

# CWM Audio 2

## Arthur (Art) Concello Interview, January 13, 1973

### INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT Part 1

Interviewer: You started to go to the Y ...

Art: Yeah.

Interviewer: ... and somebody there figured that you ought to work out with the Wards or work out in the Y at that point. Then you went on the road with the Wards.

Art: Right.

Interviewer: Was this Hagenbeck-Wallace?

Art: Yeah, I went with the Hagenbeck-Wallace show in 1927.

Interviewer: Okay. The act with Eddie Ward, was it ...

[00:00:30]

Art: Eddie Ward ...

Interviewer: ... somebody else's?

Art: No, Eddie Ward himself was with the Floto show.

Interviewer: Who was in your act?

Art: A guy named [Jimmy Arbow 00:00:40], Billy Ward, Herb Fleming and it was called the [inaudible 00:00:50] Flying Wards. In them days Eddie Ward furnished the acts for the corporation shows, provided flying.

[00:01:00]

Interviewer: He probably had what, three at least?

Art: Yeah, he had the Hagenbeck Show and one was Sells Floto and one was the John Robinson.

Interviewer: When you were on that show, was Danny [Owen 00:01:14] the manager at that time?

Art: Danny Owen was the manager. That's right.

Interviewer: He was a little bit of a rough guy to work for?

Art: Well... yes, he was a rough, tough guy, old Danny Owen.

[00:01:30]

Interviewer: Did you have any particular run-ins with him or who was manager of the act? Who was ...

Art: Jimmy Arbow.

Interviewer: He'd have the heat of the ...

Art: I never had any trouble with Danny at all.

Interviewer: Okay. Then maybe the next year you switched to the Floto show.

Art: Twenty-eight, yeah. No, twenty-seven I went with the Hagenbeck show and  
[00:02:00] twenty-eight I opened with the Floto show. Then I went to the John Robinson show.

Interviewer: You're changing from one Ward act to another, was that about the size of it?

Art: No, I worked for old Eddie Ward and he just went wherever he sent you. I got an  
[00:02:30] act with the Hagenbeck show. I went with the John Robinson show in twenty-eight and twenty-nine I went with the Floto show. Terrell was there.

Interviewer: You got introduced to all of them. Was Sam [Dell 00:02:53] on the Robinson show when you were there?

Art: ... and a guy named Cook.

Interviewer: Frank Cook?

Art: Yeah.

[00:03:00]

Interviewer: Any particular incidents that comes to mind on those things?

Art: No.

Interviewer: What kind of a turn in the act were you doing then? What was your top trick at that point?

[00:03:30]

Art: I did a double, two and a half, a passing leap.

Interviewer: When you went to the Floto show, this is still with the Wards, Terrell was there and you got introduced to Zack. Who would be the [equestrian 00:03:41] director?

Art: Fred [Legend 00:03:43]. Fred Legend.

Interviewer: Was he a pretty good quester ...

[00:04:00]

Art: He seemed to be a pretty good old guy, Legend.

Interviewer: Was it pretty much fun trooping in those days?

Art: Jesus Christ, everything's fun when you're just eighteen.

Interviewer: In the twenty-nine season you would have been there when you heard that John Ringling bought them all.

Art: Yeah.

Interviewer: What was your reaction to that? What was the reaction on the show generally? Were people excited about it?

[00:04:30]

Art: No, there wasn't too much reaction. I think he bought the show and there was talk around about it, but that was about all. Of course they, like every place else, they just said, "Oh, everything will be just the same as it always is."

Interviewer: Then the changes started coming.

Art: That's right.

Interviewer: That next season I think you were with Fred Buchanan.

Art: Yeah, I went with Fred Buchanan in thirty.

Interviewer: Was that with your own act?

[00:05:00]

Art: Yeah, I did my own act. Eddie had died along in there in twenty-nine, twenty-eight or twenty-nine. Eddie had died, the old man. Mamie had the act there, one of the shows. Now at thirty I went, Fred Buchanan came over. I went with Fred Buchanan in the spring. He opened up in Iowa, over in a little town in Iowa. I was with him until about June or July. I think he come east. I don't think he was used to coming east and I think they cut the show down. About this time Terrell said, "Jeez, we need an act with the Floto show." Something happened.

[00:05:30]

[00:06:00]

Anyway, in June or July Buchanan was cutting down the show. I said, "Well, I'll get away from here then if you're cutting down the show." I went from the Buchanan show to the Floto show in June or July and finished the season in thirty.

Interviewer: When you were with Fred he must have been a tough old guy.

