

CWM Audio 2

Arthur (Art) Concello Interview, January 13, 1973

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Part 3

- Interviewer: See, this is Charlie, according to the stories of this time. They make a deal where he is going to be the man again, and this is when you are talking with the lawyers and ...
- Art: I'm talking to the lawyers in New York and fooling around, getting this deal set up, with
[00:00:30] Bob [Tran 00:00:24] and them, and Johnny's with the show. He's talking to me every night, saying, "Hey, [Laura 00:00:31] bought this". So I finally get it kicked around, and we're fooling around with the show until September or October, right in that ...
[00:01:00] September, I think it was. We got it all set. Johnny, I said, "Well, you've got to go talk to the old lady." So finally, he comes down here with the lawyers, and I'm down here, he makes a deal for 51%. The thing was three ways: Haley; Mrs. Charlie; and Johnny. He makes a deal ... He says to Mrs. Charlie, he says, "No, screw you, you ain't going to get ... I ain't going to get into a position I was in before, [whaled 00:01:14] by Haley's stock".
[00:01:30] 49/51. Finally, he convinces her, she says "All right." So he gets 51%. At that, point he has 51% and I can't throw in my money. I say this happened ...
- Interviewer: Just prior to that, he had been through that thing with the ladies' agreement, and all that thing where he never could control that and they couldn't ...
- Art: He couldn't control it, because it were three ways, and if any two of them got together, you were screwed. So when he made this deal with the ... At that point, I think it's in the
[00:02:00] end of September, I go to Atlanta. The jig is up, gentlemen. Jim Haley is [running the show 00:02:10]. The jig is up, the lawyer, Bob [Tran 00:02:17] is there, and Leonard [Fisco 00:02:20] is there. He walks in and says, "Haley, it's all over."
- Interviewer: Wouldn't that now ...
- [00:02:30]
- Art: Johnny's made a deal with Mrs. Charlie. Now, you see, when he made the deal with Mrs. Charlie, he wouldn't make this deal with Mrs. Charlie unless they agreed to buy the Haley stock ... The [IB 00:02:44] Ringling's stock, and John says, "I'll only do this on the basis of 51/49. That is the only basis I will do it on." At that point, they bought Haley's
[00:03:00] stock, and John got 51, Charlie got 49. That was the worst ... He hadn't bought the stock, but he had an agreement, if and when purchased, that he would get 51, and she would get 49.
- Interviewer: In that period, now, Jim Haley is back on the show, and because of the Hartford thing, they in part, he wants to be head of the show for a while.
- Art: He wants to be president of the show, and at that point, John is out.

Interviewer: Yeah.

[00:03:30]

Art: See, he's out. So I think the next ...

Interviewer: But the two of them got along for a while and I listened to Robert doing things.

Art: Well, the two of them got along, except Jim was going to be president, which John didn't want to stand.

Interviewer: Yeah, of course.

Art: He went and made a deal with Mrs. Charlie, and she says, "Yes, if we buy their stock, you get 49/51, and if we don't buy their stock, you're the president of the show and I'm going to vote with you." That was that.

[00:04:00]

Interviewer: The deal there too was that Robert would be chairman of the board and not active, because then he had a stroke right away.

Art: Yes, he had a stroke at that time.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. When you came on in Atlanta ... Of course, that's kind of a landmark in all of recent show history, when you walked on there, that night. Didn't Jim know this was happening?

[00:04:30]

Art: I suppose he must have had a Goddamned inkling, because Johnny was down here in Sarasota talking to Mrs. Charles. So he must have known what was happening. However, when we walked on in Atlanta that afternoon, he says, "The jig is up, Mrs. Charlie is... [look here's the 00:04:46] paper. She's voted with John. You're out." Ed Kelley was here at the time with Haley.

[00:05:00]

Interviewer: He was general manager? I mean, lot superintendent?

Art: No, George Smith.

Interviewer: What did Kelley do then?

Art: Kelley was an assistant manager.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Art: Anyway, Ed comes down and says, "Hey, now Jim's railroad car is there, it belongs to the show, but this has happened." I said, "Well, sure. He wants to take the railroad car to [Sarasota 00:05:27], move it off the train, let him take it to [Sarasota 00:05:29], what's the difference?" So, that night his car was gone, he was gone, and we took over the

[00:05:30]

show at that point. The door closed the 28th of November or something down here.

Interviewer: In that period, when you went on the show that night, was Johnny with you? Or [front 00:05:50] or [Bisco 00:05:50] or something like that?

