

GIFT BOOKS

A Three-Ring Production

The Circus, 1870-1950

• Edited by Noel Daniel. **Taschen**. 669 pp. \$200

The Circus contains as many daredevil acts as the most storied Big Top. Fire eaters, knife throwers, lion tamers, tight rope walkers, bareback riders, acrobats — they're all here. So are the tallest, shortest, fattest, thinnest men and women, the clowns, the showgirls in their spangles and glitter, and the children who followed their performing parents on the "yearly coast-to-coast circuit of bombast and flare."

Editor Noel Daniel gathered 30,000 images — posters, snapshots, paintings, newspaper photographs — and selected 900 of the most spectacular to record 80 years in the life of American circuses. In one photo, a female "bender," or contor-

tionist, pulls her legs behind her shoulders. A poster from Buffalo Bill's Wild West promises "A Realistic Representation of the Historic Battle of Summit Springs," with mounted cavalry, knife-wielding Indians and endangered white women. Circuses, Daniel argues, "invented the rules of engagement for today's global entertainment industry: launching sensational press campaigns, employing global talent scouts, and bringing entertainment directly to audiences through the latest technology," all part of putting on the Greatest Show on Earth.

— Rachel Hartigan Shea



"The Tom Thumb of the Jazz Age," Major Mite (Clarence Howerton) strikes a pose with Clyde "Tiny" Hicks; and clown Fred Hanson tips his hat. Far right, a poster, circa 1931-32

