

1843

A "grand serious pantomimic ballet of action" called "**Don Juan**" was presented at Sydney's Royal Victoria Theatre during a benefit to Mr Symes (30 Jan.). The author of the piece, Andrew Torning, appeared as Scaramouch, with Madame Louise playing the role of Don Juan (*Sydney Morning Herald* 28 Jan. 1843, 3).

Andrew Torning's pantomime *The Fairy of the Coral* (1842) cave was revived at the Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney on two occasions during the year - the first in March and the second in July.

The Sham Catalini in Little Puddleton (1842) was revived at Sydney's Royal Victoria Theatre on 29 May by lessees Joseph Wyatt and William Knight. Produced under the title *The Mock Catalini in Little Puddleton*, the cast included Joseph Simmons.

ROBINSON CRUSOE: OR, THE BOLD BUCCANEERS: [pantomime] Txt/Mus. [n/e]

A two act pantomime somewhat surprisingly described in advertising as a "romantic drama," *Robinson Crusoe* was staged as part of a programme of entertainment put on at the Royal Victoria Theatre for the last night of Mr Lee's engagement ("with his wonderful dogs"). An extensive synopsis of the scenes is also included in the same advertisement. The concluding tableaux was "followed by the favourite Characteristic Walachian Dance, with the preliminary Pantomimic action, according to the custom in Wallachia, called "The Plouga," by Miss Young and Signor Carandini" (*Courier* 21 Apr, 1843, 1).

The cast for this production featured the Howson brothers, John and Frank.

1843: Royal Victoria Theatre, Hobart Town; 24 Apr.

- **Cast** incl. Mr Thompson (Robinson Crusoe), Mr Lee (Friday), John Howson (Drego, Crusoe's Son and Captain of the Vessel), Mr Rogers (Bluff, mate of the vessel), Mr Austin (Windlass, Chief Mutineer), Mr Smith (Swivel, Gunner), Mr Wilks (Block, capatain of the 'fore top), Mr Lucan (Gunnel, a seaman), Frank Howson (Nipcheese, Ship's Steward), Mrs Montague (Ines, Crusoe's wife), and Mr Lee's Dogs.
- Other cast members played natives, Pirates, sailors etc.
- *Robinson Crusoe* was followed by "Two favourite Scenes from *Jack Sheppard*," and "The Unfinished Gentleman and Polished Philosopher."

Courier (Hobart Town) 21 Apr. 1843, 1. Advert.

"Victoria Theatre: Mr Lee and His Dogs." *Colonial Times* (Hobart Town) 25 Apr. 1843, 3.

ROBINSON CRUSOE: OR, HARLEQUIN AND THE FROZEN REGIONS: [pantomime]

Txt/Mus. [n/e]

Victoria Theatre.

Under the Patronage of the Mayor
H. CONDELL, ESQ.

MR. BUCKINGHAM'S BENEFIT,
ON MONDAY evening next will be produced
for the first time in this Province, the grand
Pantomime, entitled

Robinson Crusoe,
OR, HARLEQUIN AND THE FROZEN REGIONS,
After which,
"TELL ME MY HEART,"
By an accomplished lady lately arrived in the col-
ony.
The whole to conclude with the laughable and
mirth inspiring farce entitled the

Unfinished Gentleman,
OR, MIRTH, FUN, AND FROLIC.

Tickets to be obtained of Mr B, at the Theatre
from 10 to 4.

G. BUCKINGHAM,
Stage Manager.

Melbourne Times 6 May 1843, 2.

The *Melbourne Times* records in its 6 and 13 May editions that *Robinson Crusoe* was the first pantomime to be produced in the Port Phillip District, of which the town Melbourne was the major centre.¹ The production was staged at the Victoria Theatre by Mr G. Buckingham as part of his benefit. The Times further records that "Mr B" deserved the consideration of the public for his valiant attempt to "keep up the sinking energies of the theatre." Unfortunately this had not been as successful "as could have been wished, owing to bad materials and bad times" ("Local," 6 May 1843, 2).

In its 13 May report on the entertainment given the previous Monday, the *Times* journalist writes:

It is a truism, that those who seek intellectual amusement in a Pantomime will be disappointed, for its merits unequivocally consist of mirth and glee and Those seeking that, as a relaxation from worldly toils, met the required gratification. As the first attempt at Pantomime here, it was particularly successful ("Local," 13 May 1843, 2)

The *Port Phillip Gazette* also records:

The Theatre: This place of amusement, which is certainly redeeming its character, opens again on Monday night with the pantomime of *Robinson Crusoe*, to which has been added some additional scenery and tricks. This will no doubt carry it off with increased *eclat*. The afterpiece will be the farce of the *Unfinished Gentleman*, new to our local stage... ("Domestic," 2).

