

CHAPTER TWO

"THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS: COMPETITIVE STRATEGY AND NETWORKING"

Vaudeville as it is constituted to-day is not an art or a science. It is a commodity. The big men who control the central markets have spent a lifetime - not studying art - but in trying to fulfill the needs of a huge mass of customers of varying tastes with the goods which they seem to like best (Bert Levy).⁶⁷

Because pre-1930s' variety was first and foremost a commercial activity, the starting point of any systematic historical investigation must be one that focuses on its operational infrastructure in a competitive commercial market.⁶⁸ As an industry it operated at the fundamental level of rivalry - which Jack High describes as being any activity in which two or more entities strive to obtain the same objective (xiv). Walter H. Hamilton has noted too that "if all the world's a shifting stage [then] rivalry distributes the ever changing parts among the ever new players" (142). In order to survive each variety organisation was therefore required to adopt various strategies that would increase their market share. This might be in response to direct competition (a rival variety company) or alternative entertainment offerings - such as touring drama troupes, a circus, or a local social event. Such rivalry was not always undertaken in an aggressive manner, however, but appears to have been conducted mainly in a non-combative and non-belligerent fashion. While instances of aggressive professional rivalry, personal enmity and self-serving interest certainly occurred within the local variety industry throughout the period under investigation, it mostly operated with varying levels of mutual cooperation. The key to understanding this aspect of the industry lies in both its professional machinations and social infrastructure - whereby highly mobile practitioners with few stable community ties relied heavily on a subculture of transient professional peers for the type of support they might otherwise have received from family, neighbours and everyday workmates. This aspect of the variety industry distinguishes it from most other commercial industries of the era because most non-theatre people tended to locate themselves in a more or less permanent location, and hence were able to establish community ties in the local area or nearby vicinity.

Although rivalry may have helped maintain or increase both performance standards and reputations, profit was always the bottom line for the variety industry. The extent to which various high profile entrepreneurs cooperated with and supported their rivals on occasion

⁶⁷ Levy, Bert. "Vaudeville: Words to a Critic." *Fuller News* 28 Jan. (1922), 6. The quotation is part of an extract taken from Levy's book, *For the Good of the Race and Other Stories* (n. yr.).

⁶⁸ The origins of the term "competition" have been traced by Kevin Dennis from the Latin verb *compeo*, used in Roman jurisprudence to refer to the "competency" of individuals to bring a case to court. Translated into English *compeo* implied "competition" - to "compete" or to "sue" for the same object in court (High xiv).

indicates, too, that the industry operated very much along the lines of the "structure-conduct-performance" model proposed by economist F. M. Scherer. Business performance depends on the interplay of three independent factors: market structure, organisational structure and business conduct (qtd. in Christianson 86). The pre-1930s' variety industry developed a supportive operational ideology because no purpose could be served by putting other operations out of business. The main reason for this was that each manager relied on his rivals to maintain a pool of resources that could be drawn on when needed - which was frequently. Competitive strategy was the method by which each attempted to stay in business, and any promotional opportunity that might increase the attendance figures at their show was put into action because the potential for financial success or failure (leading to disbandment or bankruptcy) was all too often a day by day proposition. A letter writer to the Theatre in 1917 recalls, for example, the inventiveness of Frank M. Clark. Prior to opening at Bendigo's Royal Princess Theatre during the town's Easter week charity carnival (some forty years earlier), Clark found a way to gain much needed good publicity for the cost of forty or so sixpences. According to the correspondent, identified as J. G., Clark bought a supply of half price tickets while attending the carnival earlier in the day. He then distributed them to a crowd of children who were standing around with their parents and friends gaping open-mouthed at the fancy-attired performers spruiking the next session. After it "quickly got round the carnival that [Clark] had shouted the free show... everybody voted that he couldn't be a bad bloke, and hundreds went along to see [his] show that night just because he'd franked in the children at the fair" (42).

Managers weren't above creating a bit of controversy either, understanding full well the effectiveness of innuendo as a means of spreading interest. Stanley McKay is reported to have once caused "widespread discussion [that] subsequently resulted in excellent business" when he displayed his then current moving theatre repertoire on billboards:

*Every Inch A Man
What Women Suffer
When London Sleeps*⁶⁹

Competitive strategies were also utilised as a means of circumventing social and government restrictions as well as gaining circuitous financial advantage. Not one to miss an opportunity, Harry Clay showed that he was "still as astute as the best of them when it comes down to real business methods, by putting together a slight-of-hand" manoeuvre that once got him around a Good Friday entertainment embargo. Applauding his achievement Australian Variety records that Clay, in wanting "to avoid closing his theatre [that day]... set about securing a suitable attraction and bid successfully against several picture-show proprietors for Pope Pius X and

⁶⁹ Australian Variety and Show World 28 June (1918), 13.

Ireland, a Nation. Giving the [show] a fine display of publicity, Harry had the [subsequent] satisfaction of playing to a record house" (26 Apr. 1916, 12). Another example of competitive strategy, this time product placement for financial return, is recorded by the Theatre in its January 1916 issue. The magazine's vaudeville critic, X-Ray, attacked the practice of artists and managers surreptitiously inserting advertisements into stage patter and comic routines, writing: "This advertising lurk is distressingly evident throughout the [Tivoli] follies." He particularly objected to Vera Pearce and Walter Weems incorporating the name of a prominent tea product into the punch-line of their coffee gag (36).

Because variety in Australia developed in the first instance as an entertainment product (out of minstrelsy), the fundamental aim of its producers was to attract the widest possible market share by giving consumers what they wanted, rather than producing aesthetically or intellectually stimulating works of art. With its market largely comprising low to middle income earners with lower education levels, production decisions over performance, creative design, structure and content developed accordingly. An Australian Variety critic writing in 1918 expresses the general sentiment of the industry in relation to the variety's primary role: "Vaudeville is to be commended for... [its] brevity and brightness. [Because the] variety artiste depends principally upon his own initiative and ability... a regular vaudeville bill sustains much more interest for the greater portion of theatre-goers than any other form of entertainment" ("Where is Regular Vaudeville" 11). Some three years later Tivoli manager and producer Harry G. Musgrove similarly described vaudeville as: "A broad scheme of entertainment keyed on a dominant note of mirth and sprightliness. Its purpose is to amuse. It has nothing necessarily to do with problems or the experiments of the highbrows" ("Nothing but Vaudeville" 26). It is with this same understanding that the thesis will later approach the revusical - as a product to be staged and marketed to the widest demographic with the lowest possible production costs and hence maximize the greatest rate of return.

There can be little doubt that all levels of the industry producing revusicals were motivated by profit. The primary object, with few exceptions, was to attract customers away from both direct competition (i.e. rival revusical productions) and other nearby entertainment offerings, while also attempting to establish or maintain repeat custom. Variety was therefore like any other commercial business in that it was driven by a simple ratio - the exchange of market goods (i.e. entertainment) for profit. This emphasis therefore requires an historical analysis which considers the commercial/industrial aspects of both variety and the revusical as central to its development. The principle difference between the variety industry and the (non-theatrical) commercial world, however, is that each variety organisation was reliant on the same pool of human resources as his competitors. Each was part of a chain of industrial operations

that effectively trained, developed, groomed and promoted artists who could, and frequently did, become "products" to be marketed by a rival organisation. Harry Clay's principle comedian Ted Tutty would be engaged for much of the year on Clay's circuit but also frequently took sabbaticals to work with rival firms (see Ted Tutty's entry in Appendix D). Further to this the industry operated in a typically pyramid fashion, with a select (but never stable) group of stars being sought by managements around the country. Amy Rochelle, who in 1919 emerged as one of the country's leading principal boys, was initially taken on by the Fullers following Harry Clay's recommendation (see Amy Rochelle entry in Appendix D for further details). Clay's decision effectively meant that he lost one of his most popular attractions to his direct rivals in Sydney. The trade-off, however, was that the Fullers reciprocated by promoting Clay's operations to overseas stars coming off contract with their organisation.

It is under such circumstances that Australian variety's logistical and networking infrastructure was forced to operate as an integrated (though never unified) industry and not a motley collection of unconnected individual operations as the current literature would suggest. Using fundamental concepts of business theory and competitive strategy, the industry was able to maintain a sustainable entertainment practice for some fifty years as a result of its interaction with the social and market conditions in play during the local industry's formative years, circa 1860-1879. This entry structure, itself the result of several decades of American and British minstrel activity, nevertheless took on distinctive local structures in response to the practical day to day reality of commercial decision-making in the Antipodean context, and also in the context of a much smaller population. This chapter therefore serves to locate the creative and industry developments of Australian variety within the commodity market paradigm with a view to establishing two points. First that an interconnected and viable nationwide industry must have operated outside the Rickards/Tivoli sphere (a point missed almost entirely in the current literature). The second issue seeks to explain how this industry organised itself. The historical data presented in later chapters can then be placed within (or made sense through) the parameters of an "industrial logic."

The first section of this chapter draws on theories of industry strategy, competition and growth - and in particular the conclusions drawn by Michael E. Porter, whose seminal exploration of competitive strategy was first published in the early 1980s. The long-held notion that no variety industry of any consequence existed in Australia can be disregarded using an even earlier work, that of Edith L. Penrose. Her 1959 publication, The Theory of the Growth of the Firm argues that growth in any industry "is connected with attempts of a particular group of human beings to do something; nothing is gained and much is lost if this fact is not explicitly recognised" (2). Penrose's conclusion is that when any commercial "management tries to make

the best use of the resources available, a truly 'dynamic' interacting process occurs which encourages continuous growth but [also] limits the rate of growth" (5). Thus each industry segment (i.e. company or troupe), by engaging in commercial activity must necessarily have undergone some level or degree of change over time - whether growth or decline. This position is supported by Porter⁷⁰ who argues that change for (or within) an industry does not occur "in piecemeal fashion, because industry is an interrelated system." He further points out that although "industry evolution is always occurring in nearly every business and requires a strategic response, there is no one way in which industries evolve" (184). The point to be made here is that periods of growth and decline are intrinsic to any business or industry. And as this must necessarily be the case an historical survey of industry operations and infrastructure should identify some degree of evolution⁷¹ - or alternatively, that an industry of some kind existed in Australia apart from Harry Rickards' operations.

1. PRE-1930s' VARIETY THEATRE AS A COMMODITY INDUSTRY

In treating variety theatre production as an industry rather than as a theatrical genre this study must necessarily attempt to gain insight into what Australian historian Julian Meyrick aptly describes as a "felt-world of creation, so different from the speaking, relatively consistent surfaces of academic cultural criticism" (v). Professional theatre activity as Meyrick further notes "is not cut and dried, failsafe or predestined, but must constantly involve inconsistencies, incoherencies, misunderstandings and muddles" (v). Theatre industry activity is clearly an inconsistent, human practice and one at odds with the relative safety of the text. One initial, and significant, reservation concerning this project's capacity to construct a viable and practical reconstruction of the variety industry - without total reliance on primary source observations from the era under examination - was founded upon the assumption that past commercial activity and recent theory might very possibly conflict with each other. It was also apparent that competitive strategy and commercial industry analysis was a relatively new field and thus possibly presenting problems in terms of a critique of the pre-1930s variety industry. Indeed as a site for critical investigation it was not until Frank Knight's pioneering analysis⁷² of economic competition in 1921 that the area first came under close theoretical scrutiny. Prior to this the

⁷⁰ Porter's use of the term "industry" is also interchangeable, in that it can imply an overall industry (e.g. Australian variety), a physically located industry (e.g. the Sydney variety industry), or particular/individual industry (e.g. Harry Clay's operations). If necessary, Porter specifies which level of industry he is referring to.

