



PETA Factsheet

UniverSoul Circus

510 Whitehall St., Atlanta, GA 30303

UniverSoul Circus does not possess an exhibitor license from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The animals are leased from outside companies, including Tarzan Zerbini Circus,* Carson & Barnes Circus,* Kay Rosaire, Bucky Steele, Rosaire-Zoppe Chimps, and Mitchel Kalmanson, so UniverSoul is not subject to citations under its own name. UniverSoul-leased animal exhibitors have failed to meet minimal federal standards for the care of animals used in exhibition as established in the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). The USDA has cited UniverSoul exhibitors for failure to properly maintain transport vehicles and failure to provide veterinary care, medical records, and adequate space. Animals used by UniverSoul have caused injuries. Contact PETA for documentation.

*Factsheet available

August 24, 2011: The USDA issued Jorge and Louann Barreda, performing as UniverSoul at the time, an official warning for violating the federal regulations of the AWA for failing to establish and maintain a program of adequate veterinary care for four female African elephants—Makia, Lou, Lovie, and Dolly—with overgrown nails and grooves and ridges on the soles of their feet. Foot problems are the leading cause of euthanasia in captive elephants.

July 14, 2011: Following a complaint by PETA that included a video of a tiger with her foot trapped under a sliding door to the cage (see July 5, 2011), the USDA cited exhibitor Mitchel Kalmanson, performing as UniverSoul, for failing to handle a tiger in a manner that prevents “behavioral stress and unnecessary discomfort” and for failing to maintain facilities so that there is no risk of injury to animals.

July 5, 2011: A member of the public was filming caged tigers with exhibitor Mitchel Kalmanson at a UniverSoul show at the University of Buffalo’s South Campus in Buffalo, New York, when he noticed a tiger with her foot trapped under a sliding door to the cage. The video footage he made public shows the tiger struggling to free her foot, panting, and in obvious distress. (Video can be requested from PETA.)

February 25, 2011: In the same week that UniverSoul came under scrutiny by parents for a show that “portrayed strippers, pimps, and other adult themes,” the Georgia Department of Natural Resources announced that it is investigating UniverSoul for allegedly illegally allowing Clayton County Commissioner Eldrin Bell to ride an elephant. In Georgia, elephants are classified as inherently dangerous animals and one of the conditions of having a permit to exhibit such animals is ensuring that people do not ride them.

February 1, 2008: A USDA Consent and Decision Order assessed Mitchel Kalmanson a civil penalty of \$6,000 for two tiger escapes that took place while exhibiting with UniverSoul (see June 2, 2004, and February 4, 2003).

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June 5, 2007: The USDA cited UniverSoul exhibitor Terranova Enterprises for failure to properly clean animal enclosures. Animals were not removed before cages were cleaned with detergent and subsequent hosing, causing the animals to become involuntarily wet and resulting in their being exposed to a chemical that could cause irritation or damage to their skin. During the cleaning process, a cougar was obviously upset as demonstrated by her growling and body postures.

June 21, 2005: A U.S. District Court judge who viewed videotape of Tim Frisco (animal care director of UniverSoul elephant exhibitor Carson & Barnes) beating elephants with bullhooks and shocking them with electric prods described it as “troubling” and noted that it depicts conduct that violates the federal Animal Welfare Act.

June 6, 2005: A UniverSoul employee pleaded guilty to manslaughter after fatally stabbing a coworker and was sentenced to 15 years of hard labor (see September 2, 2003).

May 26, 2005: The USDA cited UniverSoul elephant exhibitor Carson & Barnes for failure to provide adequate shelter for elephants.

June 2, 2004: In a letter to PETA, Burger King announced that it was ending its sponsorship of UniverSoul.

June 2, 2004: During an inspection of UniverSoul in Landover Hills, Maryland, Prince George’s County Animal Management Division observed two tigers fighting. The trainer, Tyrone Taylor, walked into the holding cage, leaving the gate open. One tiger, known as Igor, escaped and ran loose, attacking an elephant named Suzie and biting her on the hip. During this time, children from several elementary schools attending the performance were walking under the tent in the area where the tiger escaped.

May 28, 2004: The USDA cited UniverSoul elephant exhibitor Carson & Barnes for failing to provide an adequate safety barrier between the public and elephants.

December 5, 2003: The USDA opened an investigation into UniverSoul kangaroo exhibitor Javier Martinez following a second kangaroo death within a four-month period (see July 11, 2003).

November 20, 2003: In an urgent appeal to Las Vegas City Animal Control, Olivia Newton-John wrote, “We respectfully request that you follow the lead of California authorities and prohibit the circus from featuring its kangaroo boxing routine for several reasons, including because Nevada law makes animal fight unlawful.” She continued, “I find it appalling that tethered kangaroos are taunted into defending themselves as an oddity for a UniverSoul Circus act.”

September 2, 2003: A UniverSoul employee was charged with second-degree murder and later convicted of manslaughter after fatally stabbing a coworker in New Orleans.

August 22, 2003: The U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety & Health Administration fined UniverSoul \$3,950 for a serious violation concerning occupational foot protection following an accident.

August 21, 2003: According to the *Montgomery County Sentinel*, a former animal trainer for UniverSoul “found the circus to be mistreating some of its animals and actually called the USDA to report it.”

