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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Programming Britishness: The Royal Carl Rosa Opera Company's 1937 Tour of South Africa

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Abstract

This article provides a snapshot of the Royal Carl Rosa Opera Company's 'Coronation' tour in 1937, focusing particularly on the company's time in Johannesburg. It considers the Carl Rosa's tour as a 'cultural colonisation' endeavour on the part of the British Empire, aimed at reinforcing identity politics at a time when loyalty to the Empire was waning. The article examines the significance of the Carl Rosa's tour within the broader context of British colonial relations and the Coronation celebrations of George VI in the Union. Central to its argument is the analysis of the tour's commemorative programme, published by African Consolidated Theatres (ACT), which serves as a lens to understand the articulation of Dominion South Africanism amongst English-speaking audiences. Through an examination of primary sources and historical context, this article sheds light on the complexities of imperial encounters and the role of cultural exchange in perpetuating colonial power dynamics.

Keywords: Opera studies; Visual culture; Material culture

In 1937, the Royal Carl Rosa Opera Company embarked on an unprecedented journey. With 400 crates and packages of scenery and costumes, a singing cast of forty-five (principals and chorus), an orchestra of forty-three, and two conductors, the company set sail from its native United Kingdom to tour the Union of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. Both destinations had strong ties to the British Empire: South Africa (a British colony since 1815) had been granted status as a self-governing dominion with the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910,[1] whereas Southern Rhodesia (modern day Zimbabwe) was a self-governing Crown colony at the time. This was not their first overseas tour, but it was undoubtedly the most successful.[2] Initially scheduled for ten weeks, the tour was repeatedly extended by the company, which ultimately performed in Southern Africa for twenty weeks in total.

By the 1930s the Carl Rosa, as the company was widely known, had an established reputation as the leading English touring opera company in the British Isles. Founded in 1873 by German-born impresario Carl Rosa (1842–89) and his wife, soprano Euphrosyne Parepa-Rosa (1836–74), the company sought to offer opera in English to diverse audiences –

[1] Founded as a Dutch colony in 1652, the Cape of Good Hope was annexed by the British from 1800 to 1802 and again from 1806.

[2] Evidence suggests that the Carl Rosa Opera Company toured India in 1930; however, further research is needed to elaborate on this. See 'Calcutta Notes and News', *The Dundee Courier and Advertiser* (11 March 1930).

ranging from royalty and politicians to white- and blue-collar workers – at affordable prices. Starting with their first performance in Manchester in 1873, the company premiered the English translations of several venerated works and worked with composers to commission new English operas, performing them across Britain. From smaller venues in provincial settings to esteemed theatres such as the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, it is estimated that 750,000 audience members attended opera performances by the company each year.[3] After Rosa's death in 1889, the company changed management several times. From 1923 until 1950, the company was owned by H.B. Phillips. His wife, Annette, managed the Carl Rosa until 1960, when the company became defunct.[4]

The extension of the Carl Rosa's tour in southern Africa, attributed to popular demand, speaks to locals' appetite for high-quality entertainment. The company eagerly capitalised on this, in a way that heavily underlined the Carl Rosa's contribution to South African musical life. In an article published in a school magazine of December 1937, company manager H.B. Phillips describes South Africans as being 'starved musically'.[5] Upon the Carl Rosa's return to Britain, British publications reported the Carl Rosa having 'blazed the trail of opera in English from Cape Town to Salisbury 1700 miles north' and '[performing] in towns where opera had never been heard before'.[6] This line of reportage in a sense frames the tour as a cultural 'civilising mission' in line with the colonial project. While the Carl Rosa's prolonged engagement in the region undoubtedly attests to public demand, it also speaks to the tour's pivotal role in disseminating British cultural products throughout the region to reinforce the connection to Empire.

The praises lavished on the Carl Rosa company's contribution to South African opera culture obscures the fact that settlers there enjoyed a vibrant touring opera culture from the 1850s onwards. During the nineteenth century, touring theatre companies played a crucial role in the dissemination of culture throughout the colonial world. The socio-political effects of this phenomenon, especially in places like the United States, are now well-researched by opera and theatre scholars alike.[7] While the cultural plurality of companies, often comprising performers of multiple nationalities, and equally diverse settler audiences in colonies negated the prominence of certain works or composers, performance trends in geographical locations further removed from the cultural centres of Europe like Southern Africa speak to the prominence of English repertoire, influenced by the prolonged presence of imperial powers.[8] In South Africa, English opera and operetta proved particularly popular following the influx of settlers in the wake of the mineral revolution in the late nineteenth century. The research of Frederick Hale on various opera seasons in the Cape, and Kerry Murphy's work on Thomas Quinlan's tours have confirmed this.[9] However, this period in

[3] Carl Rosa Opera Trust, 'The Opera Company' (2016–2021), https://www.carlrosatrust.org.uk/opera.html (accessed 16 May 2024).