1843: Victoria Theatre, Melbourne; 8, 15 May

- **S Mngr/Dir.** G. Buckingham
- **Cast** incl. Mr Harper (Harlequin), Miss Warman (Columbine), Mr Miller (Clown), Mr Avins (Pantaloony), Mr Buckingham (Demon), Mrs Murray, Mr Burgin, Master Buckingham.

¹ At this point in time the colony (later state) of Victoria did not exist. Melbourne had been founded in 1835 but for the next sixteen years the region was administered by the colony of New South Wales. On 1 July 1851, writs were issued for the election of the first Victorian Legislative Council, and the absolute independence of Victoria from New South Wales was established proclaiming a new Colony of Victoria ("*Anniversary of the Week*." *Argus* 4 July 1930, 2).

"Domestic Intelligence." *Port Phillip Gazette* (Melbourne) 13 May 1843, 2

"Local Intelligence." *Melbourne Times* 6 May 1843, 2.

"Local Intelligence." *Melbourne Times* 6 May 1843, 2.

HARLEQUIN AND THE TALKING BIRD: [pantomime] Lib. John Lazar; Mus. [n/e]

Although not identified by name nor advertised during the Christmas period of 1843, the *Sydney Morning Herald* edition of 27 December records:

According to custom from time immemorial, a pantomime was produced at the Victoria, last night, which appeared to give satisfaction to a very crowded house. We have not a very clear conception of the plot, which in a pantomime is not of much consequence. There were the usual transformations and tricks, and some very pretty dancing; but it must be cut down at least a third. Two hours and a half for a pantomime is too much" ("Christmas Pantomime," 2).

Advertised in early January 1844 as being presented for the "last time," *Harlequin and the Talking Bird* concluded an evening entertainment that featured a farce, an operatic burlesque and several "automaton figures."

John Lazar is identified as the author in an advertisement for the 1849 Adelaide revival (*Adelaide Times* 28 May 1849, 3).

1843: Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney; 26 Dec. 1843; 11 Jan. 1844

- Prod. John Lazar.

- Cast incl. Master Chambers (Harlequin Junior).

ROYAL VICTORIA THEATRE.
JUVENILE NIGHT.

Children under twelve years of age, admitted to the Dress Circle at Half-Price.

THIS EVENING, THURSDAY, January 11, 1844,
will be presented the laughable Farce of
THE IRISH TUTOR.

Terry O'Rourke, (with the song of *St. Patrick was a Gentleman*), Mr. J. Simmons.

After which, Mrs. BUSHELLE will sing *Wanted a Governess.*

To which will be added the Burlesque Tragic Opera, entitled
BOMBASTES FURIOSO.

General Bombastes, Master S. Lazar (only six years old), with a Medley Song, a Duet with Mr. Deering, and the original Finale.

To conclude with the Grand Comic Pantomime, (for the last time), called
HARLEQUIN AND THE TALKING BIRD.
Harlequin Junior - Master Chambers.

In the course of the Pantomime will be introduced (for the first time) various Automaton Figures, which will perform several Extraordinary Evolutions.

MR. J. LAZAR, Manager.

Vivat Regina!

1849: Queen's Theatre, Adelaide; 28 May

- Prod. John Lazar; M Arr. Mr Richards; S Art. Mr Douglas.

- Cast incl. Signor Longun (Abracadabrapompadoureatalherswallowpopdrinkmorer, the ogre - 20 feet high), Mr Jacobs (Prince Pevik/Harlequin), Mr Lazar (Rhosbrough, King of Persia), Mr Dight Pantaloon, Mr Douglas Chirrupsing-songwarbleo, the talking bird/Clown, Miss Lazar (Princess Parizade, daughter of Rhosbrough), Madame Veilburne (Columbine).

Adelaide Times 28 May (1849), 3. Advert. [above right]

Australian (Sydney) 11 Jan. (1844), 2. Advert. [above]

* LIFE IN SYDNEY; OR, THE RAN DAN CLUB: [burletta] Txt/Mus. [n/e]

Fotheringham, Richard, ed. *Australian Plays for the Colonial Stage 1834-1899*. St Lucia: U of Qld P, (2006).

