The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, featuring African-American performers Johnathan Lee Iverson and Andre McClain, will come to Nationwide Arena in downtown Colum bus
May 12-15.

Iverson was the first African American and the youngest ringmaster in the history of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey.

A New York City native, Iverson began performing at the age of 11 with the world-famous Boys Choir of Harlem, where he eventually became the lead tenor. As a member of the choir, he sang at the intermission for Luciano Pavarotti's Concert in Central Park, performed in a live show on Broadway, and won second place in the Lena Horne Jazz Scholarship.

After three previous tours, Iverson left the circus a few years ago to pursue other show business opportunities. He performed in several off-Broadway productions, including "Carnival," "Showboat," "The Magic Flute" and "Dreamgirls." He also did commercials for Jeep and Six Flags Great Adventure and provided a voice for a new animated feature titled "Eloise." In addition, he did a bit of freelance journalism under the pen names J. Frederick Baptiste and Johnathan Baptiste.

Having rejoined Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, Iverson said he is excited to once again be a part of "The Greatest Show on Earth."

“Nothing can compare to this job,” he said. “Being a ringmaster is truly thrilling.”

Joining Iverson on this outing is his wife and fellow performer Priscilla, whom he met and married while previously touring with Ringling Bros., and their children Matthew Felipe and Lila Simone.

McClain is an animal trainer, cowboy and rodeo star whose father, Lu, founded the historic Bill Pickett Rodeo in 1984, America’s first all-Black touring rodeo. McClain began riding bucking ponies and steers at 5 and made his competitive debut at age 7.

Growing up on a ranch in Kansas City, Mo., becoming a cowboy and animal trainer came naturally to McClain. In the circus, he uses his soothing voice to direct a group of horses to run around the ring with no reigns or riders in different patterns and even stand on their hind legs.

“All of the animals have different attitudes and moods, but have been living together for the last couple of months so they have really become a family,” McClain said. “It’s sort of like the circus: all of these people from all over the world have come together to live, like one big family.”

In addition to the talents of McClain and Iverson, this edition of the circus features a motorcycle troupe performing death-defying feats in a 16-foot-high sphere. High-wire artists perform 40 feet in the air, all while at a 45-degree angle. Contortionists put their bodies to the ultimate test to see how far the human body can be pushed and twisted.

For more information about the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, call Ticketmaster at (614) 431-3600 or visit Nationwidearena.com.