



Bringing the Circus

BY ERIN O'NEAL
THE GAMECOCK

The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus returns to Columbia Wednesday at the Carolina Coliseum.

After 130 years of performing, the latest additions to "The Greatest Show on Earth" are young and energetic and bring a fresh look to the circus as it prepares to entertain a new generation.

Sara Houcke, dubbed "The Tiger Whisperer" for her ability to soothe and control eight full-grown Bengal tigers, is one of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's newest performers. Her family, however, has been in the circus business for seven generations and is one of the oldest circus dynasties in Europe.

At the age of two, Houcke began her circus career in Switzerland's Circus Knie, and by 14 she was working with hippos, horses and other animals. She learned what she knows from her father, a famous French animal trainer.

The Ayala Sisters also come from a long line of circus performers. Michelle and Marguerite Ayala trained under their mother, becoming the third generation of circus performers in their family.

In their trademark act, the sisters are suspended 30 feet over the arena floor by their hair alone.

They braid their waistlength hair, intertwining it with a special rope with steel buckles. Steel cables are also attached to the braided buns atop their heads.

While Marguerite performs without the use

of any safety nets or devices, Michelle's act is just as dangerous — she spins while suspended and juggles flaming torches.

The Ayalas aren't just a sister act, however. Michelle and Marguerite's father, Rene Ayala, joins Spaniard performers Vicente, Angel and Roberto Quiros to form one of the hottest high wire acts of all time.

The group uses two bi-level high wires, 30 feet from the ground, and doesn't use a safety net.

Other acts include Jon Weiss, who will be featured as the world's first "Human Clown N' Ball." Weiss' wife of five years, Laura, pushes the button that launches him, dressed in a clown costume, 100 feet across the arena at 65 miles per hour.

Also, Anton Beliakov, 24, gives a strap performance, suspending himself 40 feet in the air while holding only onto two thick straps.

Along with the new performers Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey have added to their lineup, old classic acts will appear, including dancing elephants, prancing horses and the world's shortest living man, Mihaly Michu, who's only 33 inches tall.

There will only be one performance on Jan. 24, 25 and 26 at 7:30 p.m. There will also be shows on Jan. 27 at 11:30 a.m., 3:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Tickets are available at the Carolina Coliseum Box Office, Capital Ticket Outlets or by phone at 251-2222.

The spotlight desk can be reached at ganeckspotlight@hotmail.com



Sara Houcke, "The Tiger Whisperer," communicates silently with a Bengal tiger. She is a seventh-generation circus performer and is known for her uncanny ability to control full-grown tigers.

Special to The Gamecock

THIS WEEK IN USC HISTORY

Jan. 22, 1997 — James Dickey, USC professor and author of "Deliverance," died following years of declining health. Dickey was also a nationally acclaimed poet.

IN THE NEWS

■ ABBA members plan for Swedish version of musical

STOCKHOLM, Sweden (AP) — Two former members of the Swedish supergroup ABBA are planning a Swedish version of the musical "Chess." Love and passion will be the focus of the new musical.

The premiere is scheduled for February 2002 in the Swedish capital of Stockholm, former ABBA members Bjorn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson said. The duo wrote the music for the original that was performed in London and on Broadway.

"Chess" was a musical love story that used the complex game as a symbol of the Cold War. The historical political events will be used as a backdrop for a new story, the composers said.

Ulvaeus said some familiar songs like "One Night in Bangkok" might be scratched because of a condensed story line centered in Milan.

Ulvaeus said they decided to retell the story rather than developing an entirely new concept.

"It's not so easy to cough up something new," he said.

■ U.S. rock groups to play music festival in Venezuela capital

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Sting and Sheryl Crow on Thursday kicked off the "Caracas Pop Festival 2001," a four-day rock music festival featuring Christina Aguilera, Ruben Blades, Mana, Collective Soul, Oasis and Five.

Concert organizers said they hope to attract 30,000 people each day to the Central University of Venezuela's Olympic Stadium, where the festival is taking place.

"It used to be much more common to see artists stop in Caracas. Now it's different because of our economic situation," said Pedro Rodriguez, spokesman for Evenpro, the festival's organizer. "We want Caracas to be considered like an international capital for music just like Buenos Aires, Rio and Mexico City."

Event organizers took advantage of the simultaneous "Rock in Rio" festival in Brazil to help attract stars. Sting and Crow arrived in Venezuela after performing in Rio de Janeiro; Oasis and Five will play in Caracas after their shows in Brazil.

■ Box sets to honor careers of pair of country crooners

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Influential country rockers Gram Parsons and Emmylou Harris will have their careers surveyed in box set collections set for release on April 17.

Parsons, who died in 1973, has been cited as an influence on the Eagles, the Rolling Stones and the modern alternative country music movement. "The Gram Parsons Anthology" will be released on Rhino Entertainment.

"Emmylou Harris Anthology: The Warner/Reprise Years" will contain 45 songs from her time with Warner Bros., including six No. 1 country hits.

■ Depeche Mode to release new album

NEW YORK (AP) — Children of the '80s, get excited. Depeche Mode is releasing its first album in four years.