[4] The full history of the Carl Rosa is still being written. See Cecil Smith, 'The Carl Rosa Opera', *Tempo* 3/36 (1955), 26–8; Richard RePass, 'The Carl Rosa Opera Company Today', *The Musical Times* 93/1312 (1952), 256–8.

[5] 'Music and Musicians', *Eshowe School Magazine* (December 1937), 19–22, at 22.

[6] 'Blazing the Trail of Opera', *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (12 October 1937).

[7] See, for example, George Martin, 'Some Overlooked Operatic History', *The Yale Review* 97/1 (2008), 58–74; Katherine K. Preston, *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Troupes in the United States, 1825–60* (Chicago, 2003).

[8] Malan indicates that English works formed the core repertoire for most touring groups. J.P. Malan, ed., *South African Music Encyclopedia*, vol. IV (Cape Town, 1986), 357–8.

[9] See, for example, Frederick Hale, 'Popularising Comic Opera in Cape Town: The 1887 Season of the Searelle Opera Company', *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* 15/1–2 (2018), 41–58; Hale, 'From a Comedy of Errors to Tragedy: The Cessation of Italian Opera in Cape Town in 1877', *South African Journal of Cultural History* 30/1 (2016), 105–18; Hale, 'Italian Grand Opera at the Cape of Good Hope: The 1875 and 1876 Cagli Seasons', *South African Journal of Cultural History* 29/1 (2015), 58–73; Hale, 'Ascending to New Operatic Heights in South Africa: The Royal Italian Opera Company in Cape Town, 1895', *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa* 68/1 (2014), 69–81; Kerry

South Africa's opera history remains severely neglected in scholarship, with the cultural significance of touring companies often overlooked.

Further, while opera performance and the construction of identity during apartheid have been studied amply in the past decade, the emergence of contesting white nationalisms in the South African opera landscape of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – English and Afrikaner – has not received much attention. In the wake of the South African War (1899–1902), and building on a century of colonial subjugation under Dutch and British rule, the Afrikaner nation sought to carve out for itself a distinct cultural identity. While this manifested in several ways, the translation of opera into Afrikaans was one strategy through which cultural organisations afforded prestige to that fledgling language, with support from state bodies.[10] However, the performance of opera in Afrikaans only emerged in the 1940s, gaining serious traction following the establishment of apartheid-government-subsidised arts bodies during the 1960s.[11] In line with the politico-cultural Afrikaner nationalist incentives that drove opera during the 1940s, opera in English emerged as a potent tool for the British Empire during the twilight of imperialism. However, as I illustrate in this article, this phenomenon extended beyond the mere performance of opera itself to encompass a meticulous representation of 'Britishness' through the programme booklet designed to accompany the Carl Rosa's 1937 tour.

In what follows, I position the Carl Rosa's 1937 tour as a project of 'cultural colonisation'. As a point of departure, I discuss the articulations of British identity in South Africa leading up to the 1930s. Against this background, I provide a snapshot of the Carl Rosa Opera Company tour of the Union of South Africa in 1937, focusing on the Carl Rosa's activities in the city of Johannesburg. Drawing on insights from material and visual culture, I analyse the programme booklet of the 1937 Carl Rosa tour, specifically tailored for the company's Johannesburg residency to illuminate a realm of settler identity in 1930s South Africa where Dominion South Africanism – the demonstration of British cultural hegemony and the pride in British traditions and accomplishments among English-speaking South Africans – is reinforced through print media and opera. The success of the Carl Rosa's 1937 tour, I argue, must be understood within the broader context of British imperialist ambitions and the challenges posed by the burgeoning Afrikaner nationalism. As British cultural hegemony intersected with the rising tide of Afrikaner culture, the tour served as a battleground for competing visions of identity and belonging in colonial South Africa. The Carl Rosa's visit reinforced British cultural norms and celebrated the legacy of Empire.

