

CWM Audio 2

Arthur (Art) Concello Interview, January 13, 1973

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Part 4

Art: What have you, and I said, "I'm going to have my man there and I'm going to furnish you a couple of acts. So, that season, went out there. I think I collected \$40,000 plus interest, so he owed me \$60,000 the next year. So, the next year ...

[00:00:30]

Interviewer: Let me interrupt just a minute.

Art: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: When was it you ran into an argument with Moore in that period? Was that ...

Art: No, I just had arguments with Moore all the time.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Art: During this period... It'll come up at a later time, anyway. Anytime, I've got Genders out there, he's on the door. And I said, "I want my money every day, Clyde." He collects \$40,000 in that first season.

Interviewer: Okay.

Art: Show goes back to winter quarters. Goes out to next spring, and they ain't doing no good. I get a phone call from Genders, and I fly to California. He says, "Well, we ain't getting this and we ain't getting that and we ain't getting the other." In the meantime, McClosky and Kurnen bought the concessions, and so they've advanced him some money. They don't know what to think when I show up. I show up out there and say, "Hey, you're out around the Los Angeles area and the damn thing is going to close. Take it back to Deming. Take that son of a bitch back to Deming." They get the money together and take it back to Deming. So, I put a hand on it back there and says, "Now, don't do anything. You pay me the 60 grand or I'll take all this equipment." At this point Kernon and McClosky are trying to make a deal with me. They got a second mortgage for their thirty or forty thousand... whatever they advanced him. I got a shadow first mortgage, so they're trying to make a deal with me, I said, "You ain't got any problems, fellas." I said, "I'll make a deal with you. We'll take the show out next year. Now, if you want," I said, "we'll take the show out. I want my \$60,000 first."

[00:02:00] "First money comes in, I want my 60,000 plus interest." I says, "At that point," I says, "I'll go along with you. Whatever your second mortgage is you can take that money second, and then we'll cut it up after that. Except I want 51% of the show. You guys can have 49." Well, it wrestled around, wrestled around, wrestle around, wrestle around.

[00:03:00]

Finally, they got a hold of Jerry Columns and he loaned them some money and they took the show and paid me and my \$66,000 and they went on their way.

[00:03:30]

Interviewer: And, they did that mid-season? They did where? Fifty-six? By the time that it re-opened it was... your problem. They paid your money ...

Art: I got my \$66,000. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay. Now, the Ringling Show grinds to a halt at Pittsburgh. And, Mike Burke
[00:04:00] and the whole thing comes tumbling down. In that thing, then, that goes back to... it's just like... it's like after the fire. It's like after the strike. It limps back to Sarasota.

Art: Runs back to Sarasota. I'm sitting in the Plaza restaurant. My friend Montgomery and John ...

Interviewer: C.R. Montgomery. Is that the guy?

Art: No, no, no.

Interviewer: Okay.

Art: The guy that owns department stores here.

Interviewer: I see.

Art: Montgomery Roberts is his... department store. He's the owner in [inaudible 00:04:27].
[00:04:30] So, we're sitting in the plaza. John North... I take that back. He's sitting in the Plaza having dinner and Montgomery's there. He says, "Where is Artie?" Bud says, "I don't know where that son of a bitch is." John says, "Don't tell me that. Goddamn it, he's here some place." "Yeah, he's in town, but I don't know where he's at." Finally, Bud got
[00:05:00] a hold of me. I went down to see John. I said, "Oh, Jesus, John I'm sure sorry to hear that the goddamn thing closed up." He says, "Well, it worked out like you said it was going to. You goddamn... I went on to a couple of things. You can't get it up. You can't get it down. You can't move it." I says, "Well, I don't want to be one of them guys that says I told you so. I'm sorry that things closed up and nixed jobs for a lot of people," and
[00:05:30] what have you. "I want to make a deal with you." I says, "Shit, John, you want to make a deal with me, but I don't want to work."

I said, "Shit. The hell with you. I don't to make no deal. What's your problem?" He said, "I want to make a deal with you to take the show out in the buildings." I said, "How
[00:06:00] much do you owe?" He said, "We owe a \$1,600,000 in bills." I said, "You son of a bitch." I says, "You come around here when the goddamn thing's sick. You come around..." I says, "Shit, goddamn it, I don't want nothing to do with this." This goes on for 30 days. I can't get out of my goddamn car or anything else unless John Norris was there. I got my railroad car. I'm sitting on it ...