⁷¹ As an organic metaphor the term "evolution" is problematic for historians, not through its literal sense - that is, as the gradual process whereby an entity changes an earlier to later form - but through the implication that later forms are more advanced or superior. This study will use the term evolution as it is used by industry and economics theorists, whereby it is recognised that industrial evolution occurs in response to the need for change forced upon it by strategic and economic forces and not a descriptive for lower to higher forms or values.

⁷² Frank Knight. Risk, Uncertainty and Profit (1921).

only forms of evaluation were journalistic reports and industry-based commentary. A further complication was possible, too, in that a split in the field of industry analysis had been on-going since early the 1920s - with one camp following a "perfect industry" premise (whereby the analysis is applied to competition within a theoretical market); while others preferred to focus on the area of practical management analysis. This thesis takes as its guidance, however, Jack High's conclusion to the preface of Competition, published in 2001, in which he writes: "Business historians have enabled us to understand the technical, organisational and competitive significance of... business better than the economists working within the perfect markets paradigm" (xl). While both fields of study expanded in different directions and with considerable speed, mutual consensus was reached in at least one area - with this involving the sectioning off of commercial activity into various periods, beginning with the Classical period (c1850-1870), followed by the Neo-Classical period (1870-1920). Despite much theoretical work having been carried out in these areas it is the work of Michael E. Porter which serves as the benchmark, largely because he best approaches the slippery area of competitive strategy. As High further notes in the preface to Competition:

Strategy is such an important part of the business life... [and] Porter has been instrumental in this line of inquiry.... The result [is] a competitive analysis that [integrates] economic structure and rivalry... Porter is able to bring rivalry and strategy back into competitive analysis because he does not consider market structure per se to be competition. Rather competition is a kind of behaviour, the rivalry emphasised by the classical and early neoclassical economists. Market structure, by contrast, is the environment in which the firm must compete... A strategy that is appropriate for an industry with many small competitors [like the variety industry] will not generally be appropriate for an industry with a few large ones.... By taking structure as the environment in which competition operates, Porter significantly extends the range over which market structures are relevant to managerial strategy (xxxix).

The starting point for analysing industry evolution is the framework of structural analysis. The general consensus of most writers focusing on competitive strategies and industry analysis indicates that while each industry's structures can differ in fundamental ways - the driving forces that lay at the heart of industry change are economic. Thus economic relationships - and the strategic implications underpinning these relationships - play a pivotal role in the evolutionary process. As noted earlier, the current historical record pertaining to either the theatre industry in general or the variety theatre in particular, shows that there has been little attempt to address even the most fundamental concepts of industry analysis. The notion of Australian variety entertainment being organised within an industrial logic is not even implicit in the literature. There is, for example, no acknowledgment of the phases or stages of industry evolution known as the industry/product life cycle - a concept described by Porter, as the "grandfather" of predictive concepts (157). This concept, advanced by Polli and Cooke (1969), and later Kotler (1972), proposes that each industry, or indeed even individual products, undergoes a number of

phases (effectively described as an "S" shaped pattern).⁷³ These are said to be introduction, growth, maturity and decline.

Stages of the Life Cycle

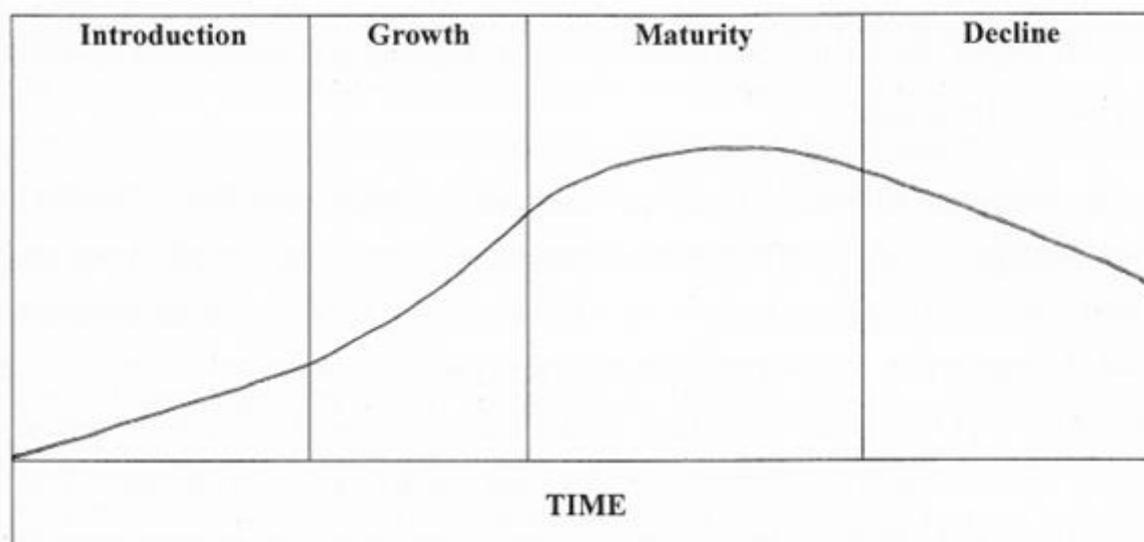


Figure 3

(P. Kotler, 1972; and R. Polli and V. Cook, 1969, cited in Porter, 158)

While this concept has attracted some legitimate criticism (largely directed towards problems in assessing the duration of each phase, the fact that some industries do not go through the "S" shaped pattern at all, and that some industries see revitalised growth after periods of decline), a core principle is still relevant and indisputable. This principle, as Porter and Penrose acknowledge, infers that no industry or product available to the commercial market can remain unchanged throughout its lifespan. Rather, all industries (or products) must necessarily undergo some degree of evolutionary change. While the industry/product life cycle theory has been superseded since at least the late 1970s, and hence is not an issue here, the fact that theatre historians had no need for it, or indeed any other industry theory for that matter, is an issue. That such an approach has not been attempted may well be due to it either having been considered unnecessary or perhaps simply not considered at all. In light of the fact that variety industry growth must have occurred, the issue at hand for theatre historicism is determining how much growth occurred and how long did it last?

In Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analysing Industries and Competitors, Michael Porter argues that as any industry emerges, its potential structure(s) form in response to (and perhaps even dependent upon) the direction and success that early industry entrants achieve. "The luck, skills, resources, and orientation of firms in the industry," he writes "can shape the evolutionary path the industry will actually take" (163). In the context of Australian variety it is

⁷³ See also T. Levitt (1965), R. D. Buzzell (1966), W. E. Cox Jr (1967) and J. E. Smallwood (1973).

fair to say that not all the early entrants were successful in realising the potential of the Australian market during its early stage of development. Indeed most, like Charles B. Hicks,⁷⁴ Dan Tracey or Frank M. Clark, for instance, were curtailed by circumstances either beyond their control, or as a result of poor managerial decisions or actions. However, each of these entrants did to some degree provide the local industry with its foundation characteristics, and thus set in motion its initial structure.

One significant structural determinant of Australian variety was that it required constant change - whether through the presentation of new turns by artists on a weekly basis, or through wholesale changes in company personnel on a frequent basis. Very few variety performers were afforded the opportunity of long engagements on a particular organisation's city or suburban circuit, let alone at one venue. Even high profile and long-serving artists with leading variety companies - those like Will Whitburn, Charles Pope and Irving Sayles (Rickards/Tivoli), Jim Gerald (Fullers) and Ted Tutty (Harry Clay) - were obliged to take on engagements with other entrepreneurs on a semi-regular basis throughout the course of their professional life.⁷⁵ As the Theatre records in its August 1906 issue, even the local drama industry found itself disadvantaged by the smaller population size: "Owing to its small population Australia can only support short runs, and that means a constant change of programme, giving artists every opportunity to become versatile in their business" (11). While this factor was inherent to both industries, the need for frequent change in variety was fundamental to its generic structure and ideological premise.

For most artists the only strategy available whereby they could maintain a constant professional career was to accept engagements with companies touring interstate, playing, for example, the Queensland circuit (which initially comprised the larger coastal townships, along with Charters Towers, and later the inland regions). Despite its isolation, Western Australia had the advantage of two large centres close by (Perth and Fremantle) and the profitable gold mine circuit, of which Kalgoorlie was just one major centre). Tours undertaken in the West also invariably called for at least one stopover in Adelaide. Other options were the small but viable Tasmanian circuit; the New Zealand "Dominion" circuit; and several NSW circuits - one along the South-West rail line, another through the Hunter Valley and beyond to the Northern Rivers, and a third along the Northern railway to Tamworth and Armidale. The discovery of minerals in Broken Hill also provided companies with an incentive to travel to the far west of the state in

⁷⁴ See Richard Waterhouse. "Antipodean Odyssey: Charles B. Hicks and the New Georgia Minstrels in Australia, 1877-1880" (1986). For further details on Clark and Tracey see Appendix D.

⁷⁵ Jim Gerald, for example, while contracted to the Fullers was leased out to Stanley McKay for some two years (c1914-916). The Fullers regularly leased out other artists to various managements, including Ted Holland (Bris) and Birch and Carroll (Qld). During his 20 years with Harry Clay, Ted Tutty also spent part of each year with other firms.

later years. Because the initial entry barriers demanded that each industry entrant tour, variety's entertainment structure was therefore built around the practical ideals of fluidity and adaptability. The *modus operandi* was to form small, flexible and low-cost troupes (around ten to twelve performers, often including couples and siblings). This evolutionary process, as the following chapter will examine in more detail, saw the early Australian variety industry operate, as with its American and British counterparts, as a largely transient industry. However, while overseas variety industries had begun to establish permanent or semi-permanent operations by the late 1860s, neither Sydney nor Melbourne saw such a movement until around the mid-1880s. Both cities were also too small to accommodate performers for long-term engagements even through to the late 1920s.

Although the Australian variety industry drew heavily from the structure of touring American and British companies in setting up its initial structure, the Australian industry context (particularly the smaller population) meant that emerging local troupes and performers were called upon to show much greater versatility and adaptability than their overseas counterparts - an aspect that a number of critics and leading industry spokespersons of the era saw as the country's greatest strengths. Con Moreni, a second generation Australian variety performer, records in a 1913 Theatre article, for example: "The average Australian performer can make it good in any country in the world, and in many cases do infinitely better... The explanation is that he gets such a good schooling. In Australia a man has to be versatile. He has to do everything. And he has to do it - not in a slipshod manner - but do it well" ("Australian Performers" 32). Writing a little over a decade later, Albert Marks, then a manager for British variety agent, D. Davis and Co, compared the Australian industry with that of England, providing further support to Moreni's claim:

In England one can run the same act for 12 months without changing anything, and playing twice nightly has the whole day to themselves. In Australia with the small population, acts have to change every week and with an afternoon matinee it leaves only the morning to performers, and that, in many cases is taken up with rehearsal (100, 105).

