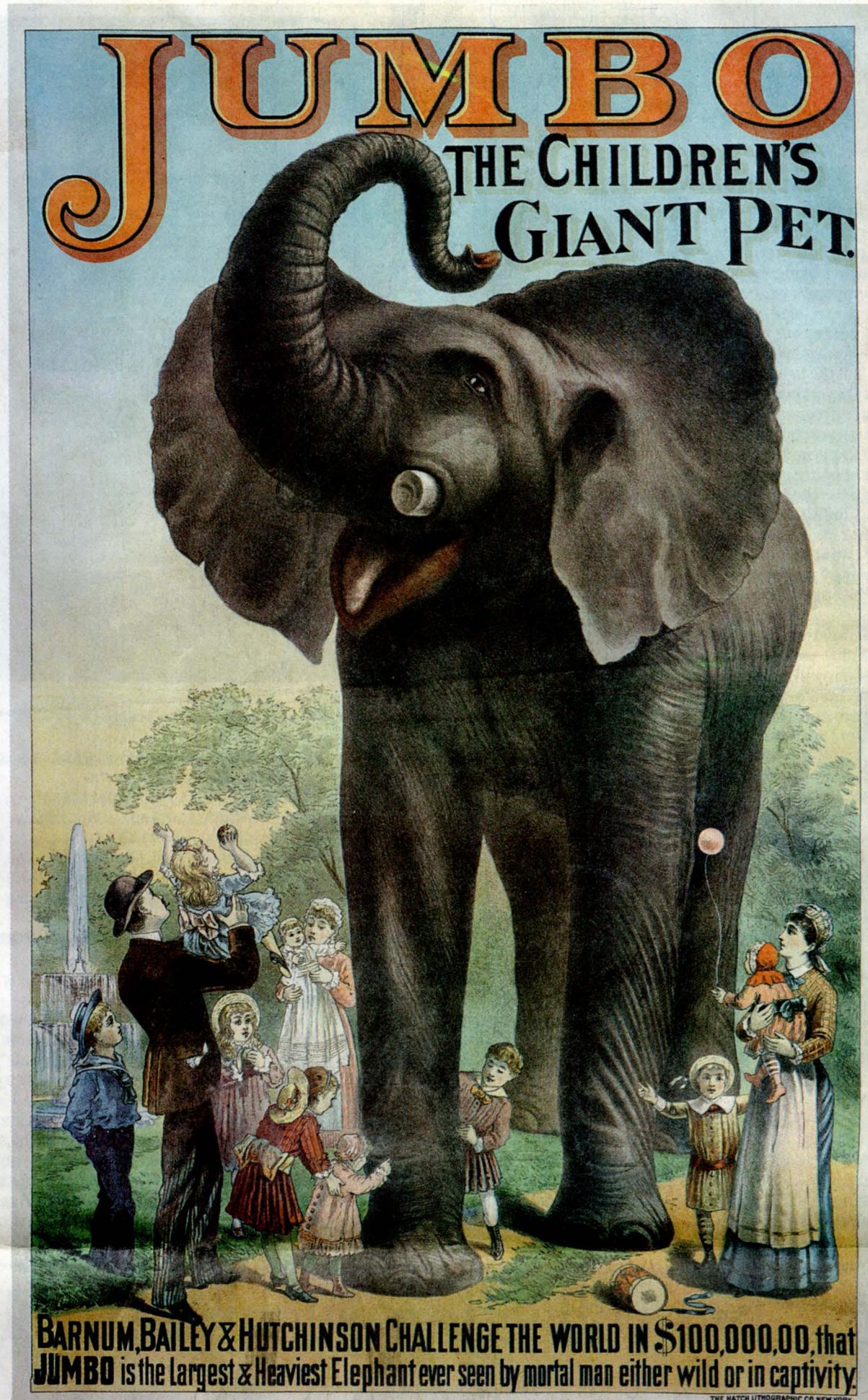
GLOBE STAFF

When local country music station WKLB launched nearly 20 years ago, music director Ginny Rogers had a very difficult job.

"I remember back in the '90s trying to get George Strait to play up here and his booking agent said, 'Well, there aren't that many country music fans in the Boston and New England area, so we don't like to come up there too often,'" she recalls. "And I was scratching my head and saying, 'You're wrong, they're here. We need the acts to come up because we know our listeners are out there.'"

