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## Editorial

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Many contributions to the journal over the last six years have emphasised the mobility of popular entertainments. It would seem that from the early modern period in Europe performers and the cultural baggage that accompanied them demonstrated an itinerant and cosmopolitan sense of adventure, knowing that their offerings would be universally recognised and appreciated. Their knowledge was founded in many cases on the fact that their physical abilities required no translation, although as travelling entertainers they were almost entirely dependent on the generosity of strangers. With the creation of purpose-built theatrical structures the process of formalising the establishment of defined touring circuits began: the actor-manager became the manager not only of an acting company but increasingly of a theatre with which he or she could be identified. It was a model which lasted well into the nineteenth century. But by the Edwardian period many traditionalists were becoming increasingly nervous as the influence, and indeed, the presence of actor-managers was being eroded by the emergence of a new breed of entrepreneurs who were buying up theatres and privileging financial considerations over the artistic. To an extent this transition was inevitable as urban populations increased exponentially and as property values began to reflect this growth. Performers and their cultural baggage became themselves properties to be exploited, exchanged and sold on by agents, promoters and commercial syndicates. We are reasonably familiar with the influence exerted in the United States by the Klaw-Erlanger Theatrical Syndicate from the 1880s and subsequently the Shubert Organization from the 1920s to this day. They established networks which effectively monopolised the operation of commercial theatres. The establishment of theatrical networks across the world, however, is perhaps less well-known.

In Australasia we are familiar with the J. C. Williamson organisation, at one point after 1881 the largest theatrical organisation in the world. Christopher Balme, however, draws our attention to the Bandmann circuit that stretched from Gibraltar to Japan and throughout the Pacific.<sup>1</sup> Maurice Bandmann maintained a base in India but managed numerous companies whose repertoires encompassed all the popular theatre genres, while he leased or built a chain of theatres throughout the Pacific using a complex network of agents and local entrepreneurs. Though his choice of offerings reflected the established tastes of Edwardian theatre, his companies played to heterogeneous audiences throughout India, China and Japan. The Bandmann circuit was thus an example

of a new paradigm, the establishment of a theatrical network that utilised new technological advances to create a global theatre capable of circumnavigating the world, a far cry from the Theatrical Syndicate and an even farther cry from the old paradigms of the actor-manager or the solitary performer utilising often sparse talents to impress spectators at great distances from the imperial centre. Janette Pelosi's article is about just such an example.

Francis Nesbitt McCron arrived in Australia just as its professional theatre was being established. He came with a self-proclaimed reputation of having played in all the major British provincial centres. Commencing in 1842 he performed in Shakespeare (*Richard III* was his forte) as well as in plays like Sheridan Knowles's *William Tell*, Jerrold's *Black Ey'd Susan* and Massinger's *A New way to Pay Old Debts*, drawn from the repertoires of actors like Edmund Kean, W. C. Macready and T. P. Cooke. From 1844, however, McCron's alcoholism began to be evident as he frequently proved unable to appear on stage. Australian audiences and critics were initially prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt, but the gap between his aspirations and his achievements was rapidly developing into a chasm. He left Australia in 1849 for California, perhaps driven by the discovery of gold there and the possibilities of capitalising on the wealth acquired by miners, and played his established repertoire in San Francisco and Sacramento. Two years later he was back in Australia where gold had been discovered in 1851. By 1853 he was dead. He had been, as one critic described him, "a theatrical meteor" who "carried audiences away by his vehemence." McCron's short career in Australia is an egregious example of opportunism which would be shown up as insufficient as more talented performers were drawn to the colonies more frequently, enabling local audiences to develop a discrimination that would allow them to judge performers as part of an international touring circuit.

The mobility of popular entertainments is probably best exemplified by the circus, an enduring thematic interest among contributors to this journal. Kim Baston, for example, wrote about the arrival of circus in North America with the performances of John Bill Ricketts and his company in Philadelphia from 1793.<sup>2</sup> In many ways, circus was at the forefront as a cultural ambassador. Its passports resided in the consummate skills that its members possessed as acrobats, jugglers or horseback riders. These rendered language largely irrelevant enabling companies like that of Richard Risley Carlisle to appear in Shanghai in 1863 and, as Mark St. Leon points out, to be the first Western troupe to reach Japan the following year.<sup>3</sup> Yet circuses also developed pronounced regional characteristics: its development in Argentina is a case in point whose significance is discussed by Julieta Infantino in this issue.