Australia's small population meant that professional variety artists could not establish semi-permanency (let alone permanency) in any city or with any company, as was the case with many British and American performers. The widespread nature of the population also meant that each engagement with different companies might see them travelling to distant areas over extended periods. It is this constant movement that the later section focusing on methodology explores, notably the difficulties in tracking individuals or troupes as they moved from company to company and from place to place. The early phase of the industry also saw local performers and emerging entrepreneurs being offered engagements with either overseas companies (often only as chorus members) or with little known, and largely disadvantaged, smaller companies. As

a community, or indeed as a distinct Australian subculture, such hardships led to an "us against them" attitude, and subsequently helped instil in Australian performers a sense of collegiality that provided the emerging industry with its collective sense of ingenuity and perseverance.

For the variety industry, as for other commercially-driven enterprises, one of the key dynamics for structural change was the market. The demand on performers and troupes to tour created and extended not only the potential market for variety beyond the Sydney and Melbourne demographic, but also instilled several unique generic characteristics which were themselves founded on the local audience's responses. Robert Toll, in *Blacking Up*, makes a similar observation of the role that early troupes like the Virginia Minstrels had in shaping the conventions of the minstrel show in America (51). This interactive response is also identified by Michel Porter as being intrinsic to the initial growth and direction of early industry entrants. He notes, for example: "Like any evolution, industries evolve because some forces are in motion that create incentives or pressures for change... Every industry begins with an initial structure... which exists when the industry comes into existence... The evolutionary processes work to push the industry toward its potential structure, which is rarely known completely as an industry evolves" (162). Porter further points to aspects such as innovation, and the identities and characteristics of particular firms, as vitally "important to evolution" because they become imbedded in the nature of present and potential consumers (163).

Edith Penrose likewise sees patterns in consumption and production, with these being shaped by "the multitude of individual decisions made by the businessmen who guide the actions of the business units we call firms" (9). As Penrose well understands, too, these decisions are made in direct response to the needs of the potential market. Her inclusion of consumption, which she also refers to as "productive opportunity," serves as a further indicator that the demographic factor played a vital role in the evolutionary process of variety entertainment through its appeal to the broader demographic base. As an entertainment it therefore attempted to cater to the widest possible age group, income levels (from working-class to upper-middle class) and educational levels in an effort to maximise both immediate returns and potential future production.

One aspect of the antipodean variety industry's early development to be either misunderstood or overlooked in the current literature is the overall quality of local acts. Most historical overviews tend to infer that all but a handful of Australian performers were second or third rate. The Tivoli organisation's over-representation and the focus afforded its many imported stars gives further weight to such observations. However, with no government or private subsidies available, the commercial reality of variety production (particularly in a

relatively small population), meant that almost every individual performer's or management's long term future relied on regularly presenting entertainment of a quality which not only attracted initial patronage but hopefully repeat patronage. There is no sustainable evidence supporting the view that Australian variety consumers - whether city-based or regional - were "easy pickings" or that they accepted anything put in front of them. Richard Waterhouse's research indicates, for example, that American entertainers were known to warn their colleagues about the "up to date" status and high expectations of Australians (126). The response towards variety performers not up to an audience's expectations is perhaps best reflected the article "Trial Turns: Acts the Regular Audiences Don't See," published the 30 June 1926 issue of Everyone's .

Every Australian vaudeville patron understands the meaning of the term "getting the bird." For the benefit of those whose education must have been sadly neglected, it is here explained that "giving the bird" is the audience's polite (?) way of intimating to a performer that his services are no longer required, and that they have no further desire to hear evidence regarding his skill as an entertainer. The bird is given in various ways - by the count out, by throwing pennies on the stage, and by the more vulgar method of heaving at the unfortunate artists vegetable long past their prime (9).

A 1920 interview with the Managing Director of Fullers Theatre Ltd, Benjamin J. Fuller, adds further weight to the notion that Australian audiences were well versed in knowing what they wanted:

The one thing to remember... [is] that seventy-five percent of the members of the audiences [are] native born, and therefore do not know names in vaudeville - all they know is whether an act pleases them or not. The greatest star in the world would not count for much with the audiences in popular-price houses in Australia if he did not present a good turn and live up to his billing matter ("Australia the Paradise" 28).

Charles Norman, in speaking of his experiences with Harry Clay's country audiences during the early 1920s reveals, too, that they were uncompromising in their expectations:

Clay audiences were Clay audiences. They were exactly that. They knew the business. You had to please them. They knew a lot about it, and you couldn't kid them. Any act or acts that didn't have much talent - well they woke up to that pretty quickly. No they wanted the best and they demanded the best let me tell you.... The bush was the only alternative to the city... they couldn't play around the city long, you see.... There were always shows in the bush... it was a great outlet for Australian talent (qtd. in Djubal, Appendix 208).

The tendency to think of regional circuits as fodder for theatrical mediocrity is also difficult to sustain because the majority of professional artists working the Australian circuits would have been acutely aware that their long-term prospects hinged on treating regional performances with the same level of professionalism as for city shows. Albert Goldie, writing for the Theatre in 1917 indicates, for example, that travelling showmen were generally treated with suspicion until they had proven themselves after a few visits. Even then the company might be required to use the ploy of making complimentary speeches about the township before leaving (10). The fact that B-level touring companies like Harry Clay's and Ted Holland's were

able to establish their companies through regional touring and not by serving city markets alone, indicates that their operational strategy, to return on an annual basis (or even more frequently), was achieved through quality programs. Far from being isolated and ripe for the picking by calculating theatrical conmen, regional centres relied very much on word of mouth criticism. Word of a poor show being played in a nearby town could be transmitted, for example, by travellers (salesmen, coaches, farmers etc) to towns further along the circuit often before they had closed their current season (Onlooker 15).

It is perhaps worth noting here that individual minstrel and vaudeville performers, and indeed many established troupes, would have likely used regional touring as a means of working in new turns or even entire shows before attempting them in front of city audiences and critics for the first time. It is equally clear, too, that turns already presented for city audiences were included on the programs of regional shows. The number of major regional variety operators working over long periods - notably Harry Clay, Ted Holland, Harry Sadler, Martyn Hagan, Delohery, Craydon and Holland ("the Australian team"), J. C. Bain and Slade Murray - were all able to return to particular regional centres on a frequent basis over a period of years and sometimes even decades. This provides even further support to the argument that the general quality of their programs met with their audiences' approval.

As a product produced for the commercial market, variety can be seen to comply with the notion of popular culture production described by cultural theorists such as John Fiske. He proposes, for example, that for any commodity "to be made into popular culture [it] must bear the interests of the people." For Fiske, popular culture consumption is not simply consumption per se, but the active process of culture - whereby meanings and pleasures are generated and circulated within a social system that engages with the products produced both for and by it (23). As Chapter Three will demonstrate, the rise in variety production over the course of the late 1870s through to the early 1900s was directly related to the strong allegiance Australia's popular culture market had towards this type of entertainment. The increased demand was also in response to the rise in the average income level, which meant that the market could attend more often if not more regularly. Richard Waterhouse writes in "Popular Culture and Popular Pastimes" that by the late 1880s two-thirds of urban Australians had reduced their working hours to forty-eight hours a week, with one result being that they were awarded the "sacred Australian institution - the half day Saturday holiday" (251). With turn-of-the-century Australians having more money to spend on leisure than previous decades, variety became the most popular choice for lower and middle class workers. Consistently cheaper than the drama (apart from the higher-priced Tivoli shows), variety provided an entertainment package ideally suited to the lifestyles of those about to enter the new century. As Waterhouse further notes:

"The favourable response to variety was chiefly the result of the urbanising process taking place. [This is because] it spoke directly to the values of urban life (269)... Members of audiences, uncertain of their status in a constantly changing environment, were reassured by songs and sketches which... reinforced notions about the superiority of their own identity, while the skills of jugglers, acrobats and animal trainers demonstrated what efficiency and discipline achieved" (256). It should be remembered, however, that variety's appeal was not exclusively the domain of urban audiences. Regional centres also actively supported the entertainment.

While the creation of new performative genres and styles occurred throughout the fifty year period in which variety dominated the local stage, one of the key factors in its continued popularity over such a long period of time is also surprisingly misunderstood by Waterhouse. Even though he is right to observe that variety embraced individualism and celebrated urban life (or even twentieth century expectations), his statement that variety represented a departure from the communal aspects of popular culture is typical of the flawed assumptions raised by theatre historians who undertook their research according to traditional methods. In this respect Waterhouse's general overviews of theatre history ("Popular Culture," "Blackface and the Beginnings of Bifurcation" and "From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville" being three examples) fail to measure up to his more focused studies (e.g. "Charles B. Hicks") because he has not attempted to explore with any rigour that activity which operated below the Tivoli (and Fullers) level of operations. Indeed, his assumption that variety departed from traditional social/communal life is inconsistent because it clearly does not take into account the way in which working-class communities consumed variety. Different sessions presented throughout each week by Harry Clay, for example, catered for different social groups, with Saturday matinees catering for children and women, while Saturday night audiences, described by Clay's manager, Bill Sadler as the "mob," invariably drew large numbers of labourers intent on having a good time - whether it be the evening's staged entertainment, or through card games held at the back of the hall or through fighting.⁷⁶ The notion of marketing different sessions to various social groups was a long tradition in the variety industry. Indeed, when Brisbane entrepreneur, John N. McCallum began marketing his weekday shows to businessmen during the war years - offering them the chance to unwind with a cigar and a glass of beer after a hard day at the office⁷⁷ - he was augmenting a strategy similarly used by Sydney-based variety manager Dan Tracey as far back as the early 1890s. Evidence presented within the following chapters will provide a more complete picture of the makeup of variety audiences, with the implication being

⁷⁶ See Clay Djubal. "Harry Clay and Clay's Vaudeville Company 1865-1930" (1998), 127, 145.

⁷⁷ Cremorne Theatre (Bris) advertisement further reads: "Mr Business Man, after a hot day spent at the office in the sultry atmosphere, you feel fagged out and nervy. You must have relaxation - it is essential... The Courtiers positively undertake to drive away dull care before you are aware of it. You will soon forget that the day has been a scorcher when you feel our cool South-easterly breezes" (Brisbane Courier 19 Jan. 1918, 2).

that variety (and particularly those staged in the suburbs) was a prominent weekly social ritual - whereby friends, workmates and relatives maintained their social allegiances (Fiske 49) through pleasurable interaction, productivity, relevance and functionality (Fiske 57).

