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PERFORMANCE. TRAINING. OUTREACH. LEGACY

Queen of the Air, Dolly Jacobs, Receives National Recognition

SARASOTA, FL – International circus legend Dolly Jacobs has been chosen by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to receive a National Heritage Fellowship award. This is the first time a circus performer has ever received this national award, validating the mission of the Circus Art Conservatory to raise the perception of the circus as a valuable form of art.

Established by Congress in 1965, the NEA is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the NEA supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America’s rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America.

“It’s an incredible honor. I truly take great pleasure in accepting it for all the great artists who came before me,” said Jacobs. “We are dedicated to preserving the extraordinary heritage of the circus arts.”

Jacobs is a world-renowned circus aerialist, dedicated teacher, and founder of The Circus Arts Conservatory. She is one of nine artists being honored this year by the NEA. She will be recognized October 1st in Washington, D.C. for her contributions to excellence, vitality, and public appreciation of folk and traditional arts. On the following day, Dolly will be performing as part of a free concert featuring the award recipients. The concert will be streamed online at www.arts.gov on October 2nd at 8:00pm.

Jacobs was born into a family of circus performers. Her mother is a renowned New York model and later performed with the circus. Her father was Lou Jacobs, one of the most recognized clowns of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus from 1925-87. Jacobs joined when she was 13-years-old as a member of the corps de ballet. By the time she was 18 she was making solo debuts on the Roman rings. Twice she performed in the Circus Festival of Monte Carlo where she was recognized as a “Dame de Cirque.”

In 1997, Jacobs and husband, fellow circus artist Pedro Reis, founded Circus Sarasota (today known as the Circus Art Conservatory). The non-profit organization presents professional performances and produces educational training and outreach programs. One of the outreach efforts is the Humor Therapy Program which sends clowns and entertainers into care facilities bringing joy, memory stimulation and entertainment to residents. As her mother’s caretaker, Jacobs understands first-hand why this program is so important.

“It’s been proven that humor heals,” said Jacobs. “To make a positive impact on lives in our community means the world to us.”

Jacobs also spends countless hours training the students of Sailor Circus Academy. “Seeing the kids light up with passion for the circus arts continues to drive me,” she said. “The number of students this program has helped is staggering.”

As an NEA honoree, Jacobs is in good company. They have awarded artists working in more than 200 distinct art forms, including bluesman B.B. King, Cajun fiddler and composer Michael Doucet, sweetgrass basketweaver Mary Jackson, cowboy poet Wally McRae, Kathak dancer and choreographer Chitresh Das, and gospel and soul singer Mavis Staples.

Fellowship recipients are nominated by the public and then judged by a panel of experts in folk and traditional arts on the basis of their continuing artistic accomplishments and contributions as practitioners and teachers.

“The art forms represented in this year’s class of National Heritage Fellows are wide-ranging,” said NEA Chairman Jane Chu. “Not surprisingly, the artists have a common bond in their efforts to both share their art forms within their communities and across the nation, while also ensuring their art forms are passed along to the next generation through teaching and mentoring.”

Circus fans, local arts patrons, and all Sarasotans can watch Dolly’s performance in the prestigious NEA National Heritage Fellowships Concert online on Friday, October 2nd at 8 p.m. ET by visiting www.arts.gov.

For more information about the other receipts and the NEA visit: <http://arts.gov>

For more information about Dolly and the Circus Arts Conservatory visit: <http://circusarts.org>

*** The Circus Arts Conservatory, Sarasota is home to world-class performances, excellence in training the circus arts, and community based education and humor therapy outreach programs. The organization was born from decades of circus history and today serves as a legacy to those that have set the standards for international circus artistry and athleticism. The Circus Arts Conservatory is a 501(c) 3 non-profit performing arts educational organization, whose extraordinary mission underscores its commitment to sharing the entertainment, education and enrichment of the circus arts.**