

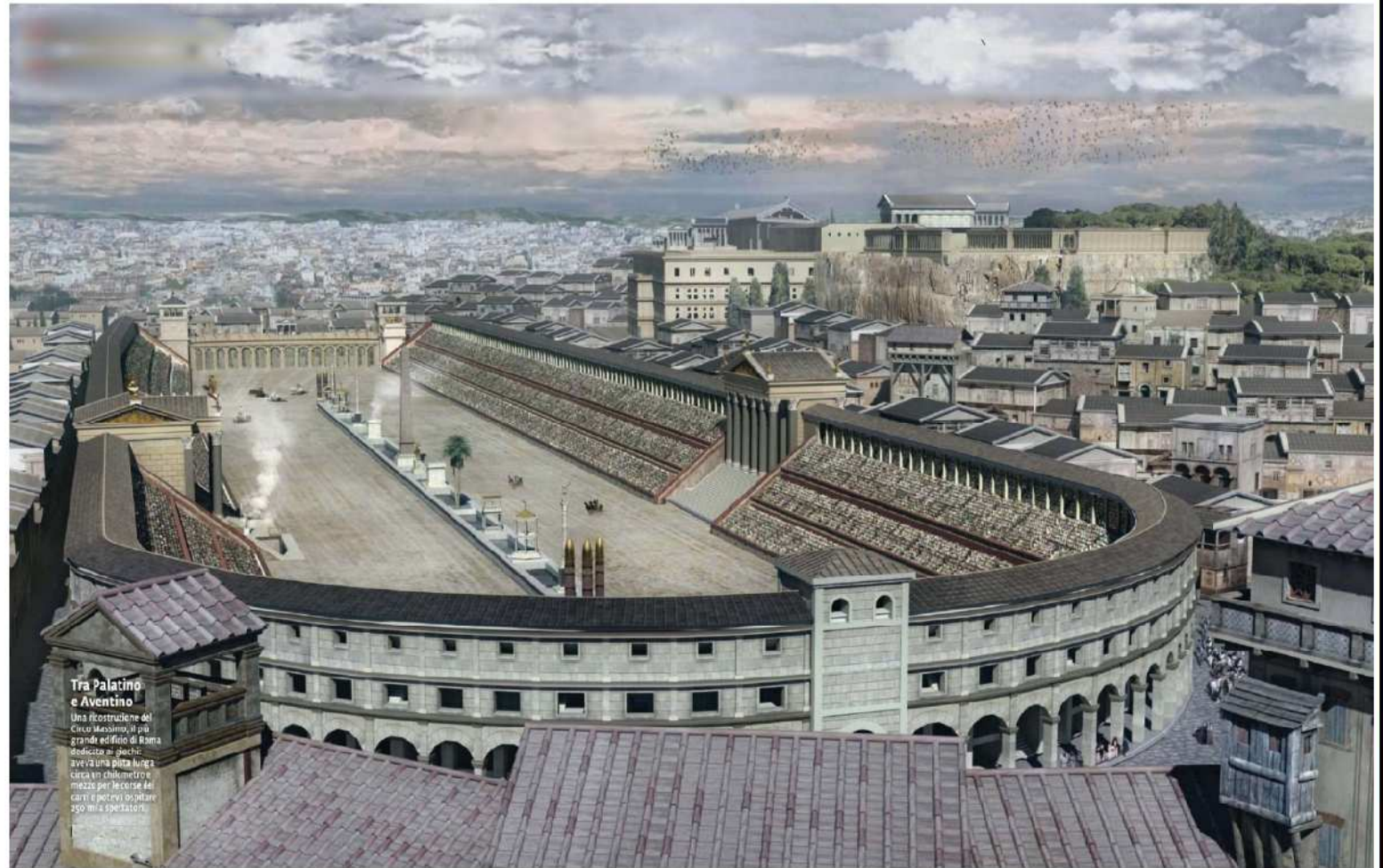
History of The Circus



The First Circus

The first Circus was established over 2000 years ago. Circus is a Latin word, which comes from the Greek 'kirkos', meaning circle or ring.

A circus, in Roman times, referred to a circular or oval area, surrounded by tiered rows of seats.



The Circus Maximus

The Circus Maximus was the first circus established in Rome. It was a huge, open air arena, with a large oval ring. The arena was used for chariot races, horse shows, battle reenactments and other entertainment. Trained exotic animals, acrobats and jugglers entertained the audience between the main events.



The End of the Circus?

When the Roman Empire fell, circuses disappeared. Showmen and small groups of entertainers wandered from town to town but the circus had gone. Bands of gypsies kept the skills of the circus alive throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, as they travelled around Europe.