Interviewer: Yeah.

[00:06:30]

Art: Early in the morning, so we talking, talking, talking, talking. I said, "John, you son of a bitch, goddamn it." I says, "you son of a bitch, you a \$1,600,000 dollars in money." I said, "You're coming to me and say, 'I want to do a show in the buildings next year.'" I says, "It's going to take some money." Finally, after 30 days I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. Tell you what I'll do. I'll put the show in the buildings and you go away from it and let it alone. You go to Europe and let it alone." I says, "You're going to do it now?" He says, "Now is the time to do it." I says, "You go ahead and do the thing," and I says, "I'll sit here and relax and do as I please." I says, "If you're going to do it, you do it. If I'm going to do it, then you got to let me do it." I says, "You can't be running around saying this, that and the other, second guessing me." I says, "Go ahead, and you got an opportunity now." "Well, god damn it, I'm sick." I says, "Why don't you sell the son of a bitch?" He's sick. Sell it and get some money out of it and the hell with it.

[00:07:30]

"Well, I'll do that," he says. At that point I call up my friend Bill Vick. I said, "Bill, come on down here. You want ... " "Yes, sir. I want to buy that thing. I can really hoot and holler about that." He come down here and spent some time. We went back to the World's Series and bullshitted in New York, but anyway, he couldn't come up with the money. It seems like he couldn't come up with money that John wanted. I said, "All right, John. I'll tell you what you do. If you want to work for a few days..." I said, "If you want to work for a few weeks," I says, "come on down here and come on downstairs. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll put it in the buildings and you go away and let it alone until I get the goddamn thing. After I had it organized two or three years..." I says, "Then, fine, you can hoot and holler and do all you want to. But you got to let it alone. If I'm going to do it, then I'm going to do it. If you're going to do it, you go ahead and do it." He says, "Fine. You do as you please and you get the show on, get me a statement."

[00:08:00]

[00:08:30]

I said, "The first thing you got to do is you got to sit down here." I says, "Come on down here," and I said, "We got to sit down on this telephone here." And I said, "You're going to call up every son of a bitch you owe a nickel to." I says, "Go on over there and get some money." He says, "What do you need?" I says, "Go on over there and get \$350,000." I says, "I think I can get it open and set and we can pacify these bill guys and what have you." So, we went out and got on the phone, called up this guy and says, "Look. We owe you \$6,000. I'm sending you 600. I'm going to pay you." But 99% of them says "Okay, we'll go." At that point, I get ...

[00:09:00]

[00:09:30]

Interviewer: From them, you're getting time? They're not loaning you more money?

Art: No, I ain't getting none. I'm just saying, you owe a million six, so you're saying, "Hey, shows going up. We're going to pay you over the next couple of years. We're going to pay you." Well, he went over to... I says, "Go on over to Oklahoma there, you son of a bitch and get some money." So, he went over and got \$350,000.

Interviewer: Where was that? Oklahoma?

[00:10:00]

Art: Yeah. He's got some oil wells over there. I says, "All right." Now... at that point I says,

[00:10:30] "All right, we'll get the building show," so we start getting the building show together and start fooling around and getting the Garden and I got the arena managers and I got the [inaudible 00:10:13] and I got a bunch of them. He says, "All right." I says, "Now, look, the first year or two the goddamn route ain't going to be any good because you're going to run into a building and say, 'Hey, I want your building' and the guy's going to say, "I got a flower show in there. You can't have it." So, anyway, we played outside and inside and around and about in first year.

Interviewer: As I recall it, now you mentioned the Arena Managers Association you work with John somebody, that was their secretary, and you got the Hershey's and the ...

Art: Boston.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Art: Anyway the guy in Boston, what the hell's his name?

Interviewer: Walter ...

Art: Walter Brown.

Interviewer: Brown.

Art: [00:11:00] Walter Brown. I sit down with Walter Brown. He says, "Look I can get you 11 weeks or whatever the hell it is." I says, "All right. We'll take it." That was a start and then we got some ...