One of the inconsistencies in Waterhouse's generalised observations (and he is not alone in making these) is that he collapses "variety," "working-class audiences" and the "Tivoli" into the same category when there is no evidence to support a claim of regular attendance at Tivoli programs by popular culture, low income audiences. As discussed in the previous chapter Rickards' operations could not support the sheer volume of numbers that comprised this market. Although the following section indicates that the Tivoli did succeed in providing an alternative to B and C level variety operations; evidence provided by Delyse Ryan in her introduction to "Brisbane Theatre During World War I" indicates that the Tivoli operations (managed by Hugh D, McIntosh) rarely managed to compete against the lower-level variety run by Ted Holland and Percy St John.⁷⁸ The reason for this is that the high-class Tivoli entertainments appealed to a niche (upper middle to upper-class) market and were ultimately unsuccessful in capturing the larger working-class Brisbane demographic.

The industry's continued growth was dependent not just on horizontal integration factors like competitive demand (marketing and presenting the right entertainment to the right market),⁷⁹ however, but also on vertical integration structures.⁸⁰ It is clear, for example, that the many variety organisations operating in Australia between the 1870s and 1920 relied to a great degree on their competitors being able to provide both engagement opportunities and on-going training for artists of varying levels of experience. The chronology of performer activity included in Chapter 2 (see Figures 1-18) demonstrates that artists were constantly moving from one management to another over the course of their careers. Both the Tivoli and the Fullers needed B-level operators like Harry Clay and Ted Holland in order to provide early entry training and on-going professional development that in turn allowed them to sustain their own operations. This was not only as a means of providing new acts but also as a training ground for chorus members. For example, Australian Variety indicates through a review of Arthur Morley's 1916 On Deck at the Coliseum Theatre (North Sydney), that Clay's suburban audiences were not being presented with programmes inferior to those on offer in the city:

The house full sign was registered long before the curtain went up.... It is really a bright little offering, and with the cast well allotted went briskly during its tenure of the stage... The whole show is scintillating with animation, colour and humour, and offerings of its kind

⁷⁸ Delyse Ryan. "Brisbane Theatre during World War I" (2000). See Introduction.

⁷⁹ Horizontal Integration describes the processes of merger, takeover, subsidiary expansion and so on which extend the influence of corporations/enterprises in a given field of economic activity. Also includes distribution and merchandising.

⁸⁰ Vertical Integration refers to the level of control established over each stage of production from raw materials to wholesale, as well as product exploitation.

should do much towards keeping the standard of Clay bravely in the fore-front of North Sydney patrons. With such productions brought to their door, suburbanites are going to have no trouble in seeing a metropolitan show for the present class of entertainment is well up to the equal of a majority of the city shows (Kitching "Coliseum" 9).

Clay simply had no choice but to maintain the quality of his shows for to do otherwise was to invite direct competition into his market, and hence risk a lowering of profit and reputation. This was due largely to the nature of an industry which was geared towards constant turnover - whether of artists or entrepreneurs. This same business policy affected all other operators, some of whom played the same suburban venues as Clay but on different nights. Indeed, each suburb might have had one or more other troupes playing there each week on either a one-off basis, or as with Clay's operations on a rotating basis (as part of his established circuit). For Clay the core strategy keeping other companies at bay was to offer city-standard entertainment at "popular prices." The same philosophy was subsequently forced on his competitors as they attempted to establish their own competitiveness in the minds of this rapidly expanding market. Of all the pre-1930s' variety organisations, only the Tivoli was unopposed because it presented an exclusive up-market type of entertainment, with the specific intention of attracting a more desirable clientele. Even then, the turnover of artists was such that this organisation also relied on a regular supply of substitutes - even if these were mostly minor engagements or non-performance employees.

The common practice of leasing artists out to other managements is one interesting example of where networking appears to have operated even between entrepreneurial competitors - an aspect that served to further underpin the industry's strong infrastructure. This practice essentially allowed the smaller producers or organisations (Sadler and Kearns, Stanley McKay, J. C. Bain, Birch, Carroll and Coyle or Ted Holland, for example) the opportunity to temporarily engage a contracted Fullers' or Tivoli star (short or long term) for the cost of the artist's contract for that period.⁸¹ This scheme worked well in Australia because there were benefits to all parties concerned. For the artists it meant more secure employment opportunities and reduced the possibilities of "overkill" in any one particular market or locale. A 1910 theatre par detailing Joe Rox's transfer to James Brennan's Melbourne theatre notes that the "front rank comedian" had been with Brennan since the opening of the National Amphitheatre (Sydney) in December 1906 - "except for intervals now and then when he has been 'sub-let' to others."⁸² For the B-level managements this system gave them access to artists with an A-level reputation, and hence worked to attract more patrons; and for the parent company it allowed them the

⁸¹ For example, Jim Gerald was leased to Stanley McKay shortly after signing with the Fullers in 1912. He remained with McKay's touring pantomime company until c1916. See Clay Djubal. "Harry Clay and Clay's Vaudeville Company 1865-1930" (1998), Appendix A, 1.

⁸² Theatre: An Illustrated Monthly Devoted to the Stage Sept. (1910), 8.

opportunity to cost-shift their overheads for these artists while still keeping them on contract. In the reverse instance the practice also allowed B-level artists on the verge of A-level status an opportunity to showcase their act on a Fullers or Tivoli bill.

**PEOPLE'S Concerts, Temperance Hall.—Combina-
tion Serenaders' Magnificent Minstrel Variety
Entertainments. Admission, 3d., 6d.; numbered re-
served, 1s.**

**PEOPLE'S Concerts, To-night.—Triumphal re-
appearance celebrated Clare Sisters, greatest
living champions modern high school terpsichorean
serio-comic vocalisation.**

**PEOPLE'S Concerts, To-night.—First appearance
Isabella Duncan, winsome descriptive dancing
serio-comic; Reg. Williams, marvellous acrobatic
comedian.**

**PEOPLE'S Concerts, To-night.—First appearance
Frank Tait, phenomenally expert acrobatic co-
median. Musical director, Professor Ireland.**

**PEOPLE'S Concerts, To-night.—Last appearance
James Robustus Stapleton, marvelous lightning
change artist, eccentric comedian, unrivalled dancer.**

**PEOPLE'S Concerts, To-night.—Last appearance
Walter Lloyd, Australia's mimiable tenor v. ca-
list; Florrie Williams, charming patriotic serio-
comic.**

**PEOPLE'S Concerts, To-night.—Howard Sisters,
fascinating serio-comic terpsichorean duettists;
Minnie Belle's (Gippsland nightingale) beautiful
National ballads.**

**PEOPLE'S Concerts, To-night.—Kohlman and
Gardner's eccentric Ethiopian comicalities,
humorous instrumentalities; farcical absurdity, Rus-
sian Court.**

**PEOPLE'S Concerts.—Why patronise expensive
inferior amusements, when threepence admits
to brightest, best entertainments in Australia?**

**PEOPLE'S Concerts.—Vacancies for first class
Variety Performers, Vocalists, Comedians,
Dancers, Specialty. Apply Secretary, Meib. Tem-
perance Hall.**

Peoples' Concerts (Temperance Hall, Melbourne)

Age 17 Nov. (1900), 12.

Melbourne's long-running People's Concerts (beginning in the mid-to-late 1850s)⁸³ is one example of competitive industry substitute positioning. The operators promoted the concerts as a cheap alternative to the "expensive and inferior amusements" on offer elsewhere in the city.

At 3p (6d reserved) admission, the Peoples' Concerts were effectively a third of the price of Harry Rickards shows.

Evidence of the Australian variety industry's growth can also be seen in the increased flow-on of complimentary (or ancillary) products relating to actual variety production during the early twentieth century - notably costume-making, properties and scenic art production, songwriting, sketch writing, performance training (i.e. dance, singing, acting etc) and lighting

⁸³ See advertising in the *Age* throughout 1897, which claims that the Peoples Concerts had been "running successfully for over 40 years" (17 Apr. 1897, 10). The aspect of competitive pricing strategy is explored in Chapter 3.

(gas and/or electric). In addition the variety market was able to sustain increasing numbers of industry magazines from 1913 onwards (Theatre, Australian Variety, Everyone's, Green Room etc), as well as increases in the sales of sheet music and songsters. In the late teens and early twenties variety also helped provide additional interest in the local motion picture industry, with many well-known variety performers appearing in productions around the country. The demand for complimentary products led therefore to the clustering of businesses within the various cities - and notably in Sydney, which due to its larger size and the market's greater preference for variety over Melbourne became the industry's operational epicentre.

Clustering refers to the centralisation of businesses in a particular geographical locale which are related by technology, markets, and suppliers, and draw on common talent and infrastructure such as transportation. A cluster is the difference between a scattering of businesses that happen to be in the same place and an industrial community that shares a distinct culture and sense of identity, interests, and future. Clustering leads to new rivals, service providers, supplier networks who tend to congregate in the same geographical area as a means of increasing business and lowering overheads. Locally, new firms start up as entrepreneurs and seek to tap the market growing around them. Simultaneously, outside firms are lured by the region's growing reputation. This magnet-effect applies as well to investors seeking new market opportunities (including media operations such as the Theatre and Australian Variety). A key factor in the growth of clusters is that they possess unique competitive advantages – that is, is the creation of specialised supporting infrastructure and services. These help draw in new firms and also act to anchor them in the region by providing support functions that may be difficult to find or costly to create elsewhere. This fundamental industry strategy will be seen as one significant factor in the emergence of the Australian revusical during the WWI era (see Chapters Four and Five).

The Australian variety industry's growth throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can also be seen as a result of first increasing its penetration into the national market place and then later through repeat patronage. As Michael Porter notes in relation to this aspect of industry evolution, the key to maintaining an upwards growth rate when the marketplace is predominantly repeat custom is achieved by "either stimulating rapid replacement of the product or increasing per capita consumption" (168). Variety, which effectively offered the first option by default of its generic format, was also able to increase per capita consumption through several industrial strategies. First, it maintained (apart from the Tivoli) relatively low admission prices over the period.⁸⁴ To a large degree the requirement that

⁸⁴ For a list of admission prices charged by various companies touring Queensland between 1888 and 1917 see Clay Djubal. "Harry Clay and Clay's Vaudeville Company 1865-1930" (1998), 103-4.

management keep prices down was in keeping with the popular culture traditions of the genre. It was also very much a response to the practical operations of variety production. In essence, a large portion of production costs was borne by the artists themselves rather than by management. For example, most acts supplied their own costumes, backdrops and props. Transport to and from city venues was also largely paid for by the artists (with regional touring costs taken care of by management). Each company operator, however, would take responsibility for ancillary production costs (venue hire, long-distance transport costs, musicians, production teams etc). The slow rate of growth in terms of technological advances also played a role in helping keep production costs down. The second issue, taken up in greater depth during the following chapters, concerns the industry's penetration of the national market as the national transport infrastructure increased, as both metropolitan and regional growth occurred, as average income levels were raised, and as the industry infrastructure itself increased with the demand.