One of many theatrical adaptations of Pierce Egan's picaresque novel of 'fast' city living, *Tom and Jerry: Life in London; or, The Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, Esq. and his Elegant Friend Corinthian Tom in their Rambles and Sprees through the Metropolis* (1820-1821), the plot in this version begins with the arrival of Jerry Webber to the Colony. Upon being made a member of the Ran Dan Club, he is taken under the wing of Tom King and Bob Logic. The three make their way from Macquarie Place (where Tom wins a £50 bet) to the Shakespeare Tavern. They join a fight between the "Cabbage Tree Mob" and the police, go to a ball, visit an auction mart and later find themselves at The Rocks, where one can 'see life as low as ever you did in St Giles in London (qtd. Leslie Rees *Making of Australian Drama* 61). Three young women who are keen on the Ran Danners disguise themselves as sailors in order to follow them, which leads to a sing-a-long. The police cut this short, another fight ensues, and the men escape. They talk next of going to the theatre, at which point Logic says to Jerry, "my dear fellow, the Victoria is really a tolerable good theatre, superior to many in London... some of our native talent, and of those who never saw a theatre but a Sydney

NEW QUEEN'S THEATRE.
BOXES, 2s 6d. PTT, 1s.

Doors open at 7, commence at half-past 7.

THIS EVENING, MAY 28th, will be presented, for the first time, a new Grand Comic Pantomime (which has been some time in preparation) selected from the "Arabian Nights Entertainments," entitled

HARLEQUIN
AND
THE TALKING BIRD;
Or the Singing Tree and Golden Waters.

The music arranged for the occasion by Mr Richards. The scenery, tricks, properties, transformations, and comic scenes, by Mr Douglas. The Pantomime originally written and produced in Sydney with great success by Mr Lazar.

Abracadabrapompadoureatalherswallowpopdrinkmorer (the Ogre, 20 feet high)... Signor Longun (from the Island of Stretchit).
Prince Pevik (transformed to a stone, afterwards Harlequin)... Mr Jacobs.
Rhosbrough Seah (King of Persia)... Mr Lazar, afterwards Pantaloon... Mr Dight.
Chirrupsing-songwarbleo (the talking bird, afterwards Clown)... Mr Douglass.
Princess Parizade (daughter of Rhosbrough Seah)... Miss Lazar, afterwards Columbine... Madame Veilburne.

Programme of Music, Scenery, Tricks, &c.:
Scene 1—Palace of the King of Persia.
Mechanical Change discovering the Fairy Queen.
Scene 2—Exterior of the Ogre's Steel Castle.
Scene 3—DEMON'S GLEN.
Scene 4—THE CHARMED MOUNTAINS.
Song—"I Can Chirrup"... Talking Bird.
Transformation! to the Splendid Gardens of the Prince.
Scene 6—NEW EXCHANGE.
Scene 7—Pratt's Smith's Shop.
Scene 8—Grand Stand and Hurdle Race.
Coppin's Auction Mart Hotel.
Scene 9—ARTIST AND DOCTOR'S SHOPS.
Juvenile Clown... Master F. Douglas. Juvenile Pantaloon... Master F. Douglass.
Scene 10—A Brick Yard.
Shoemaker's and Tailor's.
Scene 11—A STREET IN ADELAIDE.
Scene 12—Raphael's Pawnbroker's Shop.
Scene 13—The Ogre's Retreat.
Scene the last—The Temple of the Fairies!
Union of Harlequin and Columbine.
Chorus and Tableau.

one, may vie with those who have been born as 'twere upon the stage" (qtd. Rees 61). The final scene, set in a Court House at Woolloomooloo, sees the three women 'bagging' their men. It ends with a jolly chorus.

Although there is no record of any production of *Life in Sydney* having been staged until the 1970s, it serves to demonstrate, as Margaret Williams argues, just how little leeway a local playwright was allowed in depicting the often none-too-salubrious realities of life in colonial Australia (22). The burletta was submitted in late August 1843 for the Colonial Secretary's consideration, as required of all new works, but it failed to gain approval because no one had claimed authorship of the work. Rather, someone had signed the letter (with an almost illegible signature) on behalf of the author. A second letter was forwarded immediately following the rejection, this time signed by Henry O'Flaherty on behalf of the still anonymous author. The Colonial Secretary's reply indicates, however, that no approval would be sanctioned because it contained "matter of a libelous character, independently of other objections" (qtd. Williams 24).