Interviewer: Some of those weren't too great.

Art: No. Shit, they wasn't too good at first ...

Interviewer: But, Charlotte was about your first good one, wasn't it?

Art: Charlotte was good. Oh, 60% of them was all right. Some of them was dogs. Anyway, we grind along and playing that fairgrounds and any goddamn thing. The first year ...

Interviewer: Harry [Dube 00:11:23] was working on it.

Art: [00:11:30] Harry Dube worked on it. Harry Dube worked on it, and I got Walter Brown to give him 11 weeks to start and said, "Do the best you can. Get a ballpark or a fairground. Anything you can." At that point we got Irving Feld and Harry [Lushinski 00:11:38] and a guy Martell Breck to promote. John says, "Well, why don't you ..." I says, "You son of a bitch, John," I says, "goddamn it, I'm going to... you've got a big old tent up out there and I'm going to have to spend about 15 hours a day getting this thing all kicked around and new rigging and new lights and new organization and trucks and whatever the hell we got." I says, "Christ, I ain't going to have time to do nothing. I'll get Harry Dube." I called Harry and brought him down here and says, "Here's our problem, Harry. Get this goddamn thing and get what you can the first year. Second year will be better and the [00:12:00]

third year will be all right."

Interviewer: Okay. You decided that you were going to use these local promoters like Fell and Harry and Brett ...

[00:12:30]

Art: Outside the arena manager.... The building promoter. The building promoted the Garden. The Garden's all right. You do a couple million bucks there, so you get some money you can operate with. So the Garden and Boston and I think he had 12 weeks to the building promoter. The rest of them, god dammit, you can't promote them. You ain't got nobody to promote them you ain't got any money.

Interviewer: Right.

Art: So you ain't got no dough, so how the hell you going to send a bunch of promoters out if you ain't got... I said, "John, I ain't got no money." I said, "Shit, you can probably get some promoters, but that's going to take you a couple of years to get guys that are any good." I says, "Goddamn it, you got to..." I says, "We'll use Feld and Lishinski and Martell Brett. I had another guy called Warner or something out on the coast.

Interviewer: Yeah. Warner Buck.

[00:13:30]

Art: Warner Buck. We can bring in Buck in five or six spots out on the coast. Warner Buck.

Interviewer: Did Feld have any different deal, I mean not in money, but was there more emphasis on Feld than on the others at that point?

Art: No. First, the thing I did, I always [inaudible 00:13:47] Fell 15 towns, and Harry to 10 or 15 towns, and Brett 10 towns, and Feld won them all. "Shit, you ain't ever get me in a position where you've got more." I never would have let Feld have over 15 towns and then I'd say, "Harry, you get this 15 and you got them 15, and Brett you got these 10 or 12," and the building's has got a few. Buildings promoted you in New York and a few spots. And, down in Greenville I think you had a guy in there that some local thing promoted it, so you never get there. Pen, I think.

[00:14:30]

Interviewer: Oh, yeah. Herbert Pen. Well, he's still storming around.

Art: That was the thing about the first year with the... Anyway, the first year we go out and we get along. We don't need any more money. Second year, you go out and make some money. The end of the third year, you'd paid off the million six.

[00:15:00]

Interviewer: All right. Now in that time you're moving at... you're improvising in the moves about like you are in some of these other things because no money, you're ...

Art: No money.

Interviewer: You're on your way.

Art: I got some semis. I think we got a... I took the trucks from the show. The show had some big Macks. I said, "All right. Change them over the highway." I took the Macks and all the stuff and I think we bought a half-a-dozen semis and had a couple of flat trucks, [00:15:30] big canvas trucks we put the rubber and crap on and got it all together. And then I says, "All right. The elephants and horses we'll put them on a baggage car." We'll have the tickets for the people. So, the first year you did the best you could. Second year, I says, "Shit. We got to have a train." I start... looked out there in the field and you had 25 goddamn coaches. I says, "Shit. There's my thing." I says, "I build some little wagons and then I've got... I've been around the buildings for years with [them 00:16:02]." I says, "God damn, I got to have a wagon that 7' 11" high." The god damn building's got eight foot doors. I says, "All right. We'll gut that railroad car." The guys come down and say, "You can't do that." So, anyway I says, "Fuck them." I went down and got Gene [Brewcheski 00:16:18] and I made a sample tunnel car. Cut it out and rebraced it and did everything. I said, "All right. Fine." ARA guy says, "What's the matter with it?" [00:16:30] "Ain't a goddamn thing the matter with it." I says, "That's it." I got the train.