They certainly are. In the most recent Arbitron ratings, WKLB-FM (102.5) ranked third in listeners behind WXKS-FM (KISS 108) and WMJX-FM (Magic 106.7). The station has consistently ranked

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JOHN AND MABLE RINGLING MUSEUM OF ART, TIBBALS COLLECTION (ABOVE); COLLECTION OF CIRCUS WORLD MUSEUM (BELOW LEFT)

A poster from 1882, the year P.T. Barnum purchased Jumbo from the Royal Zoological Society in London.

STEP RIGHT UP

EXHIBITION ON NEW YORK CIRCUS HISTORY
PROVES TO BE LOVELY, FASCINATING JOYRIDE

By Sebastian Smee

GLOBE STAFF

NEW YORK — Jumbo the elephant died, holding his keeper's hand in his trunk, on Sept. 15, 1885. The giant pachyderm, not yet 30 years old but more famous than any elephant before or since, had been hit by a freight train after an evening performance in St. Thomas, Ontario.

The train was derailed. Jumbo was dead within minutes.

The circus impresario P.T. Barnum had purchased Jumbo from the Royal Zoological Society in London three years earlier, for \$10,000. The six-ton elephant arrived in New York in April 1882. Watched by huge crowds, he was carted up Broadway, pulled by a team of horses and two smaller elephants.

For Barnum, the elephant proved a great investment. Propelled by an unprecedented advertising blitz, "Jumbomania" swept through New York and thence the whole country, helping Bar-

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A hat worn by clown Felix Adler circa 1940-50; a late-19th-century painted wood and metal circus wagon wheel.

BRUCE WHITE/SOMERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Art



PAUL MUTINO

An 1871 ticket from the Barnum Museum collection in Bridgeport, Conn.

Circus thrived with new leisure and advertising

►CIRCUS

Continued from Page N1

num and his partners reap a record profit of \$600,000 in Jumbo's first season alone. The elephant obsession was stoked by a flood of merchandise, everything from toys and trading cards to glassware, which helped transform Barnum's circus business into an entertainment empire.

And now Jumbo was gone. What was Barnum to do?

He didn't hesitate. He sent a taxidermist to Ontario, where the winter was spent preserving and mounting Jumbo's hide, and reassembling his skeleton. These remains were exhibited all through the 1886 circus season.

They proved a big hit — and why not? "Jumbo Stuffed a Greater Attraction than Jumbo Alive" announced the New York Times.

At a dinner to celebrate Jumbo's back-from-the-grave encore, cross-sectioned slices of his left tusk, inscribed in ink with "Jumbo, King of the Elephants," were handed out as souvenirs. The ivory powder produced by all this slicing was used by cooks in a jelly that was served to the memorial dinner's distinguished guests.

Public life, we are told, increasingly resembles a circus. The same is certainly true of the art world. What could be more apposite, then, than a show about the circus and its place in the life of this country's biggest metropolis?

"Circus and the City: New York, 1793-2010" at the Bard Graduate Center tells not only the story of Jumbo but of Tom Thumb, Jim Crow, and a slew of other circus performers and entrepreneurs who were household names in their day, even if not all of them enjoyed the ambivalent honors accorded Jumbo. The exhibition is more social history than art. But it is one of the loveliest and most surprising shows on the East Coast this fall.

With its array of posters, lithographs, stereoscopic photo-



JOHN AND MABLE RINGLING MUSEUM OF ART, TIBBALS COLLECTION (LEFT); AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

Circus posters: a 1909 two-tone lithograph (left) depicting the Ringling brothers; an 1859 poster spotlighting a bareback rider from Nixon & Co's Mammoth Circus.

tographs and snapshots, sculpted portrait busts, calling cards, souvenirs, costumes, toys, and yes, even one of those inscribed slices of Jumbo's tusk, it is a great show for history buffs.

But it is also a visual joyride for art lovers. It's a spur to contemplation, too, when you consider the long and intimate associations between artists and the circus, from Seurat and Rouault to Edward Hopper and Cindy Sherman. (The show contains terrific paintings by Gilbert Stuart, Sir Edwin Henry Landseer, Milton Avery, and Walt Kuhn, among others.) What did so many different artists from successive generations see in the circus? In what ways did they identify with the clowns, the freaks, and the sad, caged, trick-performing creatures from foreign climes?

