

- **Victor Emeljanow**  
University of Newcastle, Australia

## Editorial

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With this issue we will have completed four years of operation and published 42 full-length articles and 8 shorter pieces (*Afterpieces*) in the pages of our journal. We started perhaps rather diffidently, sure about the significance of popular entertainments but unsure whether the scholarly community shared our enthusiasm. We can now confidently discard any vestigial remains of that diffidence as well-established and new scholars continue to supply us with the outcomes of their research. This issue exemplifies yet again the diversity and complexity of the field of popular entertainments.

The first two articles offer some fresh perspectives on American popular entertainment. Kim Baston introduced our readers to John Bill Ricketts in an earlier article about circus music,<sup>1</sup> and here she throws new light on a man credited with being the father of North American circus. Ricketts travelled from Scotland to establish his circus in Philadelphia in 1793 but Baston suggests that insufficient attention has been given to his earlier career as the principal equestrian performer in the Edinburgh Equestrian Circus from 1786 to 1792. She argues that Ricketts took with him to America a tested repertoire and business model which he had developed while in the company run by James and George Jones, the founders of Scotland's first circus. He was also able to surround himself with experienced performers who themselves had gained their reputations in Scotland. Though Ricketts himself remains "an interesting though elusive figure" he combined his ability to harness the skills of others and his own keen opportunism to transplant a Scottish model to the American continent. Laurence Senelick, on the other hand, feels that insufficient attention has been given to the position of *Little Nell and the Marchioness*, a version of Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*, put together by John Brougham as a vehicle for the enormously successful (and wealthy) performer Lotta Crabtree. He suggests that the play is "if not the first American book musical, then a close runner up." The title of his article draws together the elements that helped to insure the play's success: the huge industry of Dickens adaptations for the stage, the Victorian fascination with the deaths of children (plays like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *East Lynne* offer further examples) and the predatory sexualised villains of melodrama (Quip in this version). Senelick attributes the lack of attention to *Little Nell and the Marchioness* to the New York-centred focus of much American theatre history scholarship and a consequent downgrading of companies and their repertoires which toured extensively throughout the country. Senelick

might also have pointed to the success of performers who undertook dual roles and relished the opportunity to display their versatility. Crabtree did so here but in this respect she joined nineteenth century actor-managers like Charles Kean as the two dei Franchi brothers in Boucicault's *The Corsican Brothers*, Henry Irving as Lesurques and Dubosc in Charles Reade's *The Lyons Mail*, Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Micawber and Pegotty in the adaptation of *David Copperfield* and Richard Mansfield as the eponymous characters of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

The references to Irving and Beerbohm Tree lead us into Cynthia Stroud's article *Beyond Svengali: contemporary stage hypnosis performance techniques*. Dual personalities and conflicting behaviours, particularly when demonstrated by the same performer, not only were manifestations of versatility on the part of the performer but they also afforded a glimpse of the binaries of good and evil. Irving as Mathias in Leopold Lewis's *The Bells* revealed the dark truth behind his position as a successful member of his community. The revelation was achieved through hypnotism. Beerbohm Tree performed one of his most celebrated roles as Svengali in the stage version of George du Maurier's *Trilby* in which the girl Trilby is able to achieve her ambition to be a successful singer through the hypnotic powers of her mentor. This theatrical device has continued to prove highly successful as films like *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), *The Ipcress Files* (1965) and Danny Boyle's *Trance* (2013) demonstrate. Stroud's perspective, however, is to discuss the manipulation by popular hypnotists of untrained volunteers to reproduce private behaviour in a public context in an unself-conscious and deeply committed way. She draws some interesting parallels with performances by actors who "imagine and respond to a scenario [the given circumstances of a play] as if it were happening." Whatever we may feel about acting programmes that focus narrowly on fixed aspects of a Stanislavsky system which he constantly developed and evolved, there are certainly points of contact between the hypnotists' ability to instil in their volunteers the capacity to succeed and to remove a fear of failure or embarrassment, and the acting teacher's ability to elicit a level of concentration, whereby a 'circle of attention' developed by the actor removes the same sense of potential embarrassment when exposed to audience scrutiny. Many acting teachers, however, have themselves become gurus and Stroud asks whether they have inadvertently assumed the role of Svengali, creating actors who are dependent and imitative rather than independent and creative performers. After all, when Svengali died Trilby's capacity to sing died with him.

Stage hypnotists and illusionists form a significant aspect of variety. In one of the journal's *Afterpieces*, Michael Pickering urged the scholarly community to do more research into post-World War 2 variety,<sup>2</sup> a challenge to which the journal has responded on a number of occasions, the latest being Jo Loth's examination of the deconstruction and celebration of female stardom. She looks at performances by two widely recognised Australian cabaret artists, Paul Capsis and Meow Meow (aka Melissa Madden Gray). Loth provides an historical context of the vamp from Yvette Guilbert in the 1880s to the Weimar cabaret of the interwar years in Germany where self-consciousness and parody formed part of their cabaret acts. Capsis and Meow Meow follow two rather differing paths.