Tunneled out this train and went down and built little aluminum wagons so that you could... you don't have to take... you can run them right in on the floor and unload them and take them back out.

Interviewer: That 7' 11" -- you were thinking then not only of building doors, but also the size of a car?

[00:17:00]

Art: Yeah, couldn't get any higher in the car and I also... You got some, you got some buildings where you get inside... Look at that Cleveland building. Goddammit, you get inside, you got an eight foot damn beam across where you can't get... Now the minute you don't have those wagons 7' 11", them guys gotta lug all that goddamn rubber and stuff into the arena and then lug it back and put it... Shit, why not have a wagon sitting right there. I say, "Move it down there, and unload this and move... So, you moved it around your arena floor and took it out and took it to the train, put it in the train. So, it worked out all right." [00:17:30]

Interviewer: All right. You came up then with the 15 cars and you're moving... first of all you're moving in passenger service, but that didn't last did it?

Art: No, we moved and put passenger service only the first year when we had the trucks. After that we made a freight move.

Interviewer: Okay.

Art: You can get a freight, 15 car freight move and then the train's waiting for you when you want to go. Everything was freight moves.

Interviewer: But you could move a lot faster?

[00:18:00]

Art: Shit, another thing was passenger service, Christ, you might have to... the way passenger service was you might have to wait until the next day to get out.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Art: This freight service was just ideal. The train and crews would say, "What time do you want to leave?" We'd say, "I want to leave at 3 o'clock." They're sitting there waiting. You get that thing loaded they's on. Shit, there's no difference in passenger and freight service. They went along 50 mile an hour, 60 mile an hour.

Interviewer: In that process you also invented this new... this rigging that would go into any building.
[00:18:30] A minimum number of ties...

Art: Yes, that's the first year. I said, "I got to have my rigging, god dammit, that'll..." You put the flying act up there in the middle of the two ends and then you've got to have that side so it'll go up or down. They're either pulling in or out and hang it. Other thing, you had to have it so you could hang it from six points in the ceiling. You have enough trouble getting the six points in the ceiling on some of these buildings with false ceilings in them.

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Interviewer: It wasn't necessarily six. You were trying to get it as few possible. Is that right?

Art: As few as possible. If you've got the frame over one ring, a frame over one over the middle, you got to have six points for them crow feet to work. Crow feet won't work if you don't have a point on each side, so you can pull it off.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Art: I developed all that rigging I got.

[00:19:30]

Interviewer: Okay. Feld was taken more and more of those dates in this period, isn't he? Isn't he playing... maybe Martell Brett drops out.

Art: I don't think he's ... I think he takes them all. I don't think he's got any outside promoters.

Interviewer: No, I don't mean now. I mean in the time that we're talking about here. In the 60s.

Art: Martell has dropped off... The new dates had come up and Feld said... Of course I had a deal with Feld. I says, "Look," I says, "You're going to take any date I set. Good or bad." He says, "I'll take it. Good or bad. If it loses money, I ain't going to cry." I says, "Don't come back to me crying, now." I says, "Take good or bad. You take it." He says, "Okay." He said, "When I got out and wanted to break a jump," and says, "I almost stopped with you." I says, "Feld, you got to do it. Get your ass ..." "Okay. All right." He took them.

[00:20:00]

Interviewer: Okay.

Art: Where you at? Fifty-six?