Although internal and technological developments in the variety industry and shifts in market demands occurred slowly over the course of variety's fifty year domination of live entertainment in Australia, and indeed are often not immediately noticeable, changes nevertheless took place. Taste transformations within the variety marketplace are perhaps best understood through the changes in genre-specific activity over the course of the period 1870 to the First World War. While foreign minstrel or "nigger" bands had been plying their trade in the country from the 1840s, it was not until the 1850s and 1860s that that minstrelsy began to establish its unique internal structure or logic. The influx of American minstrels to Australia during the 1860s, largely a response to the potential for economic gain following the discovery of gold, led to an eventual division of loyalties within the local industry. In his overview of Antipodean blackface entertainment Richard Waterhouse notes that the increasing popularity of low entertainment theatricals during the 1850s and 1860s saw the local stage divide into "legitimate" and "popular" (illegitimate) spheres (126). This was essentially the result of the industry's leading practitioners of that era, notably, W. M. Akhurst, Sydney Nelson, George Coppin and Samuel Lazar, adopting commercially-driven strategies as a means of responding to consumer demand. While Australian-written theatre in the 1850s and 1860s ranged from comic operas, operettas and opera to pantomimes, burlesques, farces and the loosely-defined extravaganza, by the mid-1870s the minstrel show and burlesque were the predominant fare at variety houses in most capital cities.

In relation to the changing trends of audiences Waterhouse's 1989 publication "Blackface and the Beginnings of Bifurcation" rightfully acknowledges that differences between American/British minstrel shows and the Australian product existed. Although Waterhouse is right in

suggesting that sexual innuendo and direct political and social commentary were "almost altogether absent from the Australian programs" (132-3), other observations are somewhat incompatible with the evidence uncovered as part of this study. In particular is his erroneous claim that the stump speech was missing in the antipodean minstrel structure (133). The "stump speech" while rarely referred to as such was nevertheless incorporated into the 1870s and early 1880s minstrel shows as the "public lecture." Indeed, the career of Australian-born comic, W. Horace Bent, arguably the country's first great comic, was built not only on his self-penned farces and musical burlesques but also on his humorous lectures. Two of his oft-repeated and "soul-stirring" lectures were "The Reminiscences of a Raw Correspondent" and "The Comic Discourse: An Analysis of a Nursery Rhyme" (see Bent's entry in Appendix D).

As demand for variety rose over the first decade and a half of industry growth, and as growth in the local industry (in combination with imported artists) attempted to match the market needs, so too did the demand for entertainment innovation. While this thesis will acknowledge that generic creativity did not extend to consistent creation of new entertainment forms (until the emergence of the revusical) but rather the re-development or re-working of previous forms, innovation nevertheless occurred. Innovation, and not just a variation in acts, was no doubt a day to day industrial factor. The development of individual turns was a constant requirement of local performers. Reviewers and industry commentators throughout the 1880s also note the emergence of local variety performers noted for their expertise in various areas of minstrelsy and vaudeville - comedians of the calibre of W. Horace Bent, Charles Fanning, W. H. (Billy) Speed and Will Whitburn, for example, who could sing, dance and act their way through any show. There were also eccentric dancers and knockabout acrobats such as "Delohery, Craydon and Holland," and Albert McKisson and Jack "Porky" Kearns; and descriptive singers like Beaumont Read, Harry Clay and Arthur Farley who acted in farces, worked as interlocutors and filled in as comedians if called upon. Burlesque and pantomime specialists like Slade Murray and Percy St John, both wrote and directed many productions, and also worked comedy sketches; as did male and female sketch artists like D'Arcy and Eva Stanfield, and Martyn Hagan and Lucy Fraser. There were even performers who developed local characterisations - like Melbourne-based, "aboriginal" minstrel, "Dave "Murrumbidgee" Gardner. Comic instrumental duos like Jantz "Kaiser" Kohlman and Johnny Gardner are also known to have innovated numerous new turns into their act, often incorporating recent social issues into their mini-musical sketches.

Frequent changes in each individual act's product, in addition to constantly changing programmes, not only operated to fill the market demand for variety but also served to improve the industry's general circumstances and hence assisted in the overall growth rate. The search for

new product essentially knew no bounds, with each management always on the look-out for exciting and original acts to fill the public's insatiable demand for variety. Of all the turn-of-the-century Australian-based entrepreneurs Harry Rickards was best positioned, however, to find unique specialty acts, largely through the extensive contacts he made while on his frequent overseas trips. One of the more unusual Rickards turns of the early century, for example, was seen in 1902 when he secured the Australian rights for the latest American vaudeville novelty - "Netball" - replete with two teams of suitably attired lady players ("Music and Drama" 9).

Although the expansion and maintenance of industry activity over the course of variety's half a decade or more of operations was greatly reliant on the development of competitive strategies and an industrial infrastructure, it was only one factor to play a significant role in variety's growth and entertainment dominance. It is clear, for example, and as Chapter Three demonstrates, that as performers and suppliers of associated industry products increased the volume of their products through greater (and more permanent) access to distribution through these existing operations, so too the newly emerging smaller firms entered the field having become aware that an increasingly viable market existed. Among the other aspects determining potential expansion were those relating directly to industry personnel. Most essential were the ways and means practitioners organised themselves as a self-supporting community (even despite being often in competition with each other). The two factors explored in this respect are cross-generationalism and networking.

2. CROSS-GENERATIONALISM

Disparaged by some critics as just another post-modern "ism" theory, generationalism has also been criticised as "kind of cultural gatekeeping" that attempts to make sense of the late twentieth century (Davis 16), while at the same time helping to maintain the privileged status of the cultural elite (baby boomers) at the expense of new or emerging generations - i.e. Generation X (Davis xi). Mary Ann Hunter, who notes that generationalism may have long been a feature of modern social discourse, describes its attractiveness to social theorists as providing a means through they might consider "the processes of ascertaining cultural significance, values and futures to be vastly different amongst aged-defined categories, and [thus infer that] a hegemonic kind of power circulates in a variously paternalistic, obeisant, antagonistic and resistant relationship between one generation and the next" (8). While this thesis is not interested in generationalism as a contemporary tool of inquiry or in contributing to debates over its usefulness in the modern context, it is nevertheless necessary to look at recent perspectives on generationalism, and in particular those inspired by the methodological approach to social

history undertaken by Sudhir Hazareesing.⁸⁵ The purpose here is to differentiate generationalism and cross-generationalism in order to demonstrate that the former's theoretical and ideological underpinning is wholly unsuitable for any analysis of pre-modern social structures. This is because the notion of generational conflict (the generation gap) did not exist as a social construct during that period. Indeed, one of the reasons why variety was able to engage the interests of both audiences and performers in Australia (as elsewhere) for more than fifty years without the genre being forced into crisis points of innovative change when new generations of performers entered the industry, was that successive generations of emerging youth did not resolve to disrupt the status quo in the same way that teenagers have been able to do since the 1950s.

In his paper delivered at the 1998 University of New South Wales Theatre History Conference, Julian Meyrick argued for a new consideration of historical accountability - primarily one based on the concept of generationalism. Meyrick, whose research was undertaken as part of his Ph D, sees this approach as essentially a tool which allows historians to more easily delineate "the common experiences of successive cohorts of intellectuals" (136).⁸⁶ For Meyrick, as with Hazareesing, generationalism also draws attention to the pitfalls of the two traditional approaches to historicism - functionalist (the artist outside the social context) and ideological (the artist reflecting upon and reacting to the social context). In this regard he points to the fallibility of Australian theatre history which he argues has separated into two typical camps: a) genre theory, in which styles of theatre succeed each other with no more causal logic than different meals on the same menu; and b) various types of historical determinism - usually directed by a nationalistic influence - in which the growth of Australian theatre is presented as an inevitable feature of wider social development" (ii-iii). He goes on to suggest that the two have tended to "link up in an unholy alliance" pointing, for example, to the cause and effect approach in the work of Leslie Rees, who not only emphasises the relationship between socio-economic factors and the rise of a national theatre, but more significantly the gradual evolution of a more sophisticated theatrical aesthetic.⁸⁷ For Rees the theatre is one which provides not only the language for the plays, but one which reflects the values of its audience, who in turn support the theatre and hence provide the financial returns necessary to support the writer.

Historical approaches such as that of Rees rightly have their merits in that they allow enough flexibility to account for creative talent while at the same time providing an account of the practical requirements of entrepreneurial activity and industry infrastructure. The

⁸⁵ Intellectuals and the French Communist Party (1991).

⁸⁶ Meyrick has since completed his dissertation and published his findings in See how it Runs: Nimrod and the New Wave.

⁸⁷ Titled, "Two Generations of Post-War Theatre Practitioners," the quotations are cited from a copy of the paper given to me by the author. See also Meyrick's doctoral dissertation.

problematic and incongruous organic metaphor "evolution," on the other hand, inevitably leads to explanations which are both simplistic and irreconcilable. One answer to this problem, as proposed by Meyrick is to "weld the idea of different generations of practitioners as a tool to crack the smooth surface of Rees-style determinism" (v). Meyrick's prime interest is in post-modern dramatic activity, however. Thus he sees generationalism as a way of addressing the different assumptions of each strata of artists in order to discover more about "the inconsistencies, incoherencies, misunderstandings and muddles that make up theatrical activity" (v). Conversely this study is interested in identifying how the network of industry practitioners operating over a period of several decades - that is, several generations of Australian-born or resident writers and composers - without any obvious signs of inconsistency or resistance.

Although the focus of Meyrick's thesis and this present study are located in essential opposition (pre-modern/popular culture v post-modern drama), the core assumptions still remain relevant to both studies. Primarily this requires that the production of theatre be treated as a practice rather than to force upon it assumptions read out of a text. The day to day practicalities of production - the professionalism of commercial activity - imply specific, and undoubtedly significant, notions regarding the structures of artistic enterprise. The major difference between the theory of generationalism (post-WWII) and that of cross-generationalism (effectively pre-WWII) concerns, however, the social structure of the periods - and in particular the effect on society of mass media structures. Meyrick's thesis relies largely on the understanding that each successive generation of post-modern theatre practitioners attempts to oppose (or at least re-direct or re-shape) the fundamental ideologies and practices of the previous generation. In essence, generationalism establishes the notion of an ideological divide - or generation gap - as a factor in the cyclical developments of post-modern media-driven forms and artistic practices. This theory is largely analogous to the crises of paradigms Thomas S. Kuhn describes in his 1970 publication, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, whereby he argues that inventions in science, as well as creativity in the arts, and indeed in many human social practices, are the result of continuous cycles of tension and release.

The evidence presented throughout this study suggests, on the other hand, that the above theories are less than satisfactory in relation to commercially-driven, popular culture variety entertainment production of the pre-1930s' era. Indeed, it is being argued here that while all significant generic developments in variety were founded on either new creative influences - for example the arrival of jazz music or American burlesque, or through advancements in technology (i.e. electric light) - these innovations were augmented throughout the industry by practitioners young and old. That several generations of variety artists over several decades were able to relate to each other and negotiate industrial activity and innovation was no isolated or

unusual feat, however, but rather mirrored the way society of the period constructed its relations between the different generations.

