

Circus History Trivia: Questions, Answers, and Facts Printable Trivia Pack

Circus History trivia traces the evolution of the circus from equestrian spectacles and traveling big tops to modern debates over performance, animal welfare, and popular culture. Expect questions spanning famous showmen, daring acts, global traditions, and the milestones that made the circus a lasting part of entertainment history.

HARD CIRCUS HISTORY TRIVIA

1. Before James A. Bailey became P. T. Barnum's full partner, what formal title did the show use?

Answer: Barnum & London

2. In what year was the major Barnum-and-Bailey combined show mounted that is often treated as the beginning of Barnum & Bailey Circus?

Answer: 1881

3. Philip Astley's earliest presentations centered on what kind of performance before other acts were added around it?

Answer: Trick-riding displays

4. Why did the standard 42-foot circus ring become so practical for equestrian acts?

Answer: It helped riders maintain balance while standing on galloping horses.

5. The garment name "leotard" ultimately comes from whose surname?

Answer: Jules L^otard

6. Which 19th-century Paris aerial star gave his name to both a famous act legacy and a garment?

Answer: Jules L^otard

7. Cirque d'Hiver in Paris dates to what year?

Answer: 1852

8. Zippos Circus entered the scene in what founding year?

Answer: 1985

9. Which co-founder named in the record helped launch Big Apple Circus alongside Michael Christensen?

Answer: Paul Binder

10. Circus Oz was created in 1978 after the merger of SoapBox Circus with what other group?

Answer: the New Circus

11. In what year did the merger of SoapBox Circus and the New Circus produce Circus Oz?

Answer: 1978

12. UniverSoul Circus was founded in which city?

Answer: Atlanta, Georgia

13. John Ringling later established a major art museum in which Florida city?

Answer: Sarasota, Florida

14. The preserved Ringling site in Baraboo, Wisconsin, represents what part of the circus operation?

Answer: The winter quarters

FUNNY CIRCUS HISTORY TRIVIA

1. Before modern British clowning had a standard face, which theater star helped paint in the lines for the modern clown image?

Answer: Joseph Grimaldi strongly shaped the modern clown image in Britain.

2. Which clown type is the elegant boss of the ring when the joke needs someone looking gloriously in charge?

Answer: The whiteface clown traditionally plays the elegant, authoritative clown role.

3. If one clown is dignified and the other seems professionally confused, which role is usually the comic foil?

Answer: The auguste clown is typically the bumbling comic foil to the whiteface clown.

4. Which clown character is usually portrayed as a down-and-out wanderer, basically carrying the world's worst travel itinerary?

Answer: A tramp clown character is usually portrayed as a down-and-out wanderer.

5. Weary Willie, one of circus history's best-known sad-sack clown figures, was famously performed by whom?

Answer: Emmett Kelly performed Weary Willie.

6. What famous clown gag made Lou Jacobs look like he had somehow folded traffic laws into a suitcase?

Answer: He was famous for performing in an oversized tiny car clown gag.

7. Where did clowns traditionally get into costume and apply makeup before strolling out to cause elegant chaos?

Answer: In clown alley, the backstage area where clowns traditionally prepared costumes and makeup.

8. Which fizzy prop has been a classic choice when a clown wants the audience to expect dignity and get sprayed instead?

Answer: A seltzer bottle.

9. What airborne dessert attack became a standard visual joke in clowning and slapstick entertainment?

Answer: Pie-throwing became a standard visual joke.

10. Which entertainer not only created a clown painting style but also publicly celebrated

circus clown traditions?

Answer: Red Skelton.

11. Which clown legend was admirably nicknamed the "King of Clowns"?

Answer: Otto Griebling.

12. The phrase "send in the clowns" became widely known from a 1973 song title by which composer-lyricist?

Answer: Stephen Sondheim.

13. Long before modern circus branding, European comedy often paired two performers in what kind of setup?

Answer: A strict clown duo pairing of clown and fool.