Interviewer: Well, we're beyond that. We're beyond the fifty-six. We're into a these years when you were creating the new rigging, creating the new train, going into buildings and jelling that whole building system. That's got to be a pretty good thing. One thing you skipped over was the rubber flooring. Was the your idea or was that ...
[00:20:30]

Art: Yeah. Yes, sir. 100%. These buildings, when I got to thinking about it a year or so, I says, "Jesus Christ, I can't go in these god damn buildings." First thing I run into is... I says, "Philadelphia." They says, "You son of a bitch, you ain't going to put that goddamn dirt on my good hardwood floor." Philadelphia's hardwood. So I says, "Jesus Christ, there's gotta be..." Then, Ned Irish kept coming to me. Goddammit, it already cost \$5,600 dollars to put this dirt in here. I says, "There's got to be a better way." I went to U.S. rubber and I says, "Look. I want a floor about a quarter of an inch thick. I want it in 20 x 6 sheets, and I want it made out of tire rubber. I want it tough now, goddamn it, so horses can run on it and this and that." The guys says, "Yes, sir. I got it for you." So, I says, "All right. Make up a set." The damn thing cost \$20,000 in them days. I says, "We got to go for it." I said, "You're going to go in these buildings, you got to have something you can throw it out on their floor and when you get out of the building, you just pick it up and go and say, 'Good day, gentlemen.'"
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[00:21:30]
[00:22:00]

I says, "Any building with a wood floor under the thing, they don't want you to put dirt in that. They'll have a hell of time getting up. Then they have floor problems." They say, "My floor this. There's moisture in it." So, anyway, we... That's another thing. The goddamn dirt in a lot of these towns, you go to a town and you say, "I got to have dirt in there," and the son of a bitch says, "Oh, it's raining like a son of a bitch and we got it in there, but it's mud." Anyway, the floor I developed...
[00:22:30]

Interviewer: On that floor you got two wagons with this, this frame that comes out. You put the rubber on it and then pretty soon you winch the wagon back over the frame.

Art: You got rollers on the wagon. You take those rollers and put three or four men down each side, and it goes right over a roller and drops in the wagon. You don't have to move it. You move the wagon every time you do it, but you can just take that thing and pull it... You got a little winch in the front. You can just pull it up on the wagon and flop. Pull it on the wagon, plus you can... I got some vice grip arrangements that you can take six men, and they can just take it and snap on there and set it anywhere you want it. Worked out good.
[00:23:00]

Interviewer: What inspiration or what led to the tunnel car... well, the winching and all of that. Did you hark back to times that there were two-car shows, little shows? Elmer Jones shows? Did you ever see any of those things?
[00:23:30]

Art: What led to it? You have 25... you didn't have any money and you had 25 cars that were

[00:24:00] sitting out right out there looking at you. I says, "Jesus Christ, you got 25 cars out there. All got big triple axles under them, trucks under them and everything." I said, "Jesus Christ, now if I develop a little aluminum wagon, we can put them in. And, another thing, I want to develop a little 7' 11" wagon so I can get it in and out of these buildings because, goddamn, when you take a wagon right out on the floor the thing is, hey, load that in there. It's a lot easier than carrying the damn thing out in the yard like some of the ice shows. I says, "Well, hell, this is the answer." I made that sample. When I made the sample, ARA guys come down here and says, "Shit. That's fine." That's when the tunnel cars was made for all the crap.

[00:24:30]

Interviewer: You said about when you started doing that there was talk about using the ice show promotion system. Using the ice shows and that, but right away it's the ice shows that are copying you. They came along and wanted a train. And, Morris [Chelton 00:24:46] asked you to build a train for him. I guess you traded the services of a European agent of his for building a train. You also had John ...

[00:25:00]

Art: John Harris. We're in Pittsburgh. We're playing Pittsburgh and John Harris comes down. Of course, the show in them days, when you come in there, an hour-and-a-half, an hour-and-forty-five minutes to two hours when the show is over. Two hours from then, there ain't a goddamn thing in that building. John Harris says, "I don't believe this." We went into Pittsburgh and three or four hours, five hours the most, you're set up. He says, "I don't believe this." He says, "goddamn it." He went out to California. Fooled around and if he'd have come down to see me, I said, "Well, John, I'll get the guys and they'll do training if you want it," but he went to California and he did this and he did... he says, "I spent a ton of money." When I seen him later, I said, "John, you should have come and seen me." He says, "Well, hell, I didn't know if you'd talk to me or not." I says, "Well, sure as shit, I'd have talked to you. I talk to any ..."

