Introduction

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Considering Performance in Colonial Culture

Under the heading "He Acted," the *Auckland Star* entertained its readers in April 1888:

> "Father," said Robert, "I have long cherished a desire to go on the stage, and have at last decided, with your permission to—"
> "My son," interrupted the fond father, "all the world's a stage. Take that hoe hanging in the woodshed and go out and dig those potatoes back of the orchard." The engagement lasted a week.[1]

Robert clearly thought performance only occurred in the theatre: his father, on the other hand, saw it operating throughout daily life. The Otago Centre for Colonial Culture's "Commanding an Audience" symposium, which gave rise to this Special Issue, aimed to analyze the spectrum of performance—from everyday life, social roles and ritual, and popular entertainments—in colonial New Zealand.[2] Inspired in part by Erving Goffman's notion of the performance of self in everyday life, and by scholarship on performativity in public culture, established and emerging scholars analyzed music and drama but also examined the notion of performance beyond the stage: in the pulpit, in parliament, in the courtroom, in the lecture hall and in daily life.[3]

New Zealand's colonial performance culture has received most attention from those interested in drama and music, notably Peter Harcourt's examination of the "lost world of New Zealand's musicals" and Peter Downes's books on theatre and entertainment.[4] Adrienne Simpson's *Opera's Farthest Frontier: A History of Professional Opera in New Zealand* builds on John Mansfield Thomson's authoritative 1991 *Oxford History of New Zealand Music*.[5] Less apparent are studies of apparently "unstaged" performances. To take just one example, the Lyttelton Colonists' Society, one of the oldest and best organized of such groups, met in a crowded hall in late April 1871 for "Winter Entertainment." The Society had a library, a reading room, a chess room and a discussion class. Through membership, colonists were said to improve their minds and fit themselves to become useful members of society. "We must always remember," the President noted, "that we are a self-governing community."[6]

The meeting began with the President's address, in which he summed up the significant events of the year. These included the end of the Franco-German war; the hope that the electric telegraph would soon connect New Zealand to the rest of the world; and the welcome establishment of a postal link between New Zealand and the American continent, promising "benefits of a commercial character with the enterprising inhabitants of the Western hemisphere." One matter preoccupying Americans, as well as "the folks at home," was "the scientific education of women." The President could not see why, given that Faraday's love of science began by reading a book by a woman, women should not be instructed in science.

After his address, the members of the Society provided short entertainments. Two women opened the evening's pleasures with a "duett on airs from Verdi's La Traviata," linking the small port of Lyttelton in 1871 with an Italian opera which received critical success in 1854. A Mr Warde then gave "in excellent style Wolsey's speech on Ambition" from Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, reminding its hearers of the arc of life. A new (1868) song followed—"Driven from Home"—which remembered the poor with nowhere to go: "Fatherless, motherless, sadly I roam / nursed by my poverty, driven from home." The Reverend J. D. Fergus's reading, of selections from the Scottish writer and geologist Hugh Miller's visit to England, was warmly applauded. Mrs Gibson and Miss Ward then "sang a

Journal of New Zealand Studies NS15 (2013), 1-3

very pretty duet." Roars of laughter greeted Mr Marshman's rendition of the 1867 Arthur Sketchley tale "Mrs Brown's visit to the Paris Exhibition." Mr Roberts sang "You'll remember me" from the popular opera *Bohemian Girl*, which had been an international success in the mid-nineteenth century. A Mr Bolt then read a selection from Mark Twain's 1869 *The Innocents Abroad*. More singing preceded the national anthem, asking God to protect the Queen, which reminded those present of the allegiance of the colony, and drew the evening to a close.

In the meeting of the Lyttelton Colonists' Society we can see performance on a number of levels. First, individuals put themselves forward to read, play or sing for the pleasure of others: skill was perhaps secondary to willingness. Second, the performances might be said to "reproduce the macrocosm in the microcosm."[7] The President's reflections on international affairs; Italian and English opera; Shakespeare, Miller and Twain, brought the small Lyttelton community on the edges of the Southern hemisphere into contact with world events, western music and literature. Third, the very ritual of meeting brought into being a group identity, thereby making the individual members into a "Colonists' Society." Through the act of grouping together, settlers addressed what being a New Zealander "could and did mean."[8]

The contributors to this collection address each of these levels of performance. Some authors discuss those individuals, known as "amateurs," who performed music or theatricals for others and whose efforts were much appreciated in a society lacking a developed entertainment infrastructure. The performance of ethnicity—of the Irish on stage or of Māori musicality—comes under examination, while the multiple recreations of self by the show-girl Lottie Wilmot suggest the layering of an individual life. The political platform and education in science allowed performances that addressed questions to do with the place of the local in the global. Finally, the enactment of group identity, whether through membership of a congregation or in Parliament, helped shape visions of what the nation might become. The authors included here engage in interrogating colonial performance as an individual act, as a way of enlivening knowledge, and as a means of providing entertainment, revealing a richly textured associational past.

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[1] *Auckland Star,* April 14, 1888, 4.

[2] Thanks to the Centre for Colonial Culture at the University of Otago, and its Director, Tony Ballantyne, who sponsored the symposium held on November 19, 2012 at the Hocken Collections. Not all papers are represented here, but thanks to all who participated, and in particular to Professor Lyn Tribble, who provided reflections on the papers given.

[3] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959); Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002) delineates the wide field; Jeremy C. Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics; Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy," *Sociological Theory* 22, no. 4 (2004): 527–73; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[4] Peter Harcourt, *Fantasy and Folly: The Lost World of New Zealand Musicals, 1880–1940* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2002); Peter Downes, *The Pollards: A Family and its Child and Adult Opera Companies in New Zealand and Australia, 1880–1910* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2002); Peter Downes, *Top of the Bill: Entertainers Through the Years* (Wellington: A. H & A. W. Reed, 1979); Peter Downes, *Shadows on the Stage: Theatre in New Zealand, The First 70 Years* (Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1975).

[5] John Mansfield Thomson, *The Oxford History of New Zealand Music* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991); Adrienne Simpson, *Opera's Farthest Frontier: A History of Professional Opera in New Zealand* (Auckland: Reed, 1996).

[6] "Winter Entertainments," *Star* (Lyttelton), May 1, 1871, 2.

[7] Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics," 537.

[8] Angela Ray uses this phrase talking about the American Lyceum Movement: Angela G. Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005), 6.