



April 10, 2017

To: John "Rocky" McWilliams, Potentate, Midian Shrine
c/o Tracy Dahl, Operations Coordinator, Midian Shrine

Via e-mail: Tracy@MidianShrine.org

Dear Mr. McWilliams,

I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and our more than 5 million members and supporters worldwide regarding the James Cristy Cole Circus. It recently used bears from Castle's Bears and is scheduled to do so again as part of the Midian Shrine Circus. In addition, Brian and Irene Franzen are planning to offer rides on elephants at this event. Recent [video footage](#) covered in the [Daily Mail](#) shows one of the bears urinating in distress as they were tethered, muzzled, prodded, and forced to perform cruel and confusing tricks. Furthermore, there is no kind or safe way to force an elephant to give rides or perform cruel, meaningless tricks. **I urge you to ensure that bears, elephants, and other wild animals are not used in the Midian Shrine Circus' upcoming performance and to adopt a humane, modern policy that bans wild-animal acts at this circus's performances going forward. Please consider the following information.**

Bears are complex, far-ranging animals who require opportunities to climb, dig, forage, and build nests. Because their instinctual needs are thwarted, the animals used by Castle's Bears endure miserable lives. Dressed in ridiculous costumes, muzzled, and tethered, they're forced to perform confusing and likely painful tricks in crowded arenas day in and day out. According to bear expert Jay Pratte—who has more than 25 years of experience in captive-bear husbandry and viewed footage of a performance in February—these bears are being coerced or forced to participate. He also notes that their training "was very clearly accomplished by aversive means," as evidenced when one bear urinated after his or her leash was pulled and again when the animal was forced to stand and walk on his or her front legs. Pratte went on to state that forcing an animal to exhibit these unnatural types of behavior (e.g., walking bipedally on hind and front legs) causes distress and "potential long term physiological issues as they are counter to [the] animal's natural body and abilities"—and that the noise and crowd are clearly affecting the bears, who are undoubtedly stressed by the audience.

Similarly, in their natural habitats, elephants don't give rides or perform cruel and confusing tricks. In the circus, they do these things out of fear of being prodded or bludgeoned by a bullhook-wielding handler. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued Franzen Bros. Circus an official warning after an elephant handler was caught forcefully striking an elephant named Kosti with a bullhook at least five times about the eyes and ears to "teach" her not to take another elephant's hay. Moreover, direct contact with elephants has proved exceptionally dangerous. Since 1990, [interactions with captive elephants](#) in the U.S. have

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resulted in at least 18 human deaths—an astounding number, given that there are fewer than 450 captive elephants in the country.

[PETA investigations](#) have uncovered horrendous abuse at similar circuses, and Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus' announcement that it will close in May and SeaWorld's decision to end its orca-breeding program have made it abundantly clear that the public no longer supports the use of animals for entertainment. **May we please hear by the end of the day on Thursday, April 13, that you'll ensure that bears, elephants, and other wild animals are not exploited at the Midian Shine Circus and that you'll commit to hosting only animal-free circuses in the future?**

Thank you for your time and consideration. I can be reached at 516-592-3722 or JohnD@peta.org.

Sincerely yours,

John Di Leonardo, M.S.
Senior Campaigner, Animals in Entertainment
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