July 11, 2003: A kangaroo named Rocky, who was used in a UniverSoul boxing routine in which he was restrained by a harness and taunted into defending himself, died. The circus had continued to use the animal even though he had been diagnosed two months earlier with an often-deadly bacterial infection known as lumpy jaw, which can be caused by crowding, poor hygiene, or poor diet.

July 2, 2003: According to the *Boston Herald*, a tiger named Angel briefly got loose in the back of the lot where UniverSoul was performing in New Haven, Connecticut.

June 30, 2003: The U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety & Health Administration fined UniverSoul \$6,225 for two serious violations concerning ladders, stairways, and training requirements following an accident.

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February 4, 2003: A 450-pound tiger with UniverSoul escaped in Jacksonville, Florida, while a cage was being cleaned. The tiger climbed up on a car, jumped over a fence, headed down an alley, frightened employees at a nearby restaurant, and was recaptured 10 minutes later.

July 6, 2002: UniverSoul's Platinum unit was observed in Charlotte, North Carolina, using elephants belonging to William Woodcock. According to information compiled by the USDA on elephant examinations, housing, and transport, Woodcock commented to a USDA official, "If I get any defiance [from the elephants], I'll beat the hell out of them. [The elephants] will disobey in public because they know I can't hit them with the stick as much."

June 21, 2002: According to *The Baltimore Sun*, a UniverSoul worker was arrested after he allegedly attacked and stabbed a fellow employee in the abdomen during an argument.

April 11, 2002: UniverSoul's Roots, Rags, and Rhythm unit was observed in Charleston, South Carolina, using three African elephants from Frisco Bros. Petting Zoo, owned by Joe Frisco Sr., the patriarch of an elephant-training family. In January 2002, PETA released undercover video of Frisco's son, Tim, beating elephants during behind-the-scenes training sessions. Tim Frisco is shown cursing at and viciously attacking elephants with a sharp metal bullhook until they scream in pain and instructing other elephant trainers to "Sink that hook into them," "Hurt 'em," and "Make 'em scream." (Video can be requested from PETA.)

December 19, 2001: A General Mills spokesperson informed PETA that the company had discontinued its sponsorship of UniverSoul. The decision came after a PETA representative spoke at the company's annual meeting, asking the company to consider the plight of the animals.

March 8, 2001: The USDA cited UniverSoul exhibitor Mitchel Kalmanson for improper food storage, failure to provide an exercise plan, inadequate veterinary care records, and failure to maintain records of acquisition.

August 9–13, 2000: According to Walter Cook, captive wildlife coordinator for the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, UniverSoul was denied a state exhibitor permit for a chimpanzee act while the circus performed in Memphis, Tennessee. Tennessee law requires a protective barrier between the public and potentially dangerous animals such as chimpanzees, which the circus did not provide. The chimpanzees were kept isolated in steel compartments inside a trailer during the Memphis tour.

June 5–6, 2000: The USDA cited UniverSoul exhibitor Mitchel Kalmanson for failure to provide an adequate environmental enrichment plan for primates and failure to maintain records. The inspector also wrote that the lion was not being fed a veterinarian-approved diet.

April 27, 2000: *The New York Times* reported that UniverSoul was touring with elephants named Jan, Bunny, and Marie. While traveling with Tarzan Zerbini Circus (a.k.a. Circus Maximus) in April 1997, Jan bit a groom on the head and back. The groom required hospitalization for his injuries.

April 6, 2000: The USDA cited UniverSoul's chimpanzee exhibitor, Mitchel Kalmanson, for failure to provide veterinary care, environmental enrichment programs, and adequate space. The chimpanzee cages had barely half the floor space specified in the AWA.

April 22, 1999: World-renowned primatologist Dr. Jane Goodall appealed to UniverSoul "to end the senseless exploitation of chimpanzees ... who live out their lives in inhumane, lonely, and unnatural settings in the name of entertainment."

February 10, 1999: The USDA cited UniverSoul tiger exhibitor Kay Rosaire for failure to provide a program of veterinary care. The inspector also noted that newly acquired lion cubs were in poor condition and had not received veterinary care and that cages did not meet new size requirements.

March 26, 1998: A USDA inspector advised UniverSoul exhibitor Mitchel Kalmanson to provide environmental enrichment for big cats after observing stereotypical pacing and excessive rubbing that had caused fur loss.

March 13, 1998: The USDA cited UniverSoul exhibitor Mitchel Kalmanson for failure to have a program of veterinary care and failure to provide cages that meet minimum space requirements for lions.

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October 8, 1997: The *Ethnic NewsWatch Sacramento Observer* reported that comedian Richard Pryor had written to the circus director asking that animals not be used “because of cruel training methods and a life that consists of little more than tiny cages, leg shackles, bullhooks, and whips.”

May 23, 1997: According to *The Chattanooga Free Press*, UniverSoul lion trainer Ted McRae was bitten on the shoulder during a training session by a 400-pound tiger, causing a 2-inch gash. McRae was formerly a forklift driver and received only one month of training before working with Kay Rosaire’s big cats at the circus.

April 29, 1997: *The Village Voice* reported, “The front row is so close to the ring that people sitting there are advised to remove their belongings from the railing when the elephants enter—if one of these babies goes mad, somebody’s getting killed.”