Title page and cast list from original manuscript.
New South Wales Archives.

The original letter to the Colonial Secretary, a copy of which is held in the New South Wales Archives, claims that the burletta is a localised adaptation of the W.T. Moncrieff operatic extravaganza about London low society, *Tom and Jerry; Or Life in London* (1821). The Australian version, as Margaret Williams notes "seems an innocent enough localisation of Moncrieff's

burletta, to which it makes continual reference almost as if it were a play within a play" (24). However, as Williams further indicates, the original play, "a light-hearted version of the town and country mouse fable, enlivened with a few topicalities, takes on a much more pointed and specific edge in the smaller, more circumscribed world of Sydney in 1843" (25).

There is some conjecture over the identity of the author of *Life in Sydney*. Helen Oppenheim claims in "Colonial Theatre: The Rise of the Legitimate Stage in Australia" (Mitchell Library, MSS 3266, ca. 1960) that the play was written by H.C. O'Flaherty. Margaret Williams similarly proposes that he was the likely author. Their argument is largely based on an analysis of O'Flaherty's correspondence with the Colonial Secretary which shows a similar handwriting style to his manuscript for the drama *Isabel of Valois*. Williams also notes that O'Flaherty, then a young violinist and actor, was employed at the Royal Victoria in 1843. This ties in with an inscription on the NSW Archives manuscript which records: "written expressly for the Royal Victoria Theatre, Sydney, July 31st 1843." Leslie Rees points to manuscript's subtitled, "A Burletta in One Act, by F.O.C.H.," and suggests that the initials are very likely the reverse of H.C. O'Flaherty. Rees surmises, however, that because the letters are circled and scribbled out others may well have been associated with the writing of the burletta (60). The names of those whom it has been suggested might have been involved include James Tucker and Isaac Nathan.

Graham Pont has put forward composer Isaac Nathan's name as one of the burletta's authors. He proposes that the connection "is almost certain" because Nathan claimed to have been the originator of *Life in London* and would have had a personal stake in the adaptation. Furthermore, a number of the actors who were to appear in the production are also known to have been closely associated with him during his time in Sydney" (ctd. "Abstracts of Papers," Theatre History Conference, University of NSW, 1998). The link remains somewhat tenuous, however, as Nathan's relationship to the London version cannot be proven.

Richard Fotheringham, in his introduction to the play in *Australian Plays for the Colonial Stage: 1834-1899*, disputes any suggestion that O'Flaherty was the sole author of *Life in Sydney* should be identified as "A.B.C.", under whose hand the original letter to the New South Wales Colonial Secretary (applying for permission to perform the play) was written. His assessment of the "author's" initials, which Leslie Rees suggests are "F.O.C.H.", is that they are indecipherable and could just as plausibly be read as "A.B.C." (as the accompanying letter was signed), or 'F.A.C.T.' Fotheringham sides with Rees when he proposes that several authors, including O'Flaherty, must have been involved in the burletta's creation, noting that the manuscript appears to be the result of several pairs of hands.

1978: Downstairs Theatre, Seymour Centre, Sydney; 29 March 1978.

- **Prod.** Cartwheel Theatre; **Dir.** Rex Cramphorn; **Cost/Des.** Melody Cooper and Russell Emerson.

- **Cast:** David Brown, Paul Brown, Melisande Clark, Richard Healy, Bruce Keller, Aldo King, Jeremy Lovelock, Peta Murray, Linda Piggin, Tony Piggin, Sue Roberts, Gerry Robinson, Christine Sammers, Kim Spinks

Constantino, Romola. "Theatre Goes Back a Century." *Sydney Morning Herald* 4 Apr. 1978, 8.

Fotheringham, Richard, ed. *Australian Plays for the Colonial Stage 1834-1899*. St Lucia: U of Qld P, 2006.

Miller, Ben. "Transnational Connectivities of Whiteness: American Blackface in *Life in Sydney*." In *Reading Across the Pacific:*

Australia-United States Intellectual Histories. Ed. Robert Dixon, 2010, 151-166.

New South Wales Archives. [SZ 60] (manuscript)

Page, Robert. "Melodramas and Misfits." *Theatre Australia* May 1978, 26-7

Rees, Leslie. *Making of Australian Drama, The*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973, 58-61.

Williams, Margaret. *Australia on the Popular Stage*. Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1983, 24-5, 291.

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Expanded and updated from Clay Djubal, "What Oh Tonight" (Appendix C), Ph D Diss (2005) U of Qld.

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