The group plans to have "Exciter" in stores in late May. The first album since 1997's "Ultra," it's described in Friday's editions of *USA Today* as "a sonic cousin to 1986's diverse 'Black Celebration.'"

Singer Dave Gahan told the newspaper, "I'm a lot more confident vocally. When you're singing a song, it's like you can just disappear into it. On 'Ultra' I was not able to do that because I wasn't physically able to bring all of myself to it. Now I feel like I'm firing on all cylinders."



Special to The Gamecock

Members of the South Carolina Association of Magicians perform during the sixth annual Gala Stage Magic Show at the Township Auditorium on Saturday.

Magic, ventriloquism delight crowd at Township Auditorium

BY MICHELLE PITTMAN
THE GAMECOCK

Township Auditorium featured the sixth annual Gala Stage Magic Show Saturday night in honor of the South Carolina Association of Magicians (SCAM) Convention.

The largely adolescent audience was treated to an evening of illusion, comedy and music presented by icons and amateurs of the world of magic.

Master of Ceremonies Mark Merchant, a ventriloquist from Atlanta, Ga., kept older members of the audience entertained with his highbrow humor. Having worked internationally on cruise ships and casinos, Merchant's jokes were lost on many of the younger patrons, but his engaging range of voices and cast of dummies kept the audience entertained, regardless of age.

The show opened with "Mr. Electric" (Marvyn Roy), a veteran of MGM Grand and Radio City Music Hall. His one of a kind entertainment features a series of light bulb illusions, where strings of lights are pulled from his mouth, and he dares even to light a 5000-watt light bulb with his bare hands. Although

many of the performances seemed strapped for time, Mr. Electric and his assistant (Carol Roy) made it through their entire act with the audience behind them 100 percent.

Next in line was Ed Dunhill, a native of Myrtle Beach, who put a new twist on old magic tricks. Featuring cards and the rabbit-from-the-hat trick, Dunhill amused the audience with his off-beat humor and Southern charm. Following Dunhill was Kevin Dunn of Farmville, Va., who performed his brief levitation act to the delight of younger audience members.

The fast-paced humor of The Flying Fettucini Brothers quickened the pace, providing a much needed relief from the slower pace of the amateur magicians. Pulling audience volunteers on stage and involving them in the act, the duo from Charlotte, N.C., spun plates, flipped clubs and dazzled with their incredible talent.

The highlight of the show was Aaron Radatz, a high-tech illusionist, who held the stage for slightly less than thirty minutes. With the help of his assistants and an all-too-unwilling audience member, Aaron's performance was a step above the rest. One "trick" featured the assis-

stants in split second costume changes and a final "transformation" of the assistant into a beautiful Bengal tiger.

The SCAM Magic show was set apart by the atmosphere of the small venue. The magicians walked through the lobby at intermission, many pausing to admire the sleight-of-hand entertainment that was set out for those aspiring magicians who couldn't get enough of the performance. Though the show appealed to a much younger age group, many adults at the performance were raving about the "young at heart" feeling that only a magic show can bring.

A portion of the proceeds from this event went to the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Children's homes from the Columbia area were in attendance, and many of the staff were treated to a few on-stage impromptu performances of their own.

For more information about the S.C. Association of Magicians and upcoming events, visit the SCAM Web site at www.tudormagic.com/scam.htm

The spotlight desk can be reached at ganeckspotlight@hotmail.com

'Traffic' portrays futility of drug war



Catherine Zeta-Jones, above, portrays the wife of a drug dealer in Steven Soderbergh's "Traffic."

Special to The Gamecock

BY TUG BAKER
THE GAMECOCK

MOVIE REVIEW

MOVIE: "Traffic"

STARRING: Benecio Del Toro, Michael Douglas, Catherine Zeta-Jones

GRADE: ☆☆☆☆ out of ☆☆☆☆

Drugs are bad. We've heard it since childhood.

The US throws \$19 billion a year at the drug problem, but there's no real way to stop the trafficking of drugs in America.

In fact, by doing so, the government is helping drug dealers make more money.

Steven Soderbergh's new film, *Traffic*, addresses these issues.

However, most critics argue that Americans know this already, and they're right.

Unfortunately for them, they only looked at the "big picture" of the film and missed out on stellar performances and realistic stories of loyalty to family, friends and country.

"Traffic" deals predominately with three interlinked story lines. The first

concerns Mexican State Police Officer Javier (Benecio Del Toro) and his partner as they become entangled in the war on drugs in their country.

Del Toro delivers an immaculate performance that has already won him many critics' awards and nominations.

Reminiscent of Russell Crowe's character in "L.A. Confidential," Javier is a tough cop caught between doing what's right and being loyal to his boss.

Another outstanding performance is Michael Douglas' role as Robert Wakefield, the newly appointed U.S. drug czar.

He is torn between loyalties to his work and to his family.

As Wakefield learns of the impossibility of controlling drugs in America, he also learns his daughter is heavily using drugs.

The third story line features Catherine Zeta-Jones as the unsuspecting wife of a major American drug dealer and the two cops (Don Cheadle and Luis Guzman) bent on bringing him to justice.

When her husband is arrested, she pulls her act together to preserve her family and her lifestyle.

The major problem with *Traffic*

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