Art: I liked him.

[00:06:30]

Interviewer: I would have liked him. I was with George Christy recently, talking to George, talked to him for a long time. He chuckled about Fred Buchanan and said, "There was an old rascal," and this kind of thing. What's been rough around the [Robert 00:06:42] show for two reasons. One, you had the grift and one you had the depression.

Art:

[00:07:00]

Yeah, as far as I was concerned I did the act. He liked me and I did the act. He wasn't used to having flying acts around his show. I had a state room for the show and I went on and took care of my own business. I was there from April until June or July. I never had any trouble. I had the grift around there. They had nineteen-zillion fags, Kenneth Wade and Molly Moon and Peggy [Pool 00:07:22] and all them queens was around there. I never had any problems around there until he said, "Jesus, things are tough. I ain't doing much business. I'm going to cut down the show."

[00:07:30]

I said, "Fred, you ain't got any problem. I got a chance to go to the Floto show."

He said, "Go ahead," so I went right from there over to the Floto show.

Interviewer:

I've heard of that connection that he ... The way I heard it was that he cut down a pole. Now really he probably just started using [the menagerie 00:07:49] for a big top or something like that. Didn't he?

Art:

[00:08:00]

I don't know. He talked to me about cutting down the show. I said, "Fine." I said, "Fred, if you're going to cut down and have a little show, I can't get up in there." I said, "The best thing is I get away from here and it won't cost you any monies."

He said, "That'll be perfect."

The show wasn't cut down when I left because Terrell had said he's going to need the act. I said, "All right Zack, I'll come over there and when do you want me, John?"

"Come on over here the first of July," or whatever the date was, so I went over to the Floto show. I never seen it when it was cut down. It was cut down and I just took my stuff and went to the Floto show. Then I finished the season with the Floto show with Terrell.

[00:08:30]

Interviewer:

Now was Tom [Ricks 00:08:38] still there?

Art:

[00:09:00]

Yeah, Tom was there. I finished the season with the Floto show. Pat [Valdo 00:08:55] come around and says, "Hey, he wants you to go with the Ringling show."

I had a contract with the Floto show so I said, "Hell, I don't want to go with the Ringling show. I don't." Anyway, I wound up going with the Ringling show the next

year.

Interviewer: In the program booklet, the little booklet things of 1931, your act is listed in both. The copies I've got at least, it's listed in both Sells Floto and Ringling. Is there something that you recall about Valdo deciding that maybe the Floto show wasn't going to last?  
[00:09:30]

Art: I don't know. He came over there and says, "Hey, I want to take you to the Ringling show.

I said, "Well, that's all right." I says, "I want more money."

He says, "Oh my God, you got a contract."

I says, "All right, I'll go back to the Floto show." Anyway that wrestled around. I got a little more money and I went with the Ringling show. I think that was thirty-one.

Interviewer: Yeah.

[00:10:00]

Art: I went with the Ringling show in thirty-one and then probably I had a contract to go with Floto show in thirty-one. Robert, Jake, [Dellman 00:10:12] or somebody just made the damn program up.

Interviewer: You never did open with the Floto [crosstalk 00:10:17] ...

Art: No, no, no, I went. I left the Floto show in the end of thirty. I left there in the spring of thirty-one I went to the Ringling show because I used to go for [Owen 00:10:32]. As soon as them shows were closed I played for [Owen 00:10:35] in Detroit, played them dates. Then I'd close just before the Garden and go to the Garden. In thirty-one I went to the Garden.  
[00:10:30]

Interviewer: Now, that's your first time in there?

Art: Yeah, that was my first time in the Garden.

Interviewer: Is the act a little more about the same? You're going to add the triple pretty soon but you don't do that at that point, do you? You wait a little bit.  
[00:11:00]

Art: Just after that.

Interviewer: In thirty-one you're in the Garden and thirty-two ...

Art: I'm there in thirty-one until forty-two.

Interviewer: Now, along that way Alfredo Codona pulled his shoulder.

[00:11:30]

Art: Alfredo was all right in thirty-one. Then he got hurt the next season and couldn't, thirty-two I think it was, he got hurt. Then he wasn't really active around that year but then he was out after that.

Interviewer: When did you take over the center ring?

[00:12:00]

Art: I'd say about thirty-three. I think he got hurt in thirty-two the next year and then I took over the center ring. Then at that point I furnished them all the acts. I furnished them three acts with Ringling from ...

Interviewer: How soon did you get to that point? How soon did you [crosstalk 00:12:12] ...