[00:25:30]

[00:26:00]

Interviewer: I've talked to John about that before he died. He gives you all the credit. I tell you one of the thing that he probably told you, but he and Dick Palmer they used to ... well, they still do. Have those promoters meetings in Atlantic City.

Art: Yeah.

Interviewer: Old John was there and he's tough and he's storming around, but he's saying that in that period they saw the circus. They got the idea. They tried to do it themselves. For one thing, right away they had flat tires and they looked at yours and they said, "Well." First of all they looked at yours and they said, "No sense in our putting two wheels on there because we don't have that heavy a load." Then they had flat tires and then they realized that they better come and see how you've been thinking this out after all. What happened in connection with [Chelton 00:26:53]? Same sort of thing?

[00:26:30]

Art: Chelton comes ... no, Chelton come down and says, "Hey, get the guys." I went down to Gene and says, "Make him a train and make him some wagons." He made them and then he ... they had a little tire trouble at first because I put three wheels on this Ringling wagon. I think Grant or somebody said, "Oh, put two on there." But shit that was a mistake. They had a little wheel trouble, but they got it all ironed out to their satisfaction, but now I guess, the discontinued it. They wanted to go back to trucks.

[00:27:00]

[00:27:30]

Interviewer: Well, while they've discontinued it the Icecapades show uses it and when it comes to our building now it's got your system ...

Art: Yeah.

Interviewer: Clear. They finally bought some system cars and then the railroad condemned some they had and they had to change overnight in Chicago yards and they got some Santa Fe baggage cars or something, but the wagons are yours. It's the same deal. Well, in that
[00:28:00] situation, one of the things that figures is were you there when the show went to South America?

Art: Sure. I made all the arrangements.

Interviewer: Okay.

Art: Shit. I made all the arrangements.

Interviewer: I was trying to make some of these notes from memory and I blew that one. I couldn't remember. Then you also ... now with Chelton and the train deal you got a European route. What's the European story?
[00:28:30]

Art: Well, Europeans ... I never wanted to do the show in Europe, but John lived over there all the time. He wanted ... Oh, Christ. Three or four years I kept stalling and stalling. I don't want to do the goddamn European show. I said, "I don't know anything about Europe and I don't want to do it." Anyway, North finally think he got into this European show. I said, "Shit. I'll get some physical stuff together," but I says, "I don't know nothing about Europe." I says, "Goddamn it. I don't want to do it." I finally said, "All right. If you want me to do it. I'll go over there and get the wagons and the crap and the physical end ready." That point Chelton had been promoting shows over there for years, so I says, "Morris, you want to promote?" He says, "Yeah. I want to promote it." He made a deal with Morris to promote the show over there. I says, from the start, "It's a mistake. What the hell? They ain't got the buildings over there to do it right." Anyway, they did the show in Europe and it wasn't no good. It wasn't no good. At that point, I didn't want to do the World's Fair thing. Fuck, did everything I could to stop it, but they says, "Oh, well. We'll do it."
[00:29:00]
[00:29:30]

Harry Dube and Bob [inaudible 00:29:54], they wanted to do it and John finally says, "All right. Do it." We're in Europe. I got the show ready. Physical end of the show ready. I says, "I got to leave." John says, "Shit. You can't leave." I says, "If I don't leave there ain't going to be no tent up at that damn World's Fair. I'll tell you that right now. It ain't going to be up." Anyway, he says, "Well, the hell with you. You can't leave." I says, "I either got to go leave and do it or it ain't going to be up. They're going to stick you for a lot of money." At this point, we got into an argument. I said, "All right with me." I said, "Screw it. You can do it all. I told you this when you come to me said, 'Get this building show.' I said if you don't let me do it my way then I says, 'Do it yourself.'" At this point when I left Europe I said, "Let North do it himself." I come back here and come down here to
[00:30:00]
[00:30:30]

[00:31:00] Sarasota and mind my own business.

Interviewer: Well, you got the fair opened.

Art: No, no, no, no I didn't. This is before the fair.

Interviewer: Oh, all right.

Art: This is before the fair and so I come back and he says, "John, do it yourself. Screw you." I left and come on down here. This point they woke up and said ...