

**Commanding an Audience: Performance in Colonial Culture**  
**Hocken Collections, University of Otago**  
**19 November 2012**

**Barbara Brookes, University of Otago**

***Enlivening Entertainment and Knowledge: Considering Performance in Colonial Culture***

Live performance abounded in Colonial society, whether in church, in the community hall, on the hustings, or on stage. Through an examination of the public lecture, this paper will attempt to set the scene for the variety of Colonial performances that the colloquium will consider.

**Tom Brooking, University of Otago**

***“Supreme Commander”: Richard John Seddon and The Performance of Politics***

New Zealand’s longest serving Prime Minister used to brag that he played the crowd ‘like a piana’. Yet other contemporaries, especially the self-consciously intellectual William Pember Reeves and most conservatively inclined newspapers, considered him to be a long-winded and poor speaker. It seems that Reeves’s judgment, along with that of the Opposition press, was at variance with much of the electorate who attended Seddon’s numerous public meetings in large numbers and did not seem to object to his habit of never speaking for less than 75 minutes. He must have possessed some other quality to not only hold the attention of his listeners, but to win them over, even when they felt hostile to the policies being pursued by his government. He certainly possessed the X factor of personal charisma and had the ability to speak in terms that his audience could understand, but I shall be arguing that his speeches were much more coherent and cohesive and his rhetoric much more carefully crafted and considered, than his critics suggested.

By examining his maiden speech in 1879, his first engagement with the British press at Queen Victoria’s jubilee in 1897, and his fronting of hostile, small shopkeepers in 1904, I intend to show that he articulated a coherent Popular Liberal view of the world that meshed with that of his audience. His speeches, based on headings backed by surprisingly wide reading, also had plenty of solid content as well as flashes of brilliant improvisation. And, if he got stuck, he could always fall back on the old Lancastrian tradition of bursting into song. As a cross between a music hall star and folksy philosopher he connected with the hopes and dreams of the majority of New Zealanders of his time commanding his audience like no other New Zealand politician before or since. He remains the New Zealand master of the art of political performance.

**Rosi Crane, PhD Candidate, University of Otago**

***Giving 'an air of credibility to a bald and unconvincing narrative'—the evolution story, or how T.J. Parker (1850-1897) addressed his audiences***

Thomas Jeffery Parker, the first Professor of Biology at the University of Otago, never missed an opportunity to promulgate his views on evolution. His audiences knew his claims to scientific knowledge were based on first-hand experience; something they could not guarantee with other lecturers. Parker's lectures contributed to Dunedin's vibrant platform culture comprised of both visiting scientific performers and local speakers. Parker's skilled demonstration of biological principles over a range of topics helped to construct his scientific identity and authority. This investigation furthers our understanding of the relationship between producers and consumers of scientific knowledge

**Bronwyn Dally, Freelance Historian. Part-time lecturer, Museum and Heritage Studies, Victoria University of Wellington**

***"Not that sort of girl at all": the staging of Lotti Wilmot***

Lotti Wilmot loved a stage. Actress, lecturer, promoter, social reformer and medium were among her many roles. But she did not limit herself just to treading the boards. 'Off-stage', in both her writings and actions, Lotti performed, creating and courting public attention and controversy in Australia and New Zealand in the 1870s and 1880s. I examine the 'staging' of her life as a way to consider popular culture in the 19th century .

**Fabia Fox, MA Candidate, University of Otago**

***The Theatre of Respectability and Defiance: The Female Criminal in the Nineteenth-Century Dunedin Court***

In the nineteenth-century Dunedin courtroom a spectacle was often staged. The judge, the police, the witnesses were all players. The court report took the role of narrator and the female offender commands centre stage, cast as the villain. Her presence in court confirmed her criminality, if only for being drunk on the street, or uttering a crass word to a by-passer. Her position as an outcast in Dunedin society was determined by her blatant and frequent disregard for Victorian ideals of femininity. However, it is her behaviour in court and way she was represented by the local media that will be examined in this discussion. Notions of respectability, as defined by the court, the media and the female criminal herself will be compared to acts of defiance in order to examine the impact these courtroom performances had on understandings of female crime in nineteenth-century Dunedin.

**Peter Kuch, Eamon Cleary Professor of Irish Studies, University of Otago**

***Irish plays on the Dunedin Stage: 1862-9***

Between 1862 and 1869 there were some 300 performances of Irish plays in the Dunedin theatres. This paper will explore what is meant by the term 'Irish' play and will seek to explain why Irish plays were so popular. It will also examine the stage and reception history of the most popular of those Irish plays performed during the decade in terms of theatrical touring within Australasia.