Art: About thirty-four I think. Thirty-four, I furnished them all the acts.

Interviewer: Now, when did you start the triple?

[00:12:30]

Art: I did the triple I guess in thirty-four or thirty-five, along in there, thirty-four.

Interviewer: Now really you got a pretty good idea of when you started that, don't you?

Art: I'd say that was about then.

Interviewer: You're doing the three acts on the Ringling show in thirty-four. Was Gumpertz in charge then?

Art: Gumpertz, when I went there, Gumpertz was in charge. Gumpertz was in charge of the show for thirty-eight.

[00:13:00]

Interviewer: You made your arrangements with Gumpertz to sell him three acts.

Art: Yeah, that [fell off 00:13:05]. Gumpertz never did anything.

Interviewer: Now you also started furnishing among the Hagenbeck show.

Art: Yeah, I furnished [crosstalk 00:13:20] ... I made arrangements with Pat. I said, "All right, I'll furnish the acts for all the shows that you do." I furnished them flying acts for all the shows in them days plus I did a couple of bar acts and diving acts. I furnished them a number of acts from that point on until forty-two or three.

[00:13:30]

Interviewer: When you were doing that, do you recall the first time you had stuff on the Hagenbeck or the Barnes show, when you branched out from beyond the Ringling?

[00:14:00]

Art: I'd say about thirty-four, thirty-five, right in that period. I'd given up, asked for both shows.

Interviewer: Of course you knew all the flyers from the business and you'd go out and hire those fellows. Did you hire individuals or did you buy up acts?

Art: [00:14:30] No, I usually hired the individuals and put the acts together because I put them together and says, "Here, we'll go," because Ward's acts were mostly broke up after Eddie died. A few years it kind of went to hell. I knew all the flyers in the business. I just hired a gang, take two or three days, put an act together, make up some wardrobe and say, "Here, let's go."

Interviewer: When you had that market, when you had the acts, when you were hiring so many guys, did the price go up?

[00:15:00]

Art: No, the price went up with the show but the price of flying acts was a standard and the guy got a salary. I got a good fee for them all. I got organized. At that point they didn't want to bother. They wanted, [Aldo and those guys, 00:15:20] because they wanted an act. They just said, "Hey, we want an act at the Hagenbeck."

[00:15:30] "How many people?" I said, "Four, all right, you got it. It's going to cost you so much money." At that point I'd get it together and get all this stuff and get it ready and load it and say, "Send it to the coast," or wherever it was going. It's Hagenbeck, or New York or wherever it was going. I had the place. At that time I owned the Ward's barn.

Interviewer: I'd probably get back to that. When did you get that? When did you buy that?

Art: Right about that time, about thirty-three or thirty-four.

Interviewer: You always called that the barn, didn't you? You're going back to the barn.

[00:16:00]

Art: Yeah. I had a place to get these guys together and ready and the shows. At that same time I was furnishing Wirth in Australia, too. I furnished Wirth in Australia's act [crosstalk 00:16:13] ...

Interviewer: Wayne Larry?

Art: [00:16:30] At first I sent Red [Schalter 00:16:20] and Billy Ward over there in the early days. Then, later on, I sent Wayne Larry and three or four people over there. I sent different people over there over the years. I had them a pole. Years and years and years Wirth would just say, "I need three people or four people," or three or four years later say, "I want to change it."

I'd say, "Okay, I'll send you another act."

Interviewer: What's the biggest number of acts you had in those days?

[00:17:00]

Art: Oh, I think I had three with Ringling one time, two with Hagenbeck, one with Barnes, one at [inaudible 00:17:05], about eight at one time, seven or eight acts I had, flying acts.

Interviewer: Now Wayne Larry is the head of the Ringling show now and a great detective. He recalls that being around Bloomington and talks about how they'd assign each act an hour during the day. They'd rehearse all day. He had enough acts there to fill up the day. He was the yard master on it.

[00:17:30]

Art: Yeah, he used Wayne a lot and Toughie Genders. There was Toughie and Wayne. They'd practice and they'd practice an hour a day. When we was busy and I had eight acts, I'd just say, "Hey, you've got to go now," and sign up times. Wayne was out there part of the time and Genders was out there part of the time. He'd practice them, get them ready and get them shaped. See where you're going to put different people and put them together. I'd say, "All right, it's ready." Wayne did a lot of that.

[00:18:00]

Interviewer: As far as your own work is concerned, you're still working in the acts at that time?

Art: I worked in the act until forty-two.

Interviewer: Antoinette started doing a triple about thirty-seven. You had his and hers triples about then.

