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Editorial

The six articles in this edition are representative of the diverse genre mix and internationality that has been a characteristic of *Popular Entertainment Studies* since the journal was first published in 2010. The genres under consideration here are the Italian *sceneggiata* (a form of melodramatic theatre); circus; British pantomime; *dangdut koplo* (a form of Indonesian popular music); musical theatre; and theme parks. Weaving through these articles are themes that have frequently appeared in earlier editions, such as: transformations arising from the influence of national histories on popular performance forms; political and social influences on the management of popular genres; the transnational transference of ideas pertaining to the subject and method of performance; postcolonialism; and ideas of aspiration or utopia. These are dominant themes in the field of popular entertainment research.

The first two articles in this edition thread national performance histories through transformations of genres that arise from social changes and political developments beyond the aesthetic sphere of production and performance. The first article addresses the Italian *sceneggiata*, the second article addresses the circus in the Ukraine.

Raffaele Furno studies the *sceneggiata*, a theatrical genre from Naples, Italy, combining popular music and local stories that appealed to audiences in proletarian neighbourhoods. The family-based theatre companies that clustered around Naples railway station in the 1920s developed the genre by engaging talented writers and composers from the middle classes, while the genre's popular songs and formulaic plots dramatised the strife and struggle of life in the city's alleys. The acting stars, singing style, and moral determinants of the *sceneggiata* remained popular in the theatres until the 1970s when the social profile of Naples' inner neighbourhoods started to transform. In this article Furno reveals how aspects of the genre transitioned into other forms. In the 1970s actors Leo de Berardinis and Perla Peragallo found in the *sceneggiata* an alternative aesthetic for limited experiments in political theatre on the outskirts of Naples. The singer and screen actor, Mario Merola, used the genre's melodrama and local associations for a successful series of commercial movies in the 1970s and 1980s. The genre's

associations, retained by social setting, musical style and star-biography in the films, appealed to the diasporic generations displaced from southern Italy.

The influence of political and social change upon a specific genre of popular entertainment is a dominant thread running through Vladyslav Kashuba's article, in which he investigates recent challenges to the circus system in the Ukraine. Identifying transformations in the way that circus production and touring is organised at the state level and in the aesthetic development of circus acts and shows within the Ukraine, Kashuba lays out the influences and agents of change. In doing so he demonstrates how each of these factors derive from the massive social and political upheavals that followed Ukraine's independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991. This study is positioned within a historical overview of the establishment and growth of circus in the USSR, from the immediate post-revolution period of the 1920s, through to the present day. Kashuba explains the historical basis of the national principles of the Soviet-era circus industry, and the essential elements of its autonomous mechanism, such as the 'artistic conveyor system,' and the processes of its 'centralised management.' Analysis of the reasons for the decline of the Ukraine circus during the past three decades becomes the basis for Kashuba's proposal for ways that the crisis he identifies may be overcome through development of 'an effective model' for the system's improved functioning and creative approaches. Critical research focusing on the contemporary state of circus in countries that were formerly part of the USSR are rare in circus studies literature and this article by Kashuba makes a notable contribution to the growing body of English-language circus studies literature.

Themes of postcolonialism and transnational influence inflect the threads of transformation that run through the next two articles in this edition. A worldview bound to place and relayed over time within a genre of performance is of concern in Simon Sladen's study of political pantomime in 1980s Britain. Peter Nichols's *Poppy* adopts pantomime as a British genre with patriotic associations for a satirical treatment of the 19th century Opium Wars between Britain and China. The play was first produced at a time when British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was negotiating the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong with China's Deng Xiaoping. By examining the lyrics, script and photographs from the premier production, Sladen reveals how Nichols sought to satirise British imperial history as a metaphor for the persistence of colonial attitudes in the present. But pantomime's consensus-forming conventions as a popular genre of entertainment—in particular the sing-along expectations of audience participation and 'a good night out'—blunted the satire in *Poppy*'s first production by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Sladen finds in the 'rougher, tougher' revival of the work at Half Moon Theatre in 1988—and, more recently, as a play selected by playwright Mark Ravenhill for reading in celebration of the RSC's fiftieth anniversary in 2011—evidence that pantomime is capable of satirical subversion if the audience are willing to become complicit with the playwright's intentions.

Anita Sartika Dewi and Edi Dwi Riyanto study the transformation of *dangdut koplo*, a genre of music popular in Indonesia over recent decades. Their analysis draws on observations of the music scene in Yogyakarta and Surabaya, and focuses on the music of Via Vallen, a singer from Surabaya. Vallen's career

during the 2010s has been propelled through digital production and self-styling on social media. Her distinctive stylisation of the musical genre has transformed its audience. The authors describe her style as '*koplo* minus *goyang*,' referring to the absence of erotic dance and costume, which had previously characterised the genre, and still does in local settings. In Vallen's music videos and televised concerts, designed for circulation to her fans on social media (including 25.7 million followers on Instagram), the singer adopts a different style of performance and self-presentation. Vallen blends local form with transnational style, while conforming to standards of decorum set by religious expectations, mediating the aspirations of Indonesia's middle class, and appealing to women sharing content in the quasi-private, mobile spaces of social media. Dewi and Riyanto demonstrate how a genre of once-local popular music is flexibly transformed by the artist's self-styling through the regimes of circulation that mediate popular entertainment today.