Art: Leonard Bisco was there, and I had a half a dozen guys that went [on 00:05:59], and she
[00:06:00] said, "Well, that's it." So we just left the show as is. George was there. George said
"What's going to happen?" I said, "Shit, George, nothing's going to happen. Go ahead,
just let it go on just like it's going to the end of the season. What the hell? We ain't going
to do anything, except I'm going to check the tickets and count the money." All right, so
we took over the show close, at that point. That was until ... I think we closed up around
[00:06:30] November the 20th or something.

Interviewer: Okay. You put the fear of God in a lot of people that night, and the next day at the
Chattanooga, then you told some guys how they were going to have to operate, and you
got things squared away. Was the show in pretty bad shape at that point?

[00:07:00]

Art: Not too bad. It was doing a lot of things I wouldn't go for, but then we changed that all
in the next season.

Interviewer: Okay. That's forty-seven ... For your trip to Atlanta, did you come from New York or
Bloomington? The reason ...

Art: No, I think I come from Bloomington. I think I had been in New York and then I had been
in Provo.

Interviewer: Okay.

Art: I believe I come from Bloomington.

[00:07:30]

Interviewer: Okay. In that money thing, you're the prime factor in it. You got Frank Miller. You got
some other people in it?

Art: No. I think I had only \$200,000 and I think Frank put up \$175,000. I think we put up
\$200,000 apiece. I think we put up \$200,000 apiece, or something, which we got paid
back for when he got the money. No doubt about it, he paid the money back.

[00:08:00]

Interviewer: In that period, there was a couple of fellas in Bloomington: Sam Stern; Ed Raycraft. They
are friends of yours. They are friends of mine. Did they ever have other interest in the
show?

Art: Ed had some paper on the Russell Show. When I bought the Russell Show, I wanted the
[00:08:30] equipment to belong to a holding company. I never put a nickel up. He never put up a
nickel, but Ed ... I wanted all of the equipment, but when I bought the show I just said
"Screw this. I'm going to have somebody else own the equipment, and I'm going to own

[00:09:00] the operating company. If I get sued in Bodessa Texas, goddammit, I'm going to have Raycraft come in and say 'Oh, wait a minute, that's mine. Don't touch that, that's mine.'" Ed was in that thing, for the reason of a holding company, but he never put up any money, I just said, "Look, Ed, you've bought this stuff for \$50,000." So he had the paper on the Russell Show at one time, he had the paper, no doubt about it.

Interviewer: How about Sam? Did he ever figure anything like this?

Art: Nope. No money.

Interviewer: Okay. How about people on the show? How about Merle Evans or anybody like that?
[00:09:30] Did they ever get into something like this? All right, now the winter of forty-seven, forty-eight, you've been running the Russell Show, you've had a lot of experience, now, as the guy who owns it, the guy with the responsibility. You've got some ideas beyond the tractors, now you've got some seat ideas, it's not just ...

[00:10:00] Art: I did them in forty-seven, when I wasn't doing anything. Was it forty-seven? Yeah. When I sold the Beatty Show at the end of forty-six, I developed it. I went to Bloomington. I was between Bloomington and New York. Anyway, I developed a wagon, which eventually was the Ringling sequence. I developed it and made a model,
[00:10:30] and tried to sell it to the Ringlings in the May of forty-seven. I had a model, and I said, "Hey, here's what you're going to have to come to, gentlemen. This labor situation is getting bad, this will save you a lot of money." Anyway, Haley says, [inaudible
00:10:45]. Anyway, I eventually developed a wagon, and I went down to Lewis Diesel
[00:11:00] Engine Company and I had these damn wagon, and I said "Hey, can you make this and how much is it going to cost?" Well, along about this time, money wasn't flowing too freely around the Ringling show, so forty-seven, we took a forty-eight ... The Ringling show bought the wagons. They bought the wagons and I sold them the wagons. I told
[00:11:30] them "I'll tell you what I'm going to do, I will get the wagons, I'll get them built for you, and what have you." "What do you want?" "I want \$200,000." So I sold them the wagons for \$200,000.

Interviewer: Now, in that connection, if I recall correctly, you started building those wagons, well before the forty-eight season.

Art: Yeah. Forty-seven.

Interviewer: So in forty-eight you had the first wagons, and you put them on... I think the blues were burst with them, and then the next year you finished it off, you put the rest of them in.

[00:12:00] Art: I think we put half of them in first, and then a year or so later we put the rest of them in.

Interviewer: And the \$200,000 was for the whole ball of wax?

Art: No, the \$200,000 was me.

Interviewer: Yeah, all right.

Art: No.