The Circus Returns!

It wasn't until the late 18th century that the circus, as an exhibition of horses, acrobatics and other circus performances, returned. Philip Astley is thought to have established the first permanent travelling circus. It was a huge hit in London, where the first performance took place on January 9th, 1768.



Building the Circus

The circus became very popular in England, so much so that large cities began building arenas to host the shows.

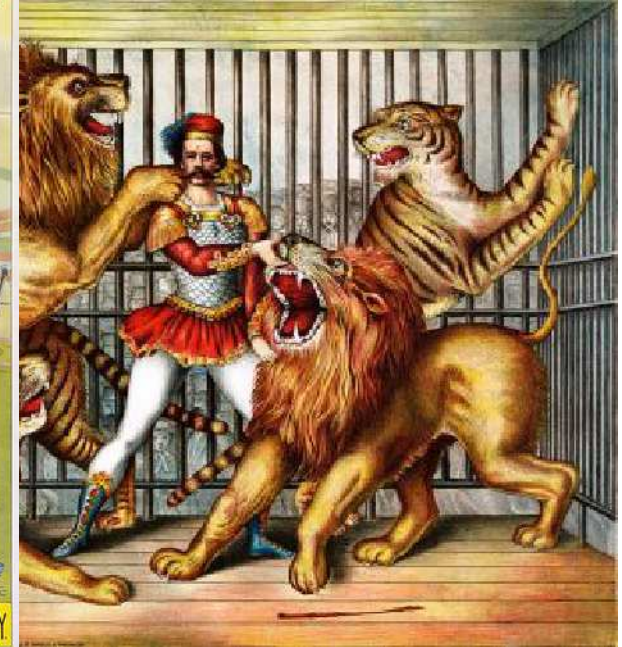
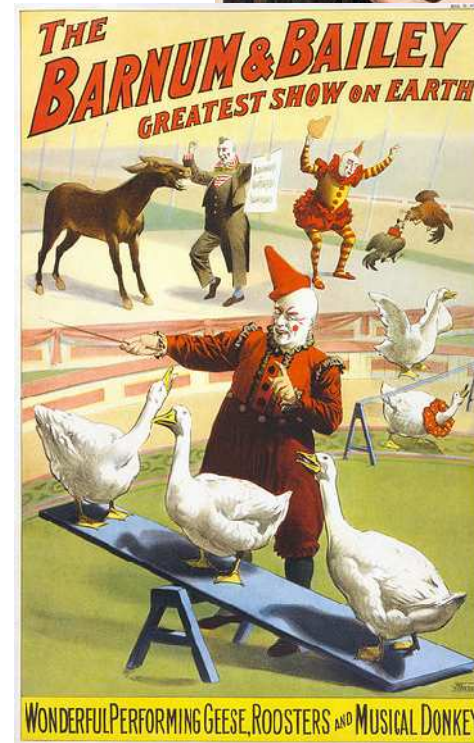
The London Hippodrome was built to house a circus, menagerie and theatre.

Wild animals including lions and elephants were often shown in the ring.



Growth of the Circus

The success of the circus led to many different circuses being formed. In 1825 Joshua Purdy Brown was the first to use a large canvas tent for circus performances. Circuses became popular in the United States, led by P.T. Barnum, who originally ran a freakshow and sideshow business.



Moving the Circus

William Cameron Coup was the first circus owner to introduce the circus train, which transported shows from town to town. Many circuses today, particularly in the United States, still use trains to get around. Coup also introduced the multi-ring circus, where more than one act takes place at one time.



The Travelling Circus

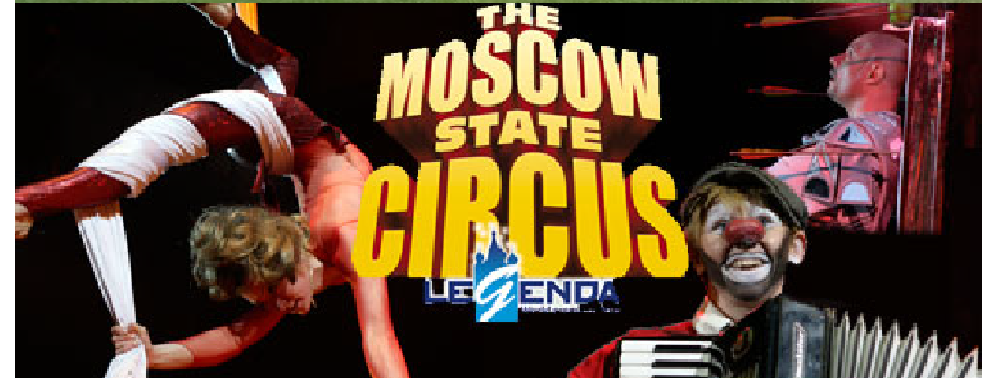
When Thomas Cooke returned to England, following a tour of America, he brought the idea of the circus tent home with him. Other circus owners, from France and Italy, began touring across Europe and the rest of the world. They visited China, India, Australia, South America, Russia and South Africa. New acts, including Chinese acrobats were introduced as the circus visited different cultures.