Art: About thirty-seven, I guess thirty-seven, thirty-six, seven or eight along in there somewhere.

[00:18:30]

Interviewer: Now let's put you on the Ringling show in thirty-eight when they had the trouble in Scranton. You got a strike. You're on deck for that, are you?

Art: Yeah, I'm around there. I'm in the show when they have the strike in Scranton and they were going to close it up. I'm friendly with John North. He sent John says, "Hey, come on down to the hotel." I went down to the hotel and he said, "We're going to take out the," another circus. I don't know what the hell, Al G. Barnes or Ringling or whatever it was. He says, "Don't go no place tonight. I want to take you. We got to go to Sarasota." At that point he says, "Don't do anything. I'll take you over with the Barnes show," so I went. It closed up in Scranton and came down to Sarasota and the Barnes thing opened. They was open and operating but they enlarged the Barnes thing and ...

[00:19:30]

Interviewer: You took twenty-five cars to Redfield, South Dakota.

Art: That's it. They went out to South Dakota and I went with that thing the rest of the year.

[00:20:00]

Interviewer: I saw you in Decatur as I'd been seeing you in Bloomington and a few other places

along the way. Everybody must have been pretty worried at that time. I guess it was quite a thing when the Barnes show came in there. They didn't know that you were going to be there and [Paul Eagles 00:20:18] and some of those guys had told me a bunch was arriving on the scene.

Art: [00:20:30] Yeah, I think so, a little upset. I had an act with the Barnes show then except they enlarged it and I said, "Well, I'll do two acts with the Barnes show." I went there for that year. I think we took Frank [Buck 00:20:39]. He was there and they enlarged it and took the Ringling top, twenty-five cars and the Barnes stuff was shipped away.

Interviewer: [00:21:00] I guess they went down to Peru probably. Now in this period too, just before the strike, John North came on the scene. Gumpertz is out and North is in. What's your first recollection on Johnny? When did you first get in contact with him?

Art: [00:21:30] Johnny I knew from time to time. He'd come around the show. I knew Johnny from time to time when he'd be around the show during this 1931 until 1938. I knew North when he'd come around the show. He told me. He said, "Well, I've made arrangements to ..." He'd borrowed a million dollars off of Harvey Gibson of Manufacturers Trust. They paid off Alfred's interest in ...

[00:22:00]  
Interviewer: Do you recall a Gumpertz thing? There were two or three names of companies or ...

Art: [Straus 00:22:02].

Interviewer: Was this Gumpertz's connection?

Art: Yeah, they put Gumpertz in.

Interviewer: Were there not two names there, Allied and something else?

Art: Yeah, there was a banking firm that John Ringling borrowed some money from.

Interviewer: I can't get straight in my mind how they switched those names. He'd borrow from somebody and then it turns out that maybe two other guys they sold off the note.

[00:22:30]  
Art: They sold the paper. They switched the paper around New York, anyway. Gumpertz was friendly with the banks, companies that had loaned Uncle John the money. They said, "Hell with you, Uncle John, we're going to put in a man to see that we get our count." At that point Gumpertz was in there and along in the thirties until thirty-eight. At that point, John North borrowed the money from Manufacturers Trust and paid them off. They come in and started to end it, started ... It was thirty-seven.

Interviewer: November or something like that in thirty-seven.

Art: Thirty-seven, sometime in thirty-seven he came around the show. I knew John and

[00:23:30] was friendly with him. I was doing an act with the show. I did the acts with the show and he'd come around, changed some things. Then he had problems. In thirty-eight he had the strike. He went out to this Redfield and did this Barnes thing. At that point in thirty-nine they went back to Ringling.

Interviewer: In that period you were still pretty busy with the act and you hadn't really gotten into the management until maybe forty-two. You had your eye on it a long time in there. When did you first start deciding that ... they tell that you're up on that fly bar and you're counting the house and not gotten the somersaults as much as the house.  
[00:24:00]

Art: I nosed around and I knew all about the show from the years I was around it. I was interested in the physical end. In thirty-eight North had to put up a bond, fifty-grand and he didn't have the money. I put up the fifty-grand.

[00:24:30]  
Interviewer: That early, I knew you you'd taken care into that.

Art: In thirty-eight he needed some bond money so I advanced him some money. From thirty-eight on I was friendly with North.

Interviewer: What kind of a bond was that, just a ...

[00:25:00]  
Art: Some kind of a performance bond he needed the money for. I loaned him the money. I loaned him the money to pay back what he can so he paid it back with no problem about it. Then in thirty-nine we did the Ringling show again.