Interviewer: But for both years? Well, let me ask you this way: They paid you that over a period of time, I guess, because I heard it up to now... You released the wagons to them. The supposition around the business was you owned the wagons and rented them to the Ringling Show.

[00:12:30]

Art: Well you might call it that, except I didn't. I made a flat deal and I said, "Now, I get \$200,000." "But we ain't got the money" "I can pay it, give me your notes. I have \$200,000 worth of notes to me." Now at this point, they says "Hey, goddammit," Lewis Hagen says, "I've got to have some money." So at this point they didn't have any money. I said, "She ain't got any problem." I said, "I'll get the money to pay for these wagons, give me your paper." So I [connived 00:13:00] around and got \$20,000 off this guy and \$10,000 off this guy and \$20,000 off this guy and whatever Lewis Diesel had to have ... \$80,000 or \$100,000. I got the money together and paid it. At that point, I took notes from Ringling for this money, and when Ringling paid them, and I was in charge of operating Ringling, so the moment the money came in, I just paid this guy \$20, paid this guys off that loaned the money to build these wagons.

[00:13:00]

[00:13:30]

Interviewer: Did Stern have anything to do with that? Ed Raycraft?

Art: He might have. I might have got some money off of Ed on that.

Interviewer: Had some guys around the show maybe?

[00:14:00]

Art: Oh, hell yeah. I got some money from... I think I got... Vernon give me some money, and Bob Reynolds give me some... Earl Evans probably gave me some money. I promoted the money. I didn't put a goddamn nickel in it myself.

Interviewer: Okay.

Art: I wouldn't be surprised if I didn't promote Frank Miller for \$20,000.

Interviewer: Him again. Back of the well again?

Art: Yeah.

[00:14:30]

Interviewer: Okay. Now in forty-eight, you got the seats and you are starting to make some changes in the layout of the show. You did away with the kid show band, you put O'Kelley up there, you are making it a much more efficient operation than [the first place 00:14:38]

Art: Well, first thing is you had a big fucking menagerie crew, and you had a great big long menagerie, and I says, "Oh, shit, goddammit, I'm going to do away with that." And I

[00:15:00] want to put another middle piece in the top and all of the animals... So as you walk in, they can walk into the animals, and I says "You've got the sidewall on the big top anyway. So we put the menagerie in the front of the big top."

Interviewer: It took you a few years to get that done. You were doing... First of all, well you came up with the aluminum poles.

Art: Well, the aluminum... wood poles were hard to get that heavy. So I said, "Yeah, let's get some aluminum poles." Another thing is you've got great, big main poles. It takes six niggers to pick one of them up when they are wet. So I says "Jesus Christ, that don't make any sense." So I says, "Hell, let's put an inch cable up the pole, and have one wire up there and one down, and if it rains, one guy can pick it up and it ain't going to pick up water." So we figured out a winch on the bottom of the pole, and a damn winch took it up, instead of this big rope, and another thing, this rope cost you thousands of dollars a year; you had to replace it every year. So I says, "This cable we put it on here once, it will last for 20 years." So we put the all-aluminum poles, which everybody said they wouldn't work, but they did, and then we put the seats and the aluminum poles and the winches on the poles, and ...

Interviewer: In that efficiency, you are cutting the show from Jim Haley, 108-109 cars, by fifty-one. It's 70, but it's really basically the same show.

Art: Yeah.

[00:16:30]

Interviewer: You're laughing about the cut. What brings that on?

Art: Eddie had problems with labor, and I says, "Jesus Christ, the only way I see this thing, if you've got to have 300 niggers to put this thing up and down, if you can do it with 90, you're better off." And another thing is if you are going to put seat wagons in, nobody had to pick anything up. It's a damn thing, you got a seat crew, and it's got six or eight men in it, and you say, "Okay, put 'em up, take 'em down, I don't want to hear about it." They put 'em up and they took them down, and there's no labor. So you cut your labor 50%, for Christ's sake. Your labor around your show was 50% of what it was.

Interviewer: In that early time, of your taking over, now, for the forty-eight, forty-nine period, you put the show indoors in St. Louis, San Antonio, Cow Palace.

[00:17:30]

Art: I said to North, I says, "One of these days..." I said forty-eight, forty-nine, along that period, I said, "Look, I want to put this thing in New York and Cow Palace, and St. Louis." I said "I want to try four or five spots and see what this thing does inside, and how it works out and all about." So I think we did that for two or three years. We put it inside. And I said, "North, one of these days, you're going to see this show, and there ain't going to be any tent." And I says, "The country is going to build these goddamn arenas around the country, and when that happens, you're going to take your actors and no cookhouse and no light department, and all this shit, and you're going to go right in that thing." I says, "That's going to happen to you, in your lifetime." So it did.

