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STEP RIGHT UP! BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE CIRCUS BIG TOP, 1890-1965 & PLAYING TOGETHER: GAMES at the Mercer Museum

DOYLESTOWN, PA: (January 16, 2014) – In an era spanning the early twentieth century, through depression ridden times and a dust bowl, one form of revelry thrived – the circus. Now visitors to the Mercer Museum’s new exhibition, Step Right Up! Behind the Scenes of the Circus Big Top, 1890 – 1965, opening on January 25, will get to explore another side of this thrilling spectacle and a history fraught with intrigue and majesty. Behind the Scenes of the Circus Big Top, 1890 – 1965 will be on view at the museum until March 16.

In addition to Step Right Up! the Mercer Museum will also open the hands-on exhibit, Playing Together: Games on January 25. The exhibit, developed by the Children’s Museum of Memphis, invites visitors of all ages to play a multitude of games that span generations and cultures. Playing Together: Games will run until May 11.

As one of America’s oldest theatrical traditions, the circus started as a European transplant in the late 1700s and was perfected in the United States by the likes of John Bill Ricketts and P.T. Barnum. By 1900, there were more than 100 circuses crisscrossing the country. The romanticized imagery, backstage stories, costumes and photographs featured in Step Right Up! reveal both the fantasy and reality of circus life, exploring the illusions that played to the imaginations of so many.

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The Mercer Museum, once the site for many circuses that visited Doylestown, will supplement the exhibit with its own collection of Bucks County circus posters dating from the 1950s to the 1970s.

To accompany the Step Right Up! exhibit, the Mercer Museum is collaborating with the Philadelphia School of the Circus Arts, and with the exhibit’s curator, Timothy Noel Tegge. Tegge will present the programs, “Hollywood Goes to the Circus” on Sunday, January 26, from 2-3:30 pm and the children’s program, “Be A Clown,” on Monday, January 27 from 10 a.m.-noon. The Philadelphia School of the Circus Arts will perform their “Circus Aerialist Demonstrations” on Sundays: February 2, 16 and March 2, from 1-3 p.m. The school will also host a “Circus Arts Workshop for Adults,” on Saturday, February 22, from 2-3:30 p.m., and a “Circus Arts Workshop for Kids,” on Saturday, March 15 from 2-3:30 p.m. The presentation, “The Circus-Past, Present and Future,” takes place on Saturday, February 15 from 1-2:30 p.m. All programs require registration except the Circus Aerialist Demonstrations. To register for the Step Right Up! programs, call 215-348-9461.

Step Right Up! Behind the Scenes of the Circus Big Top, 1890 – 1965, is toured by ExhibitsUSA, a national program of Mid-America Arts Alliance and is generously sponsored by: Bucks County Foundation, Philadelphia School of Circus Arts and Eric Geoffrey.

Playing Together: Games is divided into games categories of strategy, math, coordination and physical skills, and racing to the finish. The focal point of the exhibit is an oversized chessboard with giant game pieces. In one area, visitors invent their own games using various playing pieces, game boards and timers. “Senet” is one of the earliest racing games, dating back over 3,000 years.

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Step Right Up!

It was discovered in the tombs of Egyptian pharaohs and carved into roof tiles of ancient temples.

The Mercer Museum will supplement the Games exhibit with a display of original board games from the 1800s to the 1900s from the Judy and Bud Newman Collection. Playing Together: Games is generously sponsored by: Judy and Bud Newman and Susan E. Kane. Playing Together: Games was created by the Children’s Museum of Memphis, A private, non-profit organization.

Both Step Right Up! Behind the Scenes of the Circus Big Top, 1890 – 1965 and Playing Together: Games are included with museum admission.

About the Mercer Museum

The Mercer Museum, one of Bucks County’s premier tourist attractions, offers visitors a unique window into pre-Industrial America as seen through the implements used in everyday life. The Museum’s collection includes more than 40,000 objects exhibiting the tools of more than 60 different crafts and trades, providing one of the world’s most comprehensive portraits of material culture in America. The Mercer Museum is located at Green Street & Scout Way in Doylestown and is open for self-guided exploration 7 days a week. For more information, call 215-345-0210, or visit: www.mercermuseum.org.

About Exhibits USA

Step Right Up! Behind the Scenes of the Circus Big Top, 1890 – 1965 is toured by ExhibitsUSA, a national program of Mid-America Arts Alliance. ExhibitsUSA sends more than 25 exhibitions on tour to more than 100 small- and mid-sized communities every year. Mid-America is the oldest nonprofit regional arts organization in the United States. More information is available at www.maaa.org and www.eusa.org.

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