Arguably the most significant difference between the notions of generationalism and cross-generationalism is the media factor. The post-WWII explosion of media forms, and the subsequent intrusion of new media opportunities, clearly re-defined the social and cultural structure of Western societies in particular. One such effect was to create new cultural spaces by synchronising and shaping identity among large numbers of people. The role of the image in the mass media has been particularly vital to this process because it allows large numbers of people the opportunity to identify with a particular style or way of living regardless of place. Christopher Booker proposes, for example, that the media has been able to take advantage of three psychological factors that invariably emerge out of the teen years in most individuals - insecurity, peer conformity and the desire for escapist fantasy. In The Neophiliacs he writes:

The modern entertainment industry is almost entirely concerned with producing day dreams and day dream heroes.... there is no dream so powerful as one generated and subscribed to by a whole mass of people simultaneously - one of those mass projections of innumerable individual neuroses which we may call a group-fantasy... such as the teenage subculture based on dress and music (qtd. in Humphries 7).

Generationalism can be understood then as a temporal concept with little or no physical boundaries, and which identifies specific age groups who can then be organised into a consumer demographic. An especially dynamic tool in the arsenal of commodity industries, generationalism is perhaps the most favoured means of targeting prospective consumers within particular markets. This enforced intersection between cultural groups and the media is also a phenomenon specific to the post-modern, or late modern, societies such as that which exists in Australian today. It was not, however, an aspect of pre-modern society, and hence any examination of social structures or industrial infrastructure (as with the variety industry) is required to understand the way social age-different groupings interacted with each other.

While generationalism is a recent development in social criticism, the notion of generational structures in society is not. Stemming from the historical reckoning of an interval of some thirty years between the birth of the parents and that of their children, the term generation has been in use since at least the 1300s. Perhaps one of the most significant developments in terms of identifying specific generations in opposition to others was the classification of the post-WWII "teenager." There was, for example, no concept of a teenager for those living in the late nineteenth century. That is not to say that youths did not undergo a period of life determined by "teen" years, but that this construct did not exist because according to law and social custom they were still considered children until the age of twenty-one (Kooyman xxvi). In her thesis looking at attitudes to children in the nineteenth century Mary Kooyman

points out that rather than there being a spectacular period of teenhood followed by adulthood, individuals approaching the latter stage of life essentially "matured and [then] gradually withdrew from childish affairs" (xxiv). Quoting controversial social historian, Philippe Aries, with whom she largely disagrees, Kooyman finds that at least one of his interpretations more realistically fits the understanding of the movement between childhood and adulthood: "The child was not so much opposed to the adult... as preparing for adult life" (qtd. xxiv).⁸⁸ One aspect of this dissertation's research to become apparent (after having identified the ages or birth dates of many practitioners of interest) is that even those performers in their thirties (and sometimes up until their early forties) are often referred to in the reviews and comments of journalists as "young" or "youthful." Those performers under the age of twenty-one were invariably described as either "children" or "juveniles." With no form of social security available, too, it is not surprising to see many senior industry figures performing on the same programmes as these juveniles while well their fifties, sixties and beyond.⁸⁹

Unlike post-1950s media-constructed perspectives of youth rebelliousness, the concept of teenhood in Australia prior to the 1930s shares only loose connections with turn-of-the-century larrikinism or hooliganism. As Stephen Humphries notes in his analysis of the perception of working-class children and youth between 1889 and 1939, society interpreted alternative or non-conformist (i.e. unruly) behaviour by young people not as a site of resistance by "teens" or young people at large, but as a result of the working-class ethic. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the larrikin character effectively disappeared from the vaudeville stage after a brief burst of popularity during the early to mid-1890s. Edgar Waters, who traces the social and literary rise of the larrikin from his earliest appearance around the goldrush era, speculates as to why this occurred. In agreement with Humphries' observation of stigmatisation of larrikinism or hooliganism along (working) class lines, Waters writes:

The larrikins themselves made up a significant part of the audiences of the variety theatres... [and] the pushes were hardly likely to accept unsympathetic portrayals of the larrikin without noisy evidence of their disapproval, and yet a portrayal sympathetic enough to please the pushes would hardly have appealed to the more respectable members of the audience. The entertainer on the variety stage in Australia was hardly in the same position as the English music hall entertainer in London, who could caricature the Cockney costermonger as he would, because costermongers did not form a significant part of his audience (215-16).

One significant aspect relating to the cross-generationalist paradigm, and in particular to the variety industry, is that its infrastructure was largely reliant on family units, and hence most

⁸⁸ Philippe Aries influential book, *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), as Kooyman notes, has since drawn much criticism for its methodological and logical inconsistencies. Most contentious has been Aries claim that the condition of childhood only became invented between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries.

⁸⁹ See for example the Martyn Hagan, Jack Kearns and Stanley McKay entries in Appendix D.

troupes contained at least one married couple (sometimes with performing children) or a sibling act. The variety industry was not too different from the rest of the Australian society, in that the majority of lower socio-economic families were reliant on children and even extended family members to assist with income. Thus parents working in the variety industry, not unlike their non-variety working-class peers, "expected their children to contribute to the family economy as early as possible" (Kooyman xxvi). Phil Scraton makes the point that in matters of rights, power and participation children and youth are essentially dependent on adults in any institutional context (17). Adults are essentially givers and providers, serving children's interests and meeting their needs. Even in the second decade of the twentieth century juvenile (teen) performers were largely dependent on their older and more experienced peers, with these senior individuals often taking on de facto "parent" roles in terms of educating and giving advice to younger performers - particularly when touring. Roy Rene provides an insight into this relationship between emerging artists and the more experienced older professional when recalling his own early career experiences:

When I was first working, even revues were unknown... It was doing the farce that taught me how to walk and talk on a stage. It gave you confidence when you were told by the producer to come on and do a couple of lines. Working with Frank York, a great producer, or Ted Tutty, they'd just come to you and say, "look, I want you to go on in the afterpiece, you just come on and say so-and-so, now don't forget where you are supposed to do it." I'd think I was getting to be a big man when I got a chance like that. You'd get a lot of help, too, because Frank would say "Now don't do it like that, do it so-and-so." To tell you the truth that was [how] I learnt timing... Old performers were always ready to come to you at the end of a show and say, "Listen, son, I wouldn't do that, I'd do it this way," and then if you listened to them you'd learn a great deal. They'd always build you up when you did your turn because their clapping on stage would help get the audience into the proper mood.... I was only a very young performer at that time (52-5).

Evidence of numerous relationships between emerging artists and more experienced practitioners can be found throughout the two leading industry magazines. Australian Variety comments on the pairing of Joe Rox (whose name first begins to appear on variety bills around 1905) and veteran comic, Wal Rockley (c1891) in a number of issues in 1917. In suggesting that their contribution to the premiere production of Fooling a Farmer at Clay's Bridge Theatre in 1917 helped create the best revusical the troupe had yet presented Harry Kitching records: "Wal Rockley and Joe Rox have now been working together so long that they have opportunity to study one another's ways and never fail to get in good comedy. They are established favourites" (Kitching, "Harry Clay's Bridge" 5.). Two years later Harry Kitching observed that George Sorlie, while almost "a show in himself" also routinely assisted "those acts [needing] a little comedy support to brighten them up." Kitching adds: "One thing in his favour [too], is that he never oversteps the mark, but always knows where to pull in" ("Princess" 30 May, 1919, 14). Children and juveniles working in the variety industry were perhaps even more inclined to seek

support and opportunities through their older professional peers, too, because their continual touring created an enclosed community upon which they greatly depended. Key factors such as displacement from an established community location, extended family, and reliance on employment in an unstructured and high turnover industry, meant that they tended to become marginalised from the general population. As a consequence, their ideological and practical day to day strategies were constructed (or at least reflected) by the constantly changing adult peers with whom they shared their lives.

This reliance on other practitioners for support, whether financial, emotional or practical, was intrinsically part of the industry infrastructure from its earliest days. These contacts and relationships subsequently developed into a network that further strengthened the industry's development and allowed it to maintain its operations even during times of intense and long-lasting economic insecurity. Of all the factors to play a role in the continued growth of variety, networking was possibly the one upon which all others were allowed to operate, and as such requires much deeper understanding by historians attempting to analyse and critique the pre-1930s' variety industry.

3. THE VARIETY NETWORK

For the Australian variety industry to muster enough local artists during the WWI years, and thus take advantage of both the reduced number of overseas performers coming into the country and the steadily increasing population (particularly in the east-coast cities), there needed to be a significant number of men, women, children (and animals) either undergoing training or who were already working in the industry. Often required to work in front of audiences capable of throwing objects as an expression of their displeasure, these performers would therefore need to have experience beyond that of amateur entertainers. What is rarely understood, however, is that not only did this new wave of industrial activity require the presence of many hundreds of seasoned performers and perhaps thousands of emerging ones, but there had to be in place an extensive, viable and supportive infrastructure of managers, scenic artists, musicians, song writers and writers, costume makers, critics, performance teachers (dance, singing etc) along with already existing regional and suburban circuits. The extent to which the Australian variety industry needed local performers is indicated by Ben Fuller, who pointed out in a 1920 Theatre interview: "For the past three and a half years practically no talent had been imported into Australia." He then went on to suggest that one consequence of the increased opportunities for local performers was that Australia "had actually now become an exporting country so far as artists were concerned." The interviewer notes, too, that the Fullers had recently sent forty acts

to Africa and that he believed Australia would have no need of returning to the pre-war situation whereby large numbers of foreign acts were engaged to tour this country" ("Australia the Paradise" 28). It is being proposed here, then, that the industry was only able to take advantage of this relatively brief window of opportunity because it had over the previous two or more decades developed and established a viable and self-sustaining network of professional practitioners, widespread circuits, accessible venues and appreciative audiences.

As both an industrial and social mechanism networking relied on more than just the possibility of interactivity (i.e. pathways) between individual performers and various variety organisations. The socio-industrial pathways established over the course of several decades therefore became a fully-functioning subcultural environment - one that existed across the broad spectrum of activity - from micro-environments (small suburban operations, for example) to the macro-level (national and international circuits). The variety entertainment network must therefore be seen as having operated via a system of convergence - whereby artists, managers and associated practitioners and organisations developed and maintained a self-serving and supportive industry infrastructure. An unusual example of this convergence can be seen in the instance whereby the Theatre openly praised the efforts of Martin Brennan, the managing editor of its main rival Australian Variety, noting that he had made excellent headway since starting up a few months previously, and that his magazine bore "every evidence of having become a healthy permanent Sydney institution" (Feb. 1914, 37). The Theatre's regular vaudeville columnist X-Ray even went so far as to say of Brennan in the September issue: "[He] is a guide, philosopher and friend of the vaudeville pro" (32). This display of respect was not confined only to the early period of competition between the two magazines either. In its November issue of 1915 the same magazine's editor wrote: "During the past month Variety celebrated its second anniversary. Starting as it did with little or no capital the present status of Variety – it is now twenty-two pages and read by every vaudevillian in the Commonwealth – is certainly a great tribute to the brains and hard work Mr Brennan put into it" (48). The following year the same magazine noted: "The December 29 issue of Martin C. Brennan's weekly...took the form of an annual.... A bigger theatrical production for the money has never been brought out in Australia. It consisted of seventy-six pages... For Mr Brennan the production must have meant no end of work, and for this I hope he was fully compensated by the generous advertising support he received and the wide sale the annual must have commanded" (Feb. 1916, 44). The notion of convergence as demonstrated in these examples is, however, more often applicable to the industry's social infrastructure at the performative and managerial levels. Although fragmented - comprising mostly small, independent but interconnected organizations - the industry was able to continue expanding largely because of each individual enterprise, big or small, was able to

take almost immediate advantage of any positive developments which affected it (for example, the increasing access to information systems, support services, emerging technologies, transportation and population centres, and the slow down of in the arrival of foreign artists). The industry could also respond positively to any negative developments (such as economic depression, influx of foreign artists prior to WWI, and the loss of many male performers due to war duties).