Notions of utopia and aspiration are prevalent in the final two articles; in both cases the idea of 'America' as either an aspirational place, or a locus of imaginary utopia, informs the entertainment that is under investigation. Musical Theatre is the genre-focus of Michael Eigtved's article that identifies the use of various 'means of transportation' as signifiers of utopia in a range of well-known stage musicals. Identifying various transportation mechanisms that are 'either seen on stage or cited in music and sound' – including a ship in *Show Boat* (1927), a gondola in *Phantom of the Opera* (1986), a train in *Oklahoma!* (1943), a helicopter in *Miss Saigon* (1989), roller skates in *Starlight Express* (1984), and broomsticks in *Wicked* (2003) – Eigtved argues they function within the overarching narrative structure as mediators between characters' present and future. Drawing on the work of Erika Fisher-Lichte (on the transformative power of theatre) and Richard Dyer (on utopian elements in classic musicals), Eigtved develops his analysis of planes, trains, automobiles, and other means of transportation in stage musicals to argue that they are symbolic tools that can enable audiences to experience (after Jill Dolan) a type of utopia in the theatre.

In a critical case study of Wonderland Eurasia in Ankara, Turkey, the sixth article in this edition addresses theme parks as popular entertainment. From their multi-disciplinary perspectives of American Culture and Literature, and Civil Engineering, the authors Tanfer Emin Tunc and Gokhan Tunc critically appraise the symbolic capital and revisionist historical narratives that are staged by this theme park, which is massive both in size and cost. Completed in 2019 after ten years of construction and costing between 250 and 350 million US dollars (1.5 to 2 billion Turkish Lira), Wonderland Eurasia is one of the largest theme parks in Asia and Europe. Arguing that 'the park constructs an artificial narrative of continuity that connects the past ... to the present, and future,' the authors' nuanced 'reading' of the theme park proposes it is 'designed to promote a neoliberal Neo-Ottomanism that involves an identity politics of historical elision and selective erasure.' With the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourism worldwide, the ambition of the park's supporters for it to boost Turkey's 'sagging tourism industry' must now be in tatters.

Our final comments concern the year that has been 2020 and the impact of Covid-19 on live entertainments and the higher education sector. While we do not need to rehearse here the deleterious effects of the ongoing pandemic on the live entertainment industry around the world, or the fact that the jobs of many research and teaching academics are in a precarious position, or worse, have already been lost, it is important for us to acknowledge the authors who have contributed to this edition, and thank them for their patience throughout the longer-than-usual period of time it has taken our team to produce this edition. During 2020, as our editorial work slowed due to extraordinary demands occasioned by the effect of the pandemic on our institutions, social media channels and news organisations around the globe lit up with inspiring accounts of professional and non-professional performers alike finding surprising ways to adjust their creative skills to life under Covid. When many countries went into the first phase of ‘lock down’ with hopes of stemming the transmission of the virus, we learned of apartment-building residents singing and playing instruments from balconies to entertain others and express solidarity.¹ Isolating musicians of various genres found ways to collaborate on new recordings;² professional and non-professional singers from many countries participated in massive choral projects.³ And while many of these and similar creative ‘isolation’ outputs have opened windows onto the domestic and normally private domain of people’s homes, some ‘isolation’ projects found a way to turn the Zoom camera onto those viewing from their loungerooms and kitchens. This was the case with Varietyville Productions’ weekly Zoom shows that at times blurred the boundary between performer and audience.⁴ As the impact of Covid-19 plays out across different forms of popular entertainment, the articles in this edition quietly attest to the ways that popular entertainments evolve, transform, or simply find ways to adjust to the sweeping influences of social and political change.

¹ ‘Balcony singing in solidarity spreads across Italy during lockdown,’ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/14/solidarity-balcony-singing-spreads-across-italy-during-lockdown>, accessed January 29, 2021.

² ‘Confinement concerto as isolating musicians play Beethoven from home,’ <https://www.euronews.com/2020/03/26/confinement-concerto-as-isolating-musicians-play-beethoven-from-home>, accessed January 29, 2021; Isolation Orchestra plays Sibelius: Karelia Suite, Op. 11-1, Intermezzo <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPH6ALrx00Y>, accessed January 29, 2021.

³ ‘Couch Choir Sings (They Long to Be) Close to You,’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HezxInuN1YA>, accessed January 29, 2021; ‘You’ve Got a Friend’ by Carole King, sung by London City Voices, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7U7iYxHw2Q>, accessed January 29, 2021; Annie Lennox – Dido’s Lament – Choral performance with London City Voices, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3DFalovZxc&src=Linkfire&lld=e7b10fdd-e3cc-4bfb-bc23-608f0d0261ad&clid=d3d58fd7-4c47-11e6-9fd0-066c3e7a8751>, accessed January 29, 2021.

⁴ Varietyville ‘Acts of Absurdity’ live Zoom show highlights, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3108326739254709>, accessed January 29, 2021.