Capsis refers back to the models of Billie Holiday, Judy Garland and Marlene Dietrich and has created, with a minimal reliance on costuming, the isolated and enigmatic figure of the diva, drawing on the audience's familiarity with his paradigms in order to exaggerate or disrupt its preconceptions. Thus the audience acts as 'co-conspirators' in Capsis's work enabling him to explore the diva's personality, highlighting vulnerability and at the same time celebrating the diva's talent. Meow Meow on the other hand goes one step further: she draws in the audience literally to act as co-creators of the figure of the diva itself. In her show, *Feline Intimate* (2009) for example, she invited members of the audience on stage to dress and undress her thereby revealing the artifice involved in the creation of the glamorous stage image. Indeed, for Meow Meow the input of the audience is essential: it assists in the very continuation of the performance by the performer herself. If success is to be achieved, then for her the audience must form part of the journey.

Such an engagement between performers and spectators might equally be applied to sport. In past issues of the journal we have discussed the Olympic Games, cross-country mountain bike events and instances of the deliberate manipulation of spectator responses in professional wrestling and rugby union.<sup>3</sup> John Bennett takes his point of departure from the currency of soccer as an international preoccupation and, one might say, 'language.' It figures strongly as an outlet for demonstrations of national identity and pride while at the same time as a vehicle that emphasises and fosters a sense of community and local identity. Our articles about sport have referred to the nexus between it and performance. Bennett extends this to include plays which have sport (in this instance soccer) as their motivational wellspring. He concentrates on British and Irish plays which range from public tributes to individual players and teams to those which explore the wider ramifications of the sport as well as voice national tensions. Bennett is well aware of the irony that the international 'language' can be harnessed to voice a "xenophobic tribalism" (to use Nadine Holdsworth's phrase), and indeed most of the plays described in the article are unashamedly regional. Are these plays expression of nostalgia, celebrating glorious events and individuals of the past, or are they manifestations of a vibrant popular political theatre? Perhaps the jury is still out on the outcomes of this debate but Bennett implies that further research particularly into theatrical expressions of sport as a community voice needs to be undertaken. In passing, he refers to Australian playwright David Williamson's play *The Club*, the Canadian Tomson Highway's *Dry Lips Oughta Go to Kapuskasing* and American Richard Greenberg's *Take Me Out* as examples of plays in other Anglophone contexts. But what about similar expressions emanating from Germany, Italy, South America or the Middle East? Do they exist? If so, John Bennett would be keen to know.

Popular entertainments have never been constrained by fixed notions of 'place.' Paul Davies wrote about entertainment taking place on trams and in historical house appropriated for it,<sup>4</sup> and now David Cashman writes about the various spaces used for musical performances on board cruise ships. He uses architecture scholar Robert Kronenburg's taxonomy of the spaces for popular music performance (adopted, adapted, created and mobile)<sup>5</sup> to begin a

discussion of the ways in which cruise operators construct and control the experience of their clients, techniques which have much in common with those employed in Disneyland and Las Vegas. To Kronenburg's categories Cashman adds that of the 'fabricated space' where, as Umberto Eco commented, "the boundaries between game and illusion are blurred." Cashman himself worked as a musician for four years on a number of cruise ships and he knows their geography well. Fabricated spaces are those which purport to be 'authentic' replicas of known or remembered land venues, the seedy jazz club adorned with deliberately torn posters of great entertainers, or massive and elaborate ballrooms that replicate those of large hotels and offer a nostalgic reminder of the Golden Age of the great cruise liners. Such spaces reassure the cruise passengers, flatter their cosmopolitan worldliness and provide familiarity and stability in an environment where positioning the places of entertainment must take into account the need to provide easy access to lifeboats. Perhaps the presence of stage hypnotists like Boston's Peter Gross or Las Vegas-based Don Barnhart on high-end cruises offered by Carnival and Royal Caribbean companies assists in establishing the hyperreality of the cruise and corroborates both Eco's comment referred to above and the evidence supplied in Cynthia Stroud's hypnotic excursion.

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<sup>1</sup> Kim Baston, "Circus music: the eye of the ear," *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 1,2 (2010): 6-25.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Pickering, "For the sake of Variety," *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 4, 1 (2013): 110-15.

<sup>3</sup> Sean Edgecomb, "Inharmonious Pursuits: performing racism at the Olympic Games," *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 2, 2 (2011): 5-20; Kath Bicknell, "Sport, Entertainment and the Live(d) experience of cheering," *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 2, 1 (2011): 96-111; Lucy Nevitt, "Popular entertainments and the spectacle of bleeding," *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 1,2 (2010): 78-92.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Davies, "Full houses: mobility and complicity in the dramas of real buildings," *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 2, 1 (2011): 79-95.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Kronenburg, *Live architecture: venues, stages and arenas for popular music*, (London: Routledge, 2012).