Photograph by Erin Nikitchyuk

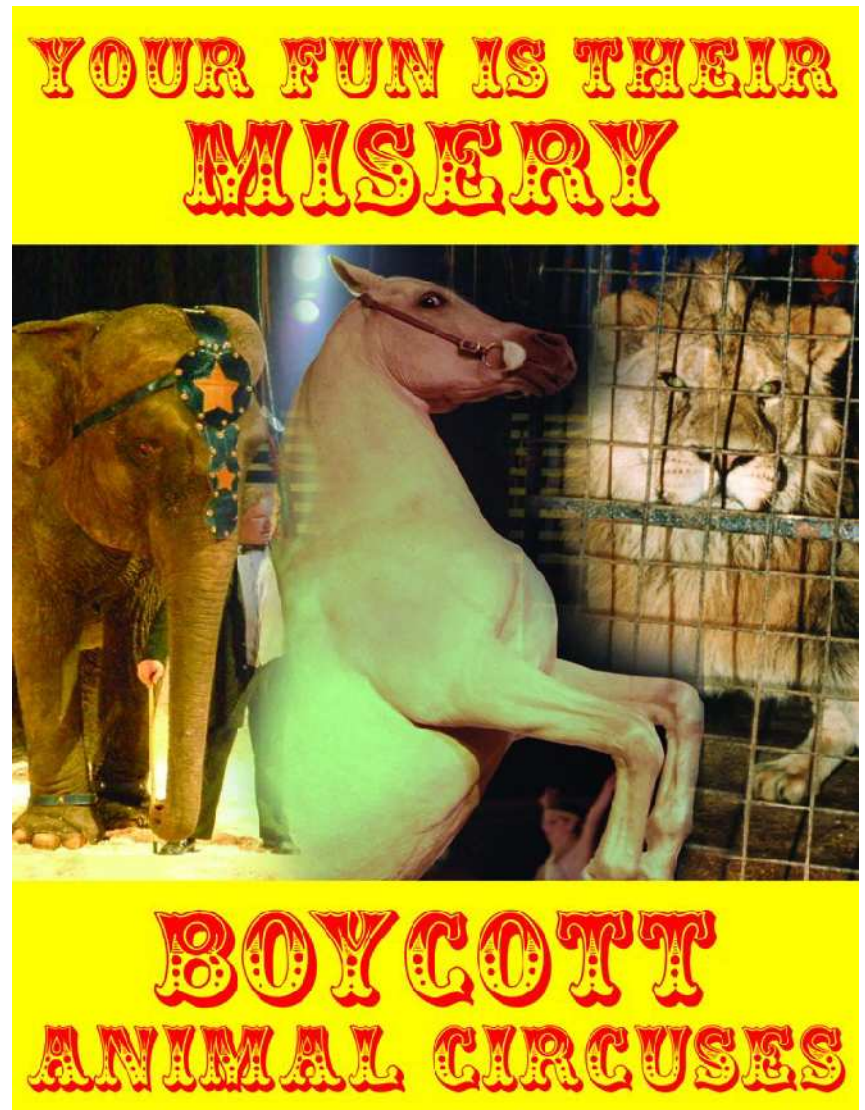
Circus University

In 1927, in Russia, the State University of Circus and Variety Arts was set up by the Russian government. It became better known as the Moscow Circus School. The university taught gymnastics that could be used within the circus. The Moscow State Circus began touring in the 1950's, it was an amazing success and changed how modern circuses would progress.



Animal Rights and the Circus

In the 1960's people became much more aware of animal rights. Many people thought that it was wrong to use animals in the circus. Some circuses had to close as a result of boycotts and demonstrations held against them. Animal rights activists are still working to stop animals being used in the circus. New laws have been put in place to ensure the well being of all circus animals.



The Captive Animals' Protection Society
www.captiveanimals.org info@captiveanimals.org

The New Circuses

Because of the animal rights issues, some circuses decided to move away from animal performances. Many people think it is fairer to have completely human productions. This move led to some of the most amazing, and popular, animal-free circus shows. One of the most famous is the Cirque Du Soleil.