Networking was the core mechanism which allowed the industry (at a national level) to emerge, expand and consolidate over several decades, and even through such harsh economic times as the 1890s, and it operated by providing interconnecting access through established pathways, points or environments. The development of an industrial network, especially one spread across the largely isolated continent of Australia prior to the advent of such high-speed media technologies as the telephone and radio, was only possible over an extended period of time. The following chapter will demonstrate in this respect that the Australian variety industry took some ten years or more to expand its logistical dimensions before a national network became operational on a larger scale. While a small number of minstrel companies had been coming to Australia since the early 1850s and touring to regional centres, these were mostly confined to the Victorian and New South Wales goldfield regions. It was not until the mid to late 1870s, when the first significant influx of overseas minstrel companies began to arrive in the country, that the regional circuits expanded into national grids. One consequence of this was that variety artists were forced into making long and arduous tours as part of small companies - and thus relied heavily on each other for support. Over the years as people criss-crossed the nation with other managements and performers, sometimes meeting up in distant regions or cities, this sense of camaraderie developed into a "networked society" or "subculture" that operated within (but also outside) the wider Australian community. In contrasting locality-stabilised societies of previous times with an increasingly transient post-industrial society media theorist Manuel Castells suggests that such networks constituted the new social morphology of modern society. "The diffusion of networking logic" notes Castells also served to "substantially [modify] the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power and culture" (469). Networking therefore allowed the Australian variety industry the opportunity to mobilise its operational characteristics into a supportive and empowering fraternity of opportunistic professionals rather than as a miscellany of isolated competitors.

Social interactivity such as networking relies not on a linear progression of temporal and physical activity but through different degrees and means of activity - the possibility, for example, of return paths between producers and users and both simultaneous and delayed activity. Sheizaf Rafaeli writes that interactivity is "the extent to which communication reflects

back on itself, feeds on and responds to the past" (Newhagen and Rafaeli 6). The evidence uncovered during the research phase of this project shows that interactivity was a means by which variety entertainers mostly accessed opportunities. It is clear that they were reliant as much on past activity (previous relationships/employment etc) as they were on the present in any situation they found themselves in. Extending on the previous section (cross-generationalism) the following chapter will further provide evidence that the network comprised practitioners of differing ages spread across several decades and hence with varying degrees of professional experience. This situation therefore provided opportunities for performative development through pro-active interaction between older, experienced artists and new and emerging practitioners. It also allowed for continuity as new relationships were established, old associations re-established, old routines re-worked, new alliances created, new routines and performances invented, introductions made, past disputes settled or inflamed and new disputes begun.

In support of the position that networking relies on interactivity Castells, argues that networking is a long-standing form of social organisation - a system through which communication flows occur, and which are themselves open, flexible and adaptable forms able to expand without limits within the shared network (469-71). Using this theory as a framework it is possible to see how networking supplied the Australian industry with the possibility of sustained growth. At the heart of interactivity, however, are two component elements - interconnectivity and interoperability. Both are necessary before networking activity can occur. Interconnectivity is the means by which different groups or individuals connect (word of mouth, advertisements, auditions, letters of recommendation etc), while interoperability refers to actual existence of operating systems (circuits, companies, management operations, tours, associated infrastructure etc). Each of these networking aspects was operating within the non-variety theatre industry during the middle half of the nineteenth century but at a more localised (city-centric) level. The difference between the dramatic stage and variety, however, is primarily related to the need for frequent changes in location and audience by the latter industry.

Although networking was essentially part of everyday practice for individuals and troupes alike, it was not confined to back stage interaction between artists or in the offices of managers. As a subculture, variety performers socialised with each other away from theatres and troupe commitments. This occurred in any number of ways - through private parties and gatherings; as members of formal organisations like the Masons and Druids (and in later years through the Australian Variety Artists' Association); through less formal social groups like the

Chasers (Australian Variety-organised fishing and boating get-togethers on Sydney Harbour⁹⁰); at outdoor festivities and events (company picnics and gala day match-ups with other variety companies etc); and via sporting interests, notably horseracing. In a 1997 interview carried out with Valmai Goodlet, the daughter of Harry Clay employee Maurice Chenoweth, Goodlet indicates that during her childhood in Sydney during the 1920s her parent's home was frequently the centre of private entertainments put on by friends and associates of her father. She recalls the names of several leading performers of the period, including Amy Rochelle (one of the Fullers' leading pantomime principal boys) being guests in the house. Variety practitioners could also expand their own network through their access to temporary board and residence facilities that catered only to professional theatre people. Two such places in Sydney were the long established business run by Mrs McGavigan in William Street (Australian Variety 23 Sept. 1914, 10) and Mrs Chadwick's at Scotland House in Albion Street. According to advertising, the latter was patronised during the war years at least by "The Dandies, J.C. Williamson's, Fuller's and Harry Clay's companies" (Australian Variety and Show World¹²).



Stanley McKay's Pantomime Company

Returning from an inland tour - Christmas 1912.

Theatre Magazine Mar. (1913), 9.

(Courtesy of the Fryer Library, U of Qld)

⁹⁰ The Chasers' exploits were frequently covered in Australian Variety between 1913 and at least 1917. See, for example, issues: 22 Oct. (1913), 12; 10 June (1914), 12 (incl. "When the Baritone was waiting on the Hungry Harry Clay," Charlie Vaude's poem commemorating Clay's initiation into the Chasers); 29 Dec., (1915), 18.; and 17 Jan. (1917), 46, 76. NB: Vaude's poem is reproduced in the Appendix I. For a brief history of the group's origins and activities see "Little Joe." Australian Variety and Show World 21 Dec. (1917), 19. A photograph of Joe Wangenheim (organiser/cook and boatman) and Jack "Porky" Kearns can be found on page 203 of this thesis.

While this thesis will tend towards detailing the more positive aspects of this networked community, it should bear mention that as with any social community or gathering there would have been various levels of conflict between particular participants - from temporary arguments and misunderstandings to longstanding feuds. There are numerous reports published in the industry magazines and newspapers of the era, along with publications such as the Bulletin, either detailing rumours or confirming both private and public spats between individuals and organisations. A 1918 item published in Australian Variety, points to this facet of life in the variety community, noting for example: "the continual rows and hard feelings which exists amongst the artists in the vaudeville profession of today is getting a bit over the fence. It is up to some of our managers to put a stop to it. This can easily be done by refusing to engage people who are continually upsetting the whole foundations of a good, solid working show" (27 Sept. 1918, 5).

Some of the more public instances of conflict known to have occurred within the upper levels of the industry network include the legal action taken against George Marlow by George Willoughby and others in 1913. The dispute between Marlow (aka Joseph Marks) and Willoughby (aka George Willoughby Dowse), George T. Easton and Arthur Bernard Davies erupted into a board-room fight for control over the George Marlow company. It was claimed that after Willoughby had been appointed director, Marlow began countermanding various business decisions and activities such as the signing of cheques, purchase of plays and engagement of artists ("Theatrical Suit" 18). A few years later another top level industry dispute between Hugh D. McIntosh (Tivoli) and Australia's two leading theatre industry magazines of the 1910s and 1920s (Australian Variety and the Theatre) turned into a long-running public stoush. Although a precise reason (and date) for the conflict arising is unclear, it is possible that McIntosh's position as managing director of the Sunday Times inflamed the situation. Certainly much space in both magazines is given to claims of bias by McIntosh towards the Tivoli's programmes (at the expense of other variety organisations). McIntosh's association with the Times also had ramifications in terms the Tivoli's presence in the Sydney Morning Herald, with mention of the company almost non-existent for two-and-a-half years after advertising was withdrawn between January 1913 and 29 May 1915.

The conflict between McIntosh and the Theatre and Australian Variety appears to have first become public via a libel case brought against the latter magazine's editor, Martin C. Brennan, by McIntosh in early 1916. Brennan at the time was also the Australian representative of Billboard magazine. McIntosh's dispute was in response to a Billboard article that reflected, according to the Tivoli manager, an inaccurate account of his current financial stability. Although the legal case was settled after Brennan disclaimed all responsibility for the piece

through an open letter published in Australian Variety (qtd. in "Capitulation - and Peace" 33), the pair continued to trade opinions about each other in public for some time afterwards.⁹¹ Brennan even went so far as to charge McIntosh with using his position as managing director of Sydney's Sunday Times newspaper to routinely inflate the quality of his Tivoli acts. By this stage even the Theatre had joined in the fray, taking McIntosh to task over "the jam [he was giving] himself and all connected with him" through the Times. As "The Month in Vaudeville" editor, X-Ray, further put it:

Side by side with the overspreading show "Mac" gets in the issue... one looks in vain for a single line about the National - the one vaudeville house in Sydney with which the Tivoli is competing... How glorious it must be to have a paper in which you can thus extol your own show... There isn't from beginning to end in what appears in the Times respecting the show the suspicion of a critical note or dissenting word ("Mac for a New Role" 38).

The Theatre continued its vitriolic attacks on McIntosh unabated throughout 1917. In its January issue, for example, the magazine published gossip overheard in the circle section by a contributor. "Anyone suffering from insomnia should certainly come here. It's a sure sleep-inducer" (51). In the March issue it went so far as to question McIntosh's entrepreneurial abilities: "Three performers that were Rickards institutions when Harry Rickards was alive - Fred Bluett, Tom Dawson, and Irving Sayles [were] evidently... not good enough for Hugh D. McIntosh. Else how did he come to lose them shortly after taking charge of the Rickards circuit?" (31). The June edition continued to take McIntosh to task:

A New Zealand correspondent of a Hugh D. McIntosh paper wrote some scathing things about a revue company that has finished the Fuller (NZ) circuit... To which the only comment worth while is - Rats!... if the company in question had erred even half as much as the Hugh D. M writer tries to infer some of our 'critics' on the daily papers would assuredly have pointed this out. I wonder did the correspondent in question see a company called "the Tivoli Follies" that visited these shores a few months ago? And did he notice... [one particular turn]. I don't recollect anything in the [Victor] Prince-show that came near some of their gags for gratuitous filth (50).

