

and its meanings would make this work stronger. The precise detail and care that he shows for visual elements makes me long for his take on the sonic elements of the performance equation.

In the final chapter of this book, Auslander writes that “it is quite clear that in the quarter century since I first started formulating these ideas there has been a significant shift” (213). He’s right and, at times, sections of this book seem slightly antiquated. But this is not a detriment, it is precisely the point: Auslander takes us through a rich archive of his thinking about musical performance, persona, and practices of production/consumption to show us not only how his thinking has progressed in the rapidly changing social context of the early twenty-first century but also how our broader collective thinking about music, identity, mediation, and performance has developed. Auslander is an important thinker whose thorough and detailed work has productively challenged performance studies, popular music studies, and related disciplines.

Ultimately, this book is an important publication in the field of performance studies and strikes me as particularly valuable for thinkers who desire a better understanding of shifts in performance discourse since the mid-1990s, or those who want to glean more productively precisely how musicians as performers function in contemporary culture.

doi:10.1017/S0040557422000096

• • •

The Cambridge Companion to the Circus

Edited by Gillian Arrighi and Jim Davis. Cambridge Companions to Theatre and Performance. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021; pp. xxxiv + 292, 13 illustrations. \$99.99 cloth, \$29.99 paper, \$24.00 e-book.

Matthew McMahan

Center for Comedic Arts, Emerson College, Boston, MA, USA

Like the circus, edited collections are meant to allure, tantalize, and engage. Similarly, they promise as much variety as the limitations of space and time can allow. The *compères* of *The Cambridge Companion to the Circus*, editors Gillian Arrighi and Jim Davis, attempt to display the variegated concerns, methods, and approaches that constitute the still inchoate and multidisciplinary field of circus studies. In the process, they argue for an expansive definition of the term “circus,” a form that has evolved in a wide variety of contexts, included an array of performance traditions, and is itself defined by a search for innovation.

The circus formed via a reciprocal exchange among multiple cultures. The collection skillfully conveys this premise through essays that cover several national contexts, including Argentina, Australia, the Czech Republic, England, France, India, China, and the United States. At the same time, because there are sixteen individual chapters, the collection employs an approach that is deliberately diffuse.

It means to expose the neophyte to prominent topics and provide avenues for future exploration. As such, each chapter ends with recommended readings and often a glossary of important terms. Whereas Part I, “Transnational Geographies of the Modern Circus,” considers the history and spread of the institution of the circus across multiple national contexts, Part II, “Circus Acts and Aesthetics,” looks at the development of the chief types of act involved, including animal, clown, and aerial acts. Part III, “Circus: A Constantly Evolving Form,” explores the changing contexts of the circus over the past hundred and fifty years. Part IV, “Circus Studies Scholarship,” attends to circus as a field of scholarly study. Taken as a whole, these groupings arm the student, scholar, and practitioner with a wide view of the concerns, issues, changes, and prominent figures in the circus, past and present.

Rather than comment on all of the essays in the collection, each written with considerable merit and supported by thorough research, I will address here the most noteworthy examples. Chapter 2, Sakina M. Hughes’s “Reconstruction, Railroads, and Race,” illustrates how the rapid expansion of the circus led to new employment opportunities for African Americans in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. She conveys the complex compromises made by African American workers, who created opportunities via a form that widely trafficked in stereotypes, exploitative labor practices, and threats of violence. In the process, Hughes demonstrates an adept approach that considers how the economic, material, and cultural aspects of the circus mirror and influence its society.

Chapter 10, Kate Holmes’s “Aerial Performance: Aerial Aesthetics,” also stands out. She discusses the evolution of aerial acts in the circus by tracing the presence of female aerialists in the ring, but she goes one step further and theorizes on the aesthetics of the act. In essence, she questions how weightlessness, risk, gender, and physical appearance contribute to the sensate effect of these skyward performers. Her approach is phenomenological in nature, exploring how the manipulation of norms and conventions in these categories influences “how aerial movements are perceived by audiences” (157). In essence, Holmes teaches the reader not only what makes aerial performance distinctive from other circus acts, but also how to manipulate these qualities to make an impact.

Catherine M. Young, in her “Circus and Somatic Spectacularity on Stage in the Variety Era” (Chapter 11), discusses the porous borders between the circus and other variety entertainments—such as pantomime, vaudeville, and music hall—in what she terms the “Variety Era” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The forms were “united as global commercial entertainments embracing novelty to attract repeat and new customers during the apex of these popular entertainments” (172). The influence these forms had on one another “complicates our understanding of circus, pantomime, and variety as distinct genres” (174).

Agathe Dumont’s important entry on “Becoming an Art Form: From ‘Nouveau Cirque’ to Contemporary Circus in Europe” (Chapter 12) analyzes the emergence and influence of *nouveau cirque* or new circus in the 1970s. This movement is defined by separating the circus from its roots in popular entertainment. Over the past fifty years, practitioners and directors have recontextualized traditional acts outside of the big top and ring by mixing them with other visual arts, such as dance, music, film, and theatre. At the same time, the *nouveau cirque* has led

to the legitimization of the circus in academic institutions through increased scholarly study and training programs. Dumont's chapter makes a historiographical point by mentioning the subsequent tension between the "intellectual" and the "popular" in contemporary circus arts (189), as if the two terms are anathema to one another. Thus, only when the circus was removed from its original context was it recognized as artistic.

Last, Anna-Sophie Jürgens's essay "Through the Looking Glass: Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Circus Studies" (Chapter 16) performs a literary review of the imaginative scholarship taking place across various disciplines, including the sciences, literary studies, humor studies, and disability studies. Through her exploration, she demonstrates the vitality of the field of circus studies. For example, neuroscientists have investigated the "alteration of cerebral formations" through the complex motor exercises practiced in the circus (245).

The editors acknowledge the recent emergence of the field; yet what is missing from the Introduction is a historiographical account of how the circus, its acts, and performers have been written about in the past. As Charles R. Batson and Karen Fricker note in Chapter 15, "circus studies is a field in formation, and as such so are the methods scholars apply in their circus research" (231). With that in mind, what has been circus's place in the academy, historically speaking? What has constituted the nature, style, and concerns of circus scholarship prior to this entry? What are the lacunae that need to be redressed by the archive? These questions are answered, in part, by the last part of the book, but are left unattended in the Introduction, and might have provided useful context for the *Companion's* intervention in the field. Nonetheless, the samplings of studies offered successfully draw the reader's attention to the promise of circus studies by preparing students to pursue further research into the circus as a big top of manifold opportunities.

doi:10.1017/S0040557422000102

• • •

The Chinese Atlantic: Seascapes and the Theatricality of Globalization

By Sean Metzger. Indiana University Press. Bloomington: Indiana, 2020; pp. vii + 262, 35 illustrations. \$75 cloth, \$25 paper, \$12.99 e-book.

Ping Fu

Department of Languages, Literatures & Cultures, Towson University, Towson, MD, USA

Sean Metzger's *The Chinese Atlantic: Seascapes and the Theatricality of Globalization* offers fresh interpretations of the themes of exilic home and global engagements within the frame of globalization. The striking word "seascape" circulates throughout the book both as a metaphor and methodology. Its function and meaning are multifold. It metaphorically nurtures global China and practically forms a lens to zoom in on Chinese transoceanic migration, economic