FUN CIRCUS HISTORY TRIVIA

1. What was the name of the giant touring spectacle Barnum & Bailey introduced after buying a famous elephant in 1882?

Answer: Jumbo

2. Those eye-popping 19th-century circus ads were commonly made as what kind of colorful posters?

Answer: Lithographic posters

3. If a show was billed as a hippodrome spectacle, what was it especially known for?

Answer: Large-scale equestrian displays and pageantry

4. Before circus acts sprawled into acrobatics and clowning, early modern circus performance grew mainly out of what?

Answer: Trick riding and equestrian exhibitions

5. About how wide is the standard circus ring?

Answer: About 42 feet in diameter

6. Which famously loud instrument helped American circuses be heard from far away?

Answer: Calliope

7. In many towns, what happened before the main circus performances even began?

Answer: A morning street parade

8. Which circus was once a major U.S. competitor to Barnum & Bailey?

Answer: Sells Brothers Circus

9. The 'Bailey' in Barnum & Bailey Circus was which person?

Answer: James Anthony Bailey

10. In what year did the Barnum & Bailey and Ringling organizations combine?

Answer: 1919

11. The combined Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus gave its last performance in what year?

Answer: 2017

12. After the 1919 merger, which family name stayed attached to the American circus brand?

Answer: Ringling

13. Which Soviet clown later became director of the Moscow Circus on Tsvetnoy Boulevard?

Answer: Yuri Nikulin

CIRCUS HISTORY FAMILY TRIVIA

1. In which city did Philip Astley establish his original amphitheatre?

Answer: London

2. Which Beatles song was inspired by Pablo Fanque's circus?

Answer: Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite!

3. The Flying Wallendas are most famous for performing what kind of act?

Answer: High-wire acts

4. Who led the famous Wallenda troupe?

Answer: Karl Wallenda

5. What was the name of the hobo clown character created by Emmett Kelly?

Answer: Weary Willie

6. Which celebrated circus clown performed with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey?

Answer: Lou Jacobs

7. Which 20th-century American circus clown is being described: Otto Griebling or Clyde Beatty?

Answer: Otto Griebling

8. Who became famous in American circus history as a wild-animal trainer?

Answer: Clyde Beatty

9. Which 19th-century American entertainer was both a clown and a showman?

Answer: Dan Rice

10. Circus Krone is based in which German city?

Answer: Munich

11. Which British touring circus is named in this clue?

Answer: Zippos Circus

12. Circa, a contemporary circus company, was founded in what Australian city?

Answer: Brisbane

EASY CIRCUS HISTORY TRIVIA

1. Who opened a riding school in London in 1768, a key founding moment in modern circus history?

Answer: Philip Astley opened the riding school in London in 1768.

2. In circus language, what does the term "big top" mean?

Answer: It means the main circus tent.

3. P. T. Barnum joined forces with which partner in the 1880s to create Barnum & Bailey Circus?

Answer: James A. Bailey.

4. What famous slogan did Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus use for itself?

Answer: "The Greatest Show on Earth."

5. The Ringling brothers originally came from what Wisconsin town?

Answer: Baraboo, Wisconsin.

6. Barnum's star performer Charles Stratton was better known by what stage name?

Answer: General Tom Thumb.

7. Which 19th-century Barnum attraction became famous as a bearded lady?

Answer: Annie Jones.

8. Who was the animal trainer known for performing with lions and tigers in the 19th century?

Answer: Isaac Van Amburgh.

9. Before his circus ventures, Barnum drew crowds with what major New York attraction?

Answer: The American Museum.

10. Which New York venue became a major indoor home for large circuses?

Answer: Madison Square Garden.

11. What famous American entertainment district included circus-style sideshows?

Answer: Coney Island.

12. If you visit Baraboo, Wisconsin to learn about circus heritage, what museum are you looking for?

Answer: Circus World Museum.

13. Which circus is located in Blackpool, England?

Answer: Blackpool Tower Circus.

Source: <https://triviagong.com/themes/circus-history>