

## CHECK OUT THE BEST THEATRE BOOK OF THE MONTH FOR JULY 2021

MICHAEL GILTZ | JULY 16, 2021

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theater, exclusively for you.

### Battle for the Big Top

By Les Standiford  
\$28, Public Affairs

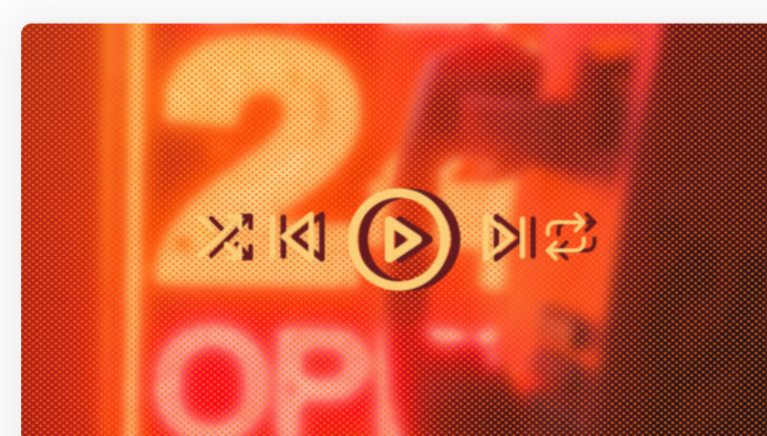
Have you ever dreamed of running away and joining the circus? But the talents of lion tamers, high-wire acrobats, and clowns are treats that fans enjoy only after a lot of hard work behind the scenes. And the entrepreneurs making it happen back in the late 1800s weren't starry-eyed dreamers. They were hard-nosed businesspeople looking to dominate one of the most profitable forms of entertainment in its day.

While kids of all ages filed noisily and happily into the big top, these men fought to survive. The circus was a cutthroat world where, say, snatching a major draw from a competitor was a matter of financial life or death.

Historian Les Standiford, author of the bestseller *The Man Who Invented Christmas*, tells this story with panache. It was a battle royale between James Bailey, P.T. Barnum, and John Ringling, a spectacle just as dazzling and dangerous as any act. We know it climaxed with the creation of an institution that held sway over its field for a remarkable 150 years. But did they decide it was better to collaborate than kill each other? Did one or two of them gang up and consume the third? What happened during the battle for the big top?

Find out in this popular history acclaimed by the likes of best-selling authors Dennis Lehane, Erik Larson, and Karen Russell, who says, "With acrobatic grace and escalating suspense, Standiford documents the evolution of the American circus in a masterful work of nonfiction."

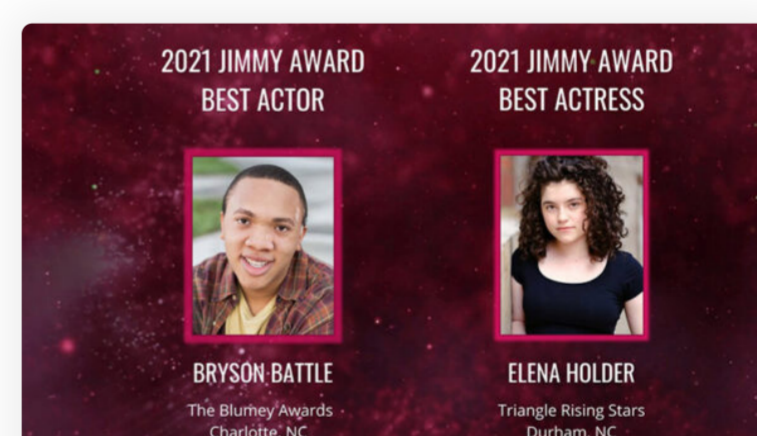
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