[00:18:00]

Interviewer: I guess, like St. Louis is never too good for the show, and it wasn't too good in that building that time, business-wise, but from a logistical standpoint, it showed that this would work.
[00:18:30]

Art: It showed us that it would work, number one. Now it ain't a good policy to have a tent show, and then put it in a building. It ain't, for the simple reason you have the goddamn big top crew, and the sideshow crew, and all the different crews you have them around the goddamn building, and they ain't got nothing to do. So when they ain't got nothing to do, goddamn it, they get drunk. It's not a good policy to go in and out, but we was fishing to see how it would work, if we didn't have all of those guys.
[00:19:00]

Interviewer: Forty-nine was about when you were doing that, and fifty, one of the main things was the Cecil B. DeMille. You must have some recollections about that. Maybe you made the deal.

[00:19:30]

Art: First of all, we had a deal with the guy that made "Gone with the Wind." Anyway, we had a deal with him. He was going to do the "Greatest Show on Earth." John says, "All right, we will give you six months." So we gave him six months to do it. You've got to come up with a script in six months. He was chasing a little gal at that time, later married. He come to the garden, said ... I said, "Have you got the script?" He says to me "No, I ain't got the goddamn thing. I got to go to Europe, and I want six months more." And I said, "No, we ain't going to give it to you." So he says, "Well, I want to talk to John, and goddammit it he's going to have to give me these six months because I'm going to do this show, and I'm going to do it, and this and that and the other." I says, "You're wasting me." Anyway, North was kind of hard to get to, if you know what I mean. Anyway, he couldn't get to North. I told him, I said, "Ain't no use kidding yourself, he ain't going to give you six months. He gave you six months, you said you'd come up with a script, you didn't do it."
[00:20:00]
[00:20:30]

At this point, I said, "Goddamn, let's get ahold of DeMille. DeMille jumped at it. DeMille says, "Yes sir, shit, I'll do it, I'll do it, I'll do it." So we made a deal with DeMille, and of course, DeMille got right on it, and six months, shit, he had a script. He had a script, he said "I'm going to do this, and now this ain't what it's going to be, but this is what I planned. Here's the script. Now you want a script, there it is. I'm going to change this 1,400 times." And I said, "All right. All right." So we finally made a deal with DeMille, and that's how the picture was made.
[00:21:00]
[00:21:30]

Interviewer: Okay. In that he wrote you into the script right away, gave you a Jeep and wrote you in there as a lead. Also, they put a unit on the show, it was at Washington, and they were filming the show, and they filmed some here in Sarasota, and so on. Do you have any outstanding recollections of that sort of thing? Was there anything special in the ...
[00:22:00]

Art: First of all, DeMille and Miss [Rossund 00:22:02] and a couple of people come on the show a year before, in North Dakota. Come on and why not [inaudible 00:22:13]. All they did was look and make sketches, and look, and they had two or three goddamned guys with pencils that made beautiful sketches and they just sketched everything. They

[00:22:30] was around there for a couple of weeks. DeMille and his secretary, Miss Rossund, come on there, and he stayed with the show for a week. He was up in the morning, seeing it move on, and he was around at night, seeing it move off, and then he would be here at different times of the drive. He stayed, and John was gone to Europe. Shit, he was never there, North. So, we put him in John's car and said, "Shit, do what you want."
[00:23:00] DeMille looked everything over and had his writer with him, and so he looked it over. That's where he come up with what he wanted to do. Then he come down here and shot for a couple of months, and he said, "We've got to do it, and so we made it." And so I said, "All right, Philadelphia we are going to set this thing up, and let you shoot."
[00:23:30] And he got more of the lights, and all of the goddamned lights in the world for the color. So we shot with the different ones, and that was ...

Interviewer: I saw in Washington where they were shooting the last of that, I guess.

Art: Yep, Washington and I think Philadelphia is where we shot, but ...

Interviewer: That gets us up to fifty-one. By now you are doing away with the menagerie, you've got it all in one top, and now it's 70 cars and so on.

Art: Three sections, instead of four.

[00:24:00]
Interviewer: Yeah. It's getting tougher to railroad it too, isn't it?

