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Methodologies of the Popular (Editorial)

During this year when celebrations around the globe, but most particularly in the United Kingdom, are marking 250 years since the ‘birth’ of the modern circus,¹ it is absolutely fitting that the first two articles in this issue bring to light new research on the early circus. Since the inaugural edition in 2010, this journal has published six full-length articles that have illuminated aspects of circus history as diverse as: the role of music in the circus; the songs and jokes performed by American circus clowns of the late-nineteenth century; the transatlantic transference of circus from the United Kingdom to the United States; the spread of circus through the Pacific region; the ghosting of early-nineteenth century hippodrama in contemporary theatrical shows featuring horse and human actors; and the resurgence and redefinition of circus arts in Buenos Aires during the post-dictatorship period.² A shorter ‘Afterpiece’ I wrote for the journal in 2015 asked the question ‘where to next for circus studies?’ and with the recent global increase in academic conferences and symposia dedicated to research on the circus, as well as the welcome publication of the *Routledge Circus Studies Reader* in 2016,³ we can now confidently say that Circus Studies is an established field of academic enquiry and practice-informed research that draws together enquiries from diverse disciplinary perspectives and methodological bases. During this year when we celebrate 250 years of the modern circus, the editorial team of *Popular Entertainment Studies* are proud to have contributed to the growing knowledge base of Circus Studies since our first volume in 2010.

Kim Baston has published several articles in this journal examining the historical role of music within the Euro-American circus tradition,⁴ and on the surprising legacy of what we might now regard as an arcane popular spectacle of the early nineteenth century, that of hippodrama, which she has appositely described as “an entertainment marrying the equestrian acts that were staples of the early modern circus with a grander narrative purpose.”⁵ Baston’s article in this edition brings together these two threads of early circus programming—music and equestrian performance. With a tight focus on the Edinburgh Equestrian Circus during the early 1790s, Baston’s primary ‘data’ source is several collections of ‘circus tunes’ published in Edinburgh for the domestic market (and therefore intended to capitalise “on the interest in this new form of entertainment.”) Meshing methodologies derived from musicology and performance studies,

Baston's enquiry concerns repertoire and function; by asking "what the music was and what it did" she provides readings of those 'circus tunes' that can be traced to programmes at the Edinburgh Circus, then extrapolates what the likely implications of the music was for the dramaturgies of various circus acts. Providing insights into the professional lives of musicians of this era, as well as the flow of performers and aesthetic trends between major venues in London and Edinburgh, Baston's research forges an important link between what the ear heard and what the eye saw at the early circus.

The first two articles in this edition are related not only by their attention to the late-eighteenth century circus, but also by the authors' meticulous readings of fine detail in relatively obscure historic records. Ellen Karoline Gjervan's study of the 1800-1802 tour of Scandinavia by "the Italian company" provides, for the first time in a scholarly English language publication, information about the early spread of circus-style entertainments to Scandinavia, and the legacy of the Casorti company's particular style of pantomime to Scandinavian performance history. Here, the author's attention is on one company, led by Mr Casorti yet founded on a set of extended familial relationships, during a narrow window of time in which the company experienced changes in leadership, membership, and repertoire as it toured through Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Using the Dano-Norwegian census that was fortuitously taken in February 1801, while Casorti's company was resident in Norway, in concert with sources such as "applications for permission to perform, playbills or advertisements for performances, passport protocols, newspaper reports, church records and ship's manifests," Gjervan has developed a more detailed understanding of this company's sojourn in Scandinavia than has been previously produced. To date, scholarship on "the Italian company" has been published in the Scandinavian languages and is here explored to a fuller extent for an English-speaking readership, thereby contributing to the knowledge base of Circus Studies in English.

Historiographical strategies reliant on sources that have been either underused or underexamined link the first three articles in this edition. Michelle Granshaw's study of the comic tramp figure "at the moment of its cultural invention" emerges from her nuanced examination of fragmentary records of tramp sketches left by the Theatre Comique in New York (later the New Theatre Comique), a theatre that was managed from 1876 by the popular comedy duo of Edward Harrigan and Tony Hart. As the historical precursor to the more intensely studied 'polite' vaudeville of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, variety entertainments have been described by theatre historian, Don Wilmeth, as being "almost invisible in the historical record because working-class entertainments received little press and left few archives."⁶ Explaining her primary sources, Granshaw observes, "[o]ther than brief descriptions, the occasional review, and advertisements in the *New York Clipper*, few New York newspapers noted, let alone reviewed variety performances which were not considered respectable entertainment during the 1870s." Utilising remnant scripts for "afterpieces and sketches, together with songsters and sheet music," Granshaw's article examines the comic tramp figure as an outgrowth of society's need to understand the meaning/s of the "masses of mobile, unemployed men" that were so visible following the 'Panic' of 1873, an event that is acknowledged

as the worst fiscal depression up to that point in American history. As Granshaw notes, “anxieties surrounding the tramp were rooted in how he disrupted the spatial ordering and discipline that was closely linked to modernity. Popular entertainment became one way these shifting meanings surrounding mobility were produced, contested, and propagated.”

At the annual meeting of the Popular Entertainments Working Group in Belgrade earlier this year—a colloquium that operates under the aegis of the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR)—scholarly discussions addressed the research presented by members of the group; discussions also focussed on the diverse methods researchers working within the field of popular entertainments engage with in order to make the invisible, visible, as it were. A sense of working at the edge of what can be known from patchy remnants of the past certainly runs through the first three articles in this edition. The fourth essay brings us to our contemporary moment with Lillian Jean Shaddick’s investigation of Brazilian *samba* in Australia; here the author’s research methods include auto-ethnography and field research. Herself a dancer of numerous styles, including *samba*, Shaddick’s participant-observer status has enabled her understanding of the aesthetics of contemporary *samba* performance outside of Brazil, as well as the commercial side of the business and performance of *samba* in Australia at our current moment in time. Positioning her study within the historical continuum of Australian audiences’ fascination with the exotic—through such popular forms as the circus, revue, and variety—Shaddick explores the tensions between those forces that are currently influencing the production of *samba* performance in Australia: authenticity, appropriation, commercial imperatives, and audience taste.

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¹ See for example the activities of Circus250, at: <http://circus250.com> accessed 30 November 2018.

² See editions 1, no.2 (2010); 4, no. 2 (2013); 5, no. 2 (2014); 6, no. 1 (2015); 7, no. 1-2 (2016).

³ Gillian Arrighi, “Circus Studies: where to next?” *Popular Entertainment Studies* 6, no. 1 (2015): 62-65; Peta Tait and Katie Lavers, eds., *The Routledge Circus Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

⁴ Kim Baston, “Circus Music: the eye of the ear,” *Popular Entertainment Studies* 1, no. 2 (2010): 6-25.

⁵ Kim Baston, “ ‘New’ Hippodrama, or ‘old circus? Legacy and innovation in contemporary equestrian performance,” *Popular Entertainment Studies* 7, no. 1-2 (2016): 21-38.

⁶ Don Wilmeth, Review of *Champagne Charlie and Pretty Jemima: Variety Theater in the Nineteenth Century* by Gillian M. Rodger, *Journal of American History*, 98, no. 1 (June 2011), 218.