Organized by Bard's Matthew Wittmann, who has also written a splendid catalog essay, the show takes us from the New York circus's 18th-century beginnings, through its gradual expansion in the mid-19th century, to its spectacular golden age between 1871 and 1920 and its slow but by no means terminal dwindling in the 20th century.

The show teems with fascinating individuals. One of them, John Bill Ricketts, established the first circus in New



JOHN AND MABLE RINGLING MUSEUM OF ART, TIBBALS COLLECTION

Circa 1920 photograph by Harry Atwell, and signed "Best wishes from May Wirth," billed as "the world's greatest bareback rider" when she joined Barnum & Bailey.

York on Greenwich Street, in 1793. Ricketts had worked in Britain under Philip Astley, the father of the modern circus in London. He was Astley's best horse rider, and the entertainments he established in New York were built around his acrobatic feats on horseback.

Only gradually were other acts introduced. The first elephant appeared in 1796. But the circus tradition of combining equestrian acts with drama, clowns, exotic animals, and sideshow exhibits was slow to

form. It was not until the 1820s that animals other than horses became a consistent part of the mix.

It was also in this decade that tents were first employed. Their introduction changed everything. Overheads (literally) were cheaper, shows traveled, more money rolled in. Circus parades — long concatenations of cage wagons, bandwagons, and theatrical floats — became part of an annual circus-comes-to-town ritual shortly thereafter. They were one of the most

effective ways for the circus to advertise itself, and grew bigger and more spectacular every year.

Even as public enthusiasm increased, an air of official disapproval grew as well. The Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, in his pamphlet "Seven Lectures to Young Men," condemned the circus, describing "circus jockeys" as "moral assassins" who "stab the purity of our children."

And this is easy to forget: It was only really around the time of Jumbo's arrival — the heyday of Barnum — that circuses began to court children. Before then, as public entertainments, they could be bawdy and crass. They also attracted notice, and plenty of censure, not just for their exploitation of animals but of children, who were often used as performers: In the late 1870s, reports Wittmann, dozens of children were rescued from exploitation in circuses every year.

Barnum wanted not only to

avoid the bad publicity this was generating, but to increase the potential audience for his circuses. In scale and logistical ambition, these were getting more and more ambitious every year. So many of his biggest acts, including Jumbo, were marketed squarely at children and their families, with a new emphasis on fun and education.

Born in Bethel, Conn., in 1810, Barnum got into show business in 1835 as the manager of Joice Heth, an African-American woman he promoted as George Washington's 161-year-old nurse.

Spurs to curiosity — some might say freak-fancying — and the whole "real or fake?" dynamic proved winning formulas for Barnum. Making the most of new printing technologies ("without printer's ink, I should have been no bigger than Tom Thumb," he acknowledged), he used advertising to contrive an atmosphere of bold-type hyperbole and far-fetched claims that became benchmarks for outlandishness.

The posters that stand testament to this are among the most enjoyable things in the Bard show. In phalanxes of shifting typefaces, we read of bearded infants, Maine giantesses, albino ladies, Ethiopian minstrels, and educated mules.

Barnum made circuses family friendly in part by contriving an atmosphere of edification. His first move, in 1841, was to buy a museum housing exhibits that ranged from skeletons and taxidermy to aquariums, suits of armor, and mummies. As he built up his circus business, he used the museum's educational mission to lend respectability to instincts that veered insistently toward sensationalism (a model for many a modern museum director).

One of his first big hits was the Feejee Mermaid, a half-monkey, half-fish curiosity. And then he hit upon General Tom Thumb.

Tom Thumb's real name was Charles Sherwood Stratton. He had a form of dwarfism that meant he stopped growing after about six months but otherwise had normal human proportions. Barnum met him when he was just 4 years old. He debuted the child in one of his shows a few months later, and over the ensuing years, had him impersonating everyone from Napoleon to a Greek statue.

The Bard show includes an arrangement of photographs of Tom Thumb in nine different guises, and one of his tiny suits. The latter is from the Barnum Museum in Bridgeport, Conn., the birthplace of Stratton. Many other fine objects in the exhibit are from the Shelburne Museum in Vermont, which has one of the finest collections of circus materials in America.

This may be a show that hinges on New York. But it is really about America, its unquenchable thirst for novelty, and its endless appetite for diversion. As such, it should not be missed.

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