Interviewer: Barnes was on the Ringling show, not Barnes Sells Floto.

Art: The bond was on him. It was some type of bond that on him. He needed some money so I advanced him the money. At that time he didn't have any money. In thirty-nine things seemed to work all right. Forty, we did the Ringling show.  
[00:25:30]

Interviewer: You're still flying then but you're taking one more interest in the management of it. You're close to John to this business.

[00:26:00]  
Art: He wanted to get away from the horses. I helped him to go the tractors which everybody said wouldn't work but they finally worked some way or another.

Interviewer: What was your part in that?

Art: Not too much. He asked me. He said, "What do you think?" He says, "Jesus Christ, we got three-hundred head of horses around here. From the time the show closes until the show opens, I got to feed them sons of bitches and they sit in Sarasota there, all them baggage horses pulling wagons."  
[00:26:30]

Interviewer: Got to haul that hay from the north somewhere.

Art: Oh Christ, they sent it down there by the trainload. I say, "God damn," I said, "Don't make much sense does it?" I said, "is there something down there you could lease them out."

He said, "No, they sit right there in the quarters, three-hundred head."

[00:27:00] I says, "North," I said, "well, Christ's sake," I said, "The God damn army moves all these heavy ammunition wagons, everything else, with these Caterpillar tractors." I said, "You ought to think about getting some damn Caterpillar tractors and see if you can't eliminate them horses. When you close you can set the Caterpillar over there and say, 'Sit there now until I want you again.'" I said, "It ain't going to cost you a nickel." I said, "Oh hell," I said, "It'll cost you might have to fix it up a little bit or something but it ain't going to eat every day." That was the situation how the Caterpillar tractors come in. I recommended to use Caterpillar tractors instead of the three-hundred head of baggage stock.

[00:27:30] Interviewer: In that same period they'd had maybe some trouble with baggage stock drivers.

Art: They did. That's another reason I says ...

Interviewer: Both reasons figured in it, right?

Art: Sure, both reasons figured in. They had three-hundred head of horses and you can do the same job with ten Caterpillars.

Interviewer: What did they do with all those horses? Who bought three-hundred horses in thirty-eight, thirty-nine?

[00:28:00] Art: They sold them to some horse dealer. Horse dealers come down here and there and they sold them all.

Interviewer: I guess that above covers this for forty and forty-one. Now the way North tells the story in his book about the train going to New York for forty-two. The idea there is they decided on the train they had to change general managers. Is that really when they did it?

[00:28:30] Art: Yeah.

Interviewer: Of course, George had been having some problems so they got to find ... Is that the primary reason, his problems?

Art: The show was in winter quarters here. I had all the acts for the show and I used to be around here and there and the front and all over. When it's loading up at night I used to be for years, I was down there so I knew all the bosses and knew where everything went and everything. Anyway, in forty I had a problem with George.

[00:29:00]

[00:29:30] God damn it, he's a hell, he's a good man, George and everything but he can get drunk. Get this man, this poor son of a bitch. Some guys could drink a quart a day and they never know it but George would fall down. On the train going up I was on the trail. I said, "Well, I better go up on the train," and Henry was on the train. Of course, George proceeded to get drunk as a bug in [inaudible 00:29:35], get drunk as hell. Don't quote me on this, you son of a bitch. Quote somebody ...

Interviewer: Let me assure you on all of this, Art, that I'm looking for the positive sides of these things. I'm not trying to upset any apple cart.

Art: [00:30:00] Because me, I didn't give a damn. I was making three times as much money as [crosstalk 00:29:57] Smith but the acts it was a money thing. They come to me and says, "Hey, I'm on the train going up. Henry's on the train going up and George is dead drunk, God damn falling down and raising hell," and this and that and the other. Anyway, we get to New York, John North and Henry called me in and says, "Hey, we got a problem."

[00:30:30] I says, "Shit, have you?" I said, "I ain't. Everything I got is money and stuff."

"Can you unload the train and get it in the Garden?"

[00:31:00] I said, "Shit, that ain't no problem." I said, "You got the train [mess 00:30:38] and all the guys." Anyway, we called George in and I says, "Hey, we can't do anything. We can't go anyplace. It's your problem. I said, "You get it up. You get it down and get it set up or whatever." In forty-two I said, "All right, what are you going to pay me?"

They said, "Well, we're going to talk."

I said, "Yeah, don't talk about it. Tell me something. I don't want to do this kind of damn thing unless you're going to pay me." Anyway, we agreed on a salary and I says, "All right, I'll ..."