Not content to let things slide, the same issue records: "The Follies finished up at the Tivoli on May 11. There's some talk of them going to Africa. It doesn't matter much where they go, so long as they go somewhere, and provided it is far enough away. For the Follies have been with us too long" (49).

The conflict aspect is evident at the performer level, too, with their being several recorded fallouts between individuals and troupes. Roy Rene's longstanding feud with George Wallace, possibly a combination of professional competitiveness and personal dislike (Wallace had once dated Rene's wife, Sadie Gale) is one such example. Another high profile incident, recounted by Charles Norman, concerns the incident that permanently split the famous partnership of Dinks

⁹¹ X-Ray's "Month in Vaudeville" section of the February 1916 edition of the Theatre Magazine includes part of the Billboard interview, complete with a breakdown of McIntosh's "bewildering" items of claim. X-Ray adds fuel to the issue by asking "by the way, does 'Mac' ever sit down and laugh at himself? He should, and would - if he had any sense of humour" (41).

and Oncus (Jack Patterson and George Wallace). The situation is said to have come about after Wallace made a remark about Patterson's wife, Trixe Ireland, which Patterson found offensive.⁹² The media and public interest in the 1918 Perth fallout between manager Harry Sadler and soubrette Phyllis Faye was to become one of vaudeville's more spectacular media stories, however. Centring on Sadler's accusation that Arthur Morley and Faye were engaged in an affair (both were married to other people), the incident eventually ended up in court, embroiling several well-known variety stars, notably Morley and Jack Kearns in controversy. Faye won her suit for libel, which included her testimony that the manager attempted to seduce her when she was a juvenile performer. Sadler's high profile reputation was left in tatters and less than twelve months later he committed suicide (see Sadler's entry in Appendix D for more details).

Although the extent to which conflict occurred throughout the industry is naturally impossible to establish now, such occurrences should be placed in context with the general practice of theatre industry professionals. In this regard instances of serious conflict would have been the exception rather than the rule, and in most cases conflict would most likely have been resolved, or at least managed, in order to allow each company or troupe to continue operating as a professional unit. There is anecdotal evidence suggesting, too, that the variety subculture that evolved during the late 1800s and early 1900s was in part one that effectively provided support to performers who suffered the type of indignities not uncommonly heaped upon them by hardened suburban and regional audiences. Recalling his experiences around the turn of the century in an article titled "Vaudeville Audiences of Other Days," Syd Russell cites, for example, "three Melbourne audiences which possessed a most unenviable notoriety" - with these being Yarraville, North Melbourne and Fitzroy.

Yarraville was exceedingly tough, and it was not an uncommon occurrence for a performer to be followed after a show, and if the lads caught him he was in for a bad time... I have personally seen a performer knocked off his feet by a dead rabbit thrown unerringly by a member of the gallery... In the bad old days of the Empire, Broken Hill (referred to as the "Blood House") it was quite a common occurrence to have bottles hit the back cloth whilst a turn was on... At the Gaiety Theatre, Melbourne, audiences were [also] very tough some sixteen years ago, and it was nothing unusual for a visiting performer to have letters sent around to him, or her, bearing something to the effect that if they did not cough up (cash) they knew what would happen (74-5).

Charles Norman's memory of his days touring the NSW Hunter valley and Wollongong circuits for companies like Harry Clay⁹³ provides an equally compelling recall of the difficulties faced by performers over issues like conditions of employment and personal safety. It is not surprising then that artists whose livelihood meant that they were required to constantly move around the

⁹² Charles Norman. *When Vaudeville was King*. (1984), 104.

⁹³ Clay Djubal. "Harry Clay and Clay's Vaudeville Company 1865-1930" (1998), Appendix H.

country relied largely on the support and friendship of fellow practitioners, and hence effectively continued to reinforce the preservation of industry-wide affiliation.

The development of a variety network in the late nineteenth century was clearly a gradual process that developed without any over-arching organisation or direction. Throughout the 1870s and into the early 1880s the network served to support and develop opportunities for long term prospects for possibly several hundred local professional or semi-professional variety performers, with the majority likely to have been based out of Sydney or Melbourne where opportunities to locate work and gain experience in the newly emerging industry were greatest. That period is distinguished by the fact that no entrepreneurial organisation had yet established a permanent base of operations in either of the two capital cities. Minstrel companies operated by traveling between interstate capitals, regional centres and New Zealand, with the length of their seasons dependent upon the popularity of the company and/or the local population.

It was not until the first decade of the twentieth century that the industry initiated any type of formal industrial support - with the founding of the Melbourne-based Australian Vaudeville Artists Association (led by Sam Gale), and the Australian Variety Artists Association, which operated out of Sydney from May 1907 under the leadership of Bert Rache ("Australian Variety Artists" 22). The need for this unionised approach was in direct response to the increasing numbers of people entering the profession. By the end of the second decade of the twentieth century Harry Clay had alone engaged upwards of several thousand performers.⁹⁴ Indeed, by 1916 (as reported by the Theatre) Clay was rotating some 100 or more artists a week around his Sydney circuit ("Harry Clay Companies" 49). The previous year Ben Fuller placed a full page advertisement in the Theatre with the names of more than 250 artists then currently "enjoying pleasant engagements" on his "big Australasian vaudeville circuits" (Nov. 1915, 56). Neither of these insights includes the many different ancillary staff employed - stage managers, secretaries, lighting operators, advance men, costume makers, scenic artists, musicians etc. Operating around the same time, too, were such leading variety entrepreneurs as J. C. Bain and Howard and Graham (Sydney), Harry Sadler (Sydney and Tasmania), Hugh D. McIntosh (Tivoli circuit), Ted Holland/Percy St John and John N. McCallum (Brisbane), Walter Morris and Birch, Carroll and Coyle (Qld), Ike Beck (Sydney/Hunter Valley) and Percy Dix (Hunter Valley), suggesting that the number of performers (both local and imported) on stage in Australia during any given week at that time would have been several thousand or more - particularly if we take into account the dozens of lesser known companies playing the suburbs and regional centres around the country.

⁹⁴ See revised and updated list of Clay's performers in Appendix H of this thesis.

Although networking provided the industry with its capacity to function both creatively and professionally across temporal and geographical landscapes, it was not the only means through which artists engaged in the cross-fertilisation of ideas. As professional theatre practitioners variety artists were also inherently fans, too. Opportunities to socialise at the theatre would in most instances have begun at an early age, whether through family involvement in the industry or simply as children from a non-industry background. Roy Rene recalls that as a little boy he would take every scrap of pocket money and go to shows like Harry Rickards at Melbourne's old Opera House. "I watched all the big English and American artists [Rickards] brought out," writes Rene, "and believe me, I learnt quite a lot from them" (31). Opportunities to watch other artists were also available to professionals. Vaudeville showman Billy Maloney notes, for example, "there used to be a reciprocal arrangement between legit shows, by which members of one company could see the other's shows [for free], by a pre-arranged staggering of matinees" (73). Acrobatic comedian, revusical writer/producer and part time journalist, Alf "Redhead" Wilson (formerly of Morris and Wilson), also writes of this community of peers in a 1917 Australian Variety article entitled "In the Sandhill Days." Echoing Roy Rene's sentiment about the support offered by more experienced performers,⁹⁵ Wilson recalls the time some years previous when there were sandhills situated on the outskirts of Redfern and Waterloo near Sydney's Moore Park. His memory is of regular Sunday morning gatherings of athletes and variety performers who competed and taught others new skills for the "mere fun" of it:

The sandhills, he writes, always had a good house, probably because everybody was on the free list! But unlike most free list audiences they were good and encouraging... Such fine performers as Joe (Dutchy) Morris,⁹⁶ Billy Duckworth, Jimmy Frances, Martini, Tom Queen, The Walhalla Brothers, McKisson and Kearns, Jack Heller, Lennon, Hyman and Lennon, the Bovis Brothers. The Faust Family were frequent visitors, and by kindly advice and practice helped the beginners, and this after their strenuous work with Fitzgerald's or Worth's circus the night previous (17 Jan. 1917, 27).

The insights into the pre-1930s' variety industry presented in this chapter have endeavoured to show that while it was first and foremost a commercial activity, a networking logic also developed over time to form a socially-active and self-supporting infrastructure. As the following chapters will further demonstrate, the competitive strategies put into play by managers and entrepreneurs in combination with a strong and widespread industrial base allowed the local variety industry the ability to operate in an environment that although requiring almost constant mobility and undertaken in often difficult circumstances nevertheless provided significant employment opportunities. The evidence of its success can be seen not only in the massive increase in performers and industry personnel between the 1870s and the end of the First World War, but also in the expanded industry clustering and the longevity of careers

⁹⁵ Rene, Roy. Mo's Memoirs (1945), 53.

⁹⁶ Joe Morris, formerly Alf Wilson's long-time stage partner.

undertaken by a relatively large band of professional performers, managers and associated industry professionals. The examination that follows is therefore very much the result of research and analysis that has emerged only after first attempting to understand the industry's professional operations and social infrastructure.

The Two Leading Theatrical Magazines Providing Information on the Australian Variety Industry during the 1910s and 1920s



Australian Variety 6 Jan. (1915), 1.

In the first issue editor Martin C. Brennan stated that *Australian Variety's* aim was 'to provide pithy paragraphs' about the amusement world generally, with special attention given 'to fair and impartial criticisms on vaudeville acts that... come under notice from time to time in this and other States'. The magazine also reported on legitimate theatre, amusement parks, moving pictures, boxing and racing, and published interstate notes and letters from performers working overseas. It included occasional columns such as 'Frocks and Frills at the Vaudeville Theatre' along with regular reports on social clubs - the Australian Terriers Society, Australian Boosters Club and the Chasers, benevolent lodges and professional associations such as the Australian Vaudeville Artists' Federation and Magicians Club. Its office provided such services as a letter drop and the preparation of performance materials. It also organized benefits for distressed performers and their dependents, and lobbied against the unscrupulous and the unfair. The title of the magazine changed in 1916 from *Australian Variety and Sports Gazette* to *Australian Variety and Show World*. In 1921 Brennan incorporated it into the magazine *Everyone's* (1921-1937).

The Theatre continued on from *The Player: An Illustrated Journal Published Monthly in the Highest Interests of the Dramatic Arts*. It began in 1904 as a bi-monthly under the title *The Theatre: An Illustrated Monthly Devoted to the Stage* and later as a monthly periodical. In the 1912 the title was shortened to *The Theatre Magazine*, and the following year began including a regular section called "The Month in Vaudeville: Interviews and Impressions," which was edited and part-compiled by X-Ray. It often comprised 10 or more pages wholly devoted to variety and light entertainment. In 1924 the magazine's title was again changed, this time to *The Theatre, Society and Home*, and in 1926 it was given an entirely new look and renamed *Just It*. The magazine eventually ended publication sometime around 1927 due in part to the increasing market share of film and the subsequent slowing down of live entertainment activity.

The Theatre June (1916), 1.



NB: See footnote on page 12 regarding the use of abbreviated titles for these magazines in this thesis.