Art: It's getting tough to railroad it, and the help and the railroads, and this, that, and the other, so you've got to keep it up to 70, instead of 109, and it makes it easier to move and you can move it. It goes along in forty-nine, it's all right. It makes money. It makes
[00:24:30] money in fifty, fifty-one, fifty-two. Fifty-two, I says to North, I says, "I'll tell you what you've got to do. I want to do this thing on 60 cars, and I think we can creep along and get this thing up and get it down and get it up and get it down and make a little money with it." So he says, "No, fuck you, I don't agree with you." At the end of fifty-two. So I go "John, I can't handle it, unless you get it on a basis so that it's easy." He says, "I don't want to build Fords, I want to build Cadillacs. Good day."
[00:25:00]

[00:25:30] So I walked out of the office, I rode out, I says, "I'm resigning, you go ahead." I wrote him a note, I said "John, I wish you all of the luck in the world." But I says, "If you make it bigger, I'm afraid you ain't going to be able to get it up and down and over." So I says, "Come see me in two years."

[00:26:00] So they went out, forty-three and forty-four, and it got to that point. I think ... I added 70. I think he went to 80 that next year, and so the end of July he comes down here. "Jesus Christ," he says, "That goddamned note was a few months off, but it sure was
[00:26:30] right." He says, "I sure couldn't get it up and couldn't get it down." I says, "Well, you're the boss, you own it. Goddamn, don't look it at me. Forty-three? No. Let's see....

Interviewer: Let me throw out some timing there, if you don't mind.

Art: Forty-three.

Interviewer: My notes show that in fifty-one you've added 70. In fifty-two you tried some sponsors. You tried the Firestone thing. You tried some other things along that line. You had Eagles in there doing some sponsorship things.

[00:27:00]

Art: Tupper. A guy named Tupper sold it. Waldo Tupper.

Interviewer: All right. I knew him.

Art: Yeah.

Interviewer: In fifty-three, that's when other sources indicate that you figured there ought to be fewer cars, and that's when that kind of change came about. You had Mr. [Mist 27:29] in that period.

Art: Yeah.

[00:27:30]

Interviewer: Was there a connection, also between that timing and the fact that North had paid back your \$200,000?

Art: He had paid everything back at that point. I think he had paid me everything he owed me back at that point. No, I don't think that was it. I think that the whole thing, in a nutshell, was that I wanted to make it 60 cars, and he wanted to make it 80. I says "Jesus, where you going to get these guys to move this shit?" I says, "Goddamn it. Where are you going to get them?" So, anyway, in fifty-three, I guess, I threw up my hands and says, "Well, I ain't going to do it then." I says, "You do it, you ain't got any problem. Goddamn, it you do it yourself and then you ain't got any problem."

[00:28:00]

Interviewer: All right.

Art: So they go out then, and I'm not with them.

Interviewer: Yeah. Now, that's about fifty-four?

Art: That's the end of fifty-three.

Interviewer: All right.

[00:28:30]

Art: Yeah. That's January... We are sitting there, January fifty-four. Fifty-four, that's right. The beginning of fifty-four.

Interviewer: Okay. Now the show is short on money and they can't move it and they are having a hell of a fix there, [inaudible 00:28:49] where they are. At that time, this is the close, which is which. Well, in that time, is that when McClosky had it? And, is that when they got to Minneapolis, or is that in a year ...

[00:29:00]

Art: No, that wasn't ... When I left... In the beginning of fifty-four, I left. I think he gets a guy called Mike Burke.

Interviewer: Okay. Just bought the ...

[00:29:30]

Art: Mike Burke gets on, and McClosky and Vernon and Lawson and all of them guys are on the show.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Art: So they go along and during that season, and I think he calls them in Chicago and says "You bastards, this, that, and the other thing. Right, you ain't getting it up, you ain't getting it down, what have you." So I think they go up to Minneapolis and he fires someone.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. What were you doing in those years? Taking it easy, looking at that Canadian money you had?

[00:30:00]

Art: Fifty-four, I aim to have sitting right here, saying there ain't nothing. Hell with everything.

Interviewer: Can't beat that. The end of fifty-four, Christmas time, you're sitting down here, Beaty comes on the scene again.

Art: Yeah.

Interviewer: And so tell me about that. Would you put some seats over there, you ran into Bill Moore again.

[00:30:30]

Art: Beaty comes to me and says, "Jesus Christ, Art, I am in trouble." I says, "What's your trouble?" He says, "Them bastards stuck me in Vegas." So I go, "What is your trouble?" So I says, "Oh, well, all right. Fine." So I'm sitting here and he says, "Jesus Christ, you've got to help me. You've got to help me and I'm really in trouble." So I says, "What do you need?" He says, "Jesus, get this show out there. I need \$100,000." So I says, "All right, Clyde. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll take a title mortgage on the show, everything you've got. I'll put a guy over there to collect my money every day." So I sent Genders out there.

[00:31:00]