

CIRCUS IN AUSTRALIA

May Wirth, The Bareback Queen

by

Mark St Leon



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RINGLING BROS. AND BARNUM & BAILEY COMBINED SHOWS



MAY WIRTH
THE GREATEST BAREBACK
RIDER OF ALL TIME

THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

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Circus in Australia

May Wirth, The Bareback Queen

Here it is! At last! The *first and only* full length biography of one of Australia's finest contributions to the annals of international circus, the great bareback rider, May Wirth. Born May Zinga at Bundaberg, Queensland in 1894 into a family of circus people, May was adopted at an early age by the Wirth family, the owners of one of Australia's largest circus companies. Under the Wirths' guidance May developed into a superlative, all-round circus performer. She took the name of 'Wirth' as her own. Acrobatic work on a bareback horse was her specialty.

In 1911, May and her troupe of riders were engaged to tour the United States with Barnum & Bailey. May was given a conspicuous place on the Barnum & Bailey program when she made her American debut at New York's Madison Square Gardens in 1912. For the next 20 years, May appeared in circus, vaudeville and at county fairs throughout the United States. She also appeared in vaudeville and the great indoor circuses of Europe. May is regarded today as one of the greatest circus performers of all time.

In preparing this volume, I have scoured public and private collections throughout Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Britain and Europe for contemporary accounts, recorded interviews, radio transcripts, personal records, family recollections, photographs and memorabilia. The book includes approximately 120 reproductions of images of:

- Circus posters, programs
- Photographs
- Letters

The work is thoroughly annotated and indexed. It includes an extensive bibliography and is strongly bound in bonded leather. This edition is **strictly limited to 200 copies for sale**, each signed by the author and numbered, plus several promotional copies (6) and legal deposit copies (4) required under Australia's Copyright Act. Please place your order without delay!!!

Sincerely yours

Mark St Leon

Wattle in the Sawdust

The history of circus in Australia Volume Thirteen

Circus in Australia:

May Wirth, The Bareback Queen

by

Mark St Leon, PhD

The first and only full length biography of the greatest circus bareback rider of all time, Australia's May Wirth (1894-1978). Complemented by more than 120 contemporary photographs and full colour posters, culled from public and private collections throughout Australia and overseas, most now published in book form for the first time.

- Limited to **200 numbered copies**, each signed by the author
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 - ISBN 978-0-9581557-1-7

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Front image: "Pretty May Wirth, Australian Somersault Bareback Rider", a liftout broadside in the *National Police Gazette*, New York, 3 January 1914. Inside image: Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows "Miss May Wirth: The Greatest Bareback Rider of all Time", c.1919, courtesy National Library of Australia, Canberra, ACT.