The term 'popular' has an inescapable political dimension usually defined as an oppositional position to prevailing cultural and political hegemonies. Infantino's essay is our second article to focus on the struggles of disadvantaged young people in the face of dominant ideologies especially enforced during the period of the Argentinian dictatorship 1976-83, but also stretching beyond to encompass the very real economic oppression and consequent impoverishment brought about by the neoliberal reforms that have continued to the present day.

In one of our earliest issues, Mara Favoretto and Timothy Wilson wrote about Argentinian pop music as a medium for the creation and maintenance of an identity in the teeth of official repression during the dictatorship. Yet despite this opposition, live concerts continued to offer a forum for public dialogue and more recently the economic hardships in Argentina have spawned an authentic musical voice for young people, the *cumbia villera* with its uncompromisingly realistic perspective on sex, drugs, crime and alcohol abuse.<sup>4</sup> Infantino takes up the story from a different perspective, in particular the resurgence of circus at the hands of young people in the post-dictatorship period. She places this development within an historical context that stretches back to the late nineteenth century. She notes that the Circo Criollo in 1884 marks the appearance of a specifically Argentinian regional version of the circus tradition: a blend of traditional circus skills and popular dramatic elements including folk dancing and music. It was an authentic nationalist expression soon to be confronted by a dominant upper class view of Argentinian art as necessarily dependent upon its European inheritance.

Argentinian circus appears to have declined during the 1960s but to have resurfaced as young people enthusiastically embraced popular performance languages associated with improvisation and collective creation. Within this environment circus techniques re-emerged as part of the recovery of a vernacular tradition in Argentina and as many young people began to take their art into the streets where it might become a tool for social participation. Perhaps the most recent development in circus practices has coined the term Social Circus, particularly as it refers to the interventional tools for working with the vulnerable elements in society. This application of circus techniques has been part of a global movement and is a recognisable facet of performance in Australia, the U.K. and Europe. Is Social Circus to be the next locus for academic investigation? Our associate editor, Gillian Arrighi asks this question in her Afterpiece occasioned by the publication of two new circus books. To be sure, the books themselves are essentially snapshots of specific practices in separate geographical contexts. Matthew Wittmann's *Circus and the City: New York 1793-2010* is the development of a *catalogue raisonnée* illustrating the significance of circus in New York. However, as Arrighi avers, the book goes beyond the snapshot and provides "a meticulously produced catalogue of a selection of circus artefacts. . . to 'narrate' the diversification and evolution of North American circus." Mimi Colligan's book *Circus and Stage: the theatrical adventures of Rose Edouin and G. W. B. Lewis* is a snapshot of a family business in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Edouin and her husband Lewis were based in Australia but travelled extensively as entrepreneurs around the Pacific: this returns us to our initial comments about the establishment of international networks of theatrical commerce to which Christopher Balme alludes in his recent article.

Finally, Eileen Curley alerts us to an increasing scholarly interest in amateur theatre and private theatricals. The establishment of a new research project in this area at the University of Exeter, England in 2014 as well as the website devoted to "research into amateur performance and private theatricals" ([rapt.org/researchers](http://rapt.org/researchers)) seem to reinforce this development. Certainly studies

have appeared investigating the 'At Homes' and the toy theatre industry throughout the nineteenth century but the study of theatrical manifestations outside the theatre and appropriated for demonstrations at home is yet to be adequately developed. Curley refers to the amateur theatrical guidebooks that appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century, many of them associated with the distributors of playscripts like Lacy and French. The guidebooks appear to have been published as spectacle increasingly dominated the popular stage. They thus provided the means to replicate theatrical events and their technical effects at home. It was a potentially dangerous course of action, but although publishers disingenuously recommended that home theatricals confine themselves to domestic dramas and comedies, they nonetheless provided the information needed to potentially cause a 'parlour conflagration.' It thus represents a nice illustration of the dissemination of popular science in the period and the fascination felt for the magic that underpinned the practices of spectacular theatre.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Balme, "The Bandmann Circuit: theatrical networks in the first age of globalization," *Theatre Research International*, 40, 1 (2015): 19-36.

<sup>2</sup> Kim Baston, "Transatlantic Journeys: John Bill Ricketts and the Edinburgh Equestrian Circus," *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 4, 2 (2013): 5-28.

<sup>3</sup> Mark St. Leon, "A Novel Route: Circus in the Pacific 1841-1941," *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 5, 2 (2014): 24-47.

<sup>4</sup> Mara Favoretto and Timothy Wilson, "'Entertaining' the notion of change: the transformative power of performance in Argentina," *Popular Entertainment Studies*, 1, 2 (2010): 44-60.