**Kirstine Moffat, Waikato University**

***"Concerts and socials for the promotion of good fellowship": Amateur Pianists Entertain***

The words 'piano performance' typically conjure up the image of a famed virtuoso playing to a packed concert hall and receiving tumultuous applause. In colonial New Zealand there was certainly an association between piano professional and instrument, with performers such as Mrs John Bell, Miss Redmayne, and Ralph Hood enchanting audiences in Auckland, Dunedin and Wellington respectively. However, for most colonial New Zealanders the opportunities of hearing such performers were rare. The piano performers who entertained audiences were more usually amateur pianists whose defining characteristics were versatility and adaptability. They performed solo works, accompanied singers, violinists and flautists, tapped out the rhythms for dances, and alternated between the compositions of classical greats such as Mozart and Beethoven, popular favourites by Balfe and Gilbert and Sullivan, and nostalgic songs such as 'Killarney' and 'My Love is But a Lassie'. Amateur pianists played in a variety of locations, from parlours and halls, to wool sheds and pubs. This paper explores the pivotal role of the amateur pianist in a diverse range of colonial entertainments: impromptu performances, variety concerts, soirées, socials, dances. In particular, it deconstructs the clichéd association of the piano with the refined, educated, middle class, female, amateur performer. Yes, many gentlewomen did sit at the keyboard in colonial New Zealand, but the instrument was also beloved of men, Maori, and the spectrum of socio-economic classes and it this varied and complex performance tradition that will be my focus.

**Marianne Schultz, PhD Candidate, Auckland University**

***"Savage Suffragettes" and a 'Harmony of Frenzy': Maori in Manhattan 1909-1910***

On September 4, 1909, as the final bars of the orchestral overture faded and the lights dimmed, the massive curtain of the gigantic New York Hippodrome stage cascaded to reveal an unfamiliar sight for the 5,000 members of the opening night audience; a 'Maori Village', complete with thatched huts and forty

performers who commanded total attention from the startled patrons.<sup>1</sup> Within a week of opening the spectacular 'Inside the Earth' proved so popular that the 'sold out' sign was erected outside.<sup>2</sup> The draw card seemed to be the performance of the New Zealanders with a report claiming that 'it will probably not be very long before the Maoris become the fad.'<sup>3</sup> A month later three Maori women from this group shared the stage with the 'mother of the militant movement of women', the British suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst during her inaugural visit to the United States.

The journey for these 'SAVAGE SUFFRAGETTES' from Rotorua to Manhattan is the focus of this paper. Their story illuminates the transnational overlapping of cultural and political representation with entertainment at its center and highlights the place that the performing arts assumed in the histories of early twentieth century politics (racial and gender) in New Zealand and the United States.

<sup>1</sup> Club Fellow, 15 September, 1909, np, H.R. Burnside Collection, series VII Scrapbook 1909-10, box 57, New York Public Library, Billy Rose Theatre Division, Lincoln Centre Library for the Performing Arts.

<sup>2</sup> Passaic Daily News, 11 September, 1909 np; New York Commercial, 5 September, 1909, np, H.R. Burnside Collection, series VII Scrapbook 1909-10, box 57, New York Public Library, Billy Rose Theatre Division, Lincoln Centre Library for the Performing Arts.

<sup>3</sup> Passaic Daily News, 11 September, 1909 np; New York Commercial, 5 September, 1909, np, H.R. Burnside Collection, series VII Scrapbook 1909-10, box 57, New York Public Library, Billy Rose Theatre Division, Lincoln Centre Library for the Performing Arts.

## **John Stenhouse, University of Otago**

### ***The passionate pastor: the cultural performances of Rev. Rutherford Waddell, 1879-1930***

This paper explores the intersection between religion and cultural performance by focusing on some episodes in the career of the Rev. Rutherford Waddell, Irish Presbyterian minister of St Andrew's Church in Dunedin. Analyzing some of his performances in the pulpit and on the public platform, I argue that, despite certain physical handicaps, Waddell won considerable popularity. He illustrates what made some clergy more successful performers than others.

## **Lisa Warrington, University of Otago**

### ***We are amused: Theatre comes to Dunedin, 1862***

On 15th February 1862, the Otago Witness noted that "the almost absolute lack of places of amusement has ... had a prejudicial effect, causing Dunedin to seem a gloomy place, in which there was no fun to be had - even the public houses being all by law obliged to close at 10 o'clock." Beyond the pubs, and some sporting activities, 'polite' entertainments were in short supply - there were few concerts or public lectures, and virtually no theatre. It was the lack of suitable premises that made theatre a difficult proposition for touring companies, and this was resolved by an unusual building conversion undertaken by "some of the spirited

Victorian speculators who have been attracted to these shores". (Otago Witness, 11th January 1862). This paper recounts the creation of the Princess's Theatre, and the early days of its management under the Fawcett brothers.

**Michelle Willyams, Recent MA Graduate, University of Otago**

***The Methodist Home Mission Party and Live Performance in New Zealand in the 1920s and 1930s.***

The core focus of this presentation will be exploring musical characteristics that were typical for an audience in New Zealand in the 1920s and 1930s. The Methodist Home Mission Party (MHMP) performed and sang throughout the country between 1924 and 1938. An investigation of their repertoire from one of their performances in 1932 to a Southland audience illuminates aspects of New Zealand's wider performance culture and reveals what was typical and what was unusual for audiences during this period. Although the MHMP was technically a Methodist choir who performed religious hymns, they also performed a Maori, Classical, American, Jazz styles as well as other musical traditions, with hybridisation also apparent.