Being British abroad

Even before the official establishment of British colonies at the Cape (1815–1910) and Natal (1843–1910), the British sought to assert cultural superiority through the construction of the African Theatre in Cape Town in 1801. While the cultural plurality of the Cape – at that time home to British, Dutch, French and German settlers – meant that several cultural centres were referenced through performances at the African Theatre, the theatre can be described as 'an early informal local Anglicising undertaking', as Adele F. Seeff has argued.[12]

Murphy, 'Thomas Quinlan (1881–1951) and His "All-Red" Opera Tours, 1912 and 1913', in *Operatic Geographies: The Place of Opera and the Opera House*, ed. Suzanne Aspden (Chicago, 2019), 133–47; Murphy, '"Covent Garden on Wheels": Thomas Quinlan's Operatic Tours of 1912–14 and Beyond', in *Making Tracks: Touring Performance and Global Exchange 1850–1950*, ed. Gilli Bush-Bailey and Kate Flaherty (London, 2021), 138–48.

[10] For an overview, see Pieter Kapp, 'Die akademie en opera', *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* 48/1 (2008), 13–22.

[11] Founded in 1962, the four Performing Arts Councils (one in each of the four provinces, Cape, Natal, Orange Free State and Transvaal) enjoyed substantial subsidy from the apartheid government.

[12] Adele Seeff, *South Africa's Shakespeare and the Drama of Language and Identity* (Cham, 2018), 17–18.

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The colonial space of the theatre acted as an extension of Empire, offering settlers the opportunity to connect with the metropole.

Unlike Cape Town – a city shaped by centuries of gradual development – Johannesburg can be accurately described, in the words of John Matshikiza, as 'an instant city'.[13] Founded in 1886 following the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg grew at an unprecedented pace; the first theatre, for example, was already in operation in 1888, just two years after the town's establishment.[14] This rapid urbanisation highlights the compressed historical timeframe in which Johannesburg emerged. The speed of Johannesburg's growth from mining camp to bustling metropolis played a crucial role in shaping its unique social and cultural identity. This compression of time meant that Johannesburg's social structures and cultural habits developed in a highly accelerated manner; this, in turn, significantly impacted how different communities – Afrikaners and British settlers, in the context of this article – interacted with each other and with the cultural imports that shaped public life.

Adding further complexity to this space, it is important to highlight that Johannesburg initially formed part of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR), or Transvaal – a Boer Republic established in 1852 following the settlement of Voortrekkers after the series of migrations from the Cape Colony in the 1830s termed the Great Trek. The discovery of gold in the ZAR led to rising tensions between the Boers and the British, resulting in British seizure, and ultimately, the South African War (1899–1902), which saw the decimation of Afrikaner women and children in concentration camps. After the war, an unsteady truce, and ultimately the formation of the Union of South Africa (1910–60), saw the fledgling Afrikaner nation once again under the political dominance of the British, creating a complex dynamic that would fuel Afrikaner nationalist ideology. The rise of Afrikaner nationalism in the late 1930s – reaching a fever pitch as Afrikaners faced continued British cultural and political dominance – must also be factored into Johannesburg's social life at this time.

These historical tensions and socio-political realities shaped the cultural landscape of Johannesburg. Class and cultural divides were further intensified by the plight of the poor Afrikaner, which Hermann Giliomee describes as a pressing issue that was at its worst between 1900 and 1930.[15] During the first waves of urbanisation, many Afrikaners, lacking education and skills, had to enter the workforce as unskilled labour in a town where English proficiency was essential for survival. Many Afrikaners ended up working in the mines, since 'capital and organised white labour were staunch imperialists with little sympathy for Afrikaner aspirations'.[16] By 1930, two-thirds of local mineworkers were white.[17] This period saw an increasing divide in the socio-economic experiences of Afrikaners and English-speaking settlers. The growing Afrikaner nationalist movement of the late 1930s, driven by the socio-economic struggles and political aspirations of this period, directly challenged this British cultural hegemony, which manifested in both public spaces and cultural institutions.

[13] John Matshikiza, 'Instant City', in *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*, ed. Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe (Durham, 2008), 221.

[14] Johannesburg enjoyed prime entertainment from the start. English-born impresario Luscombe Searelle, for example, was the first to present opera in Johannesburg in 1888, showcasing Verdi's *Il Trovatore* at a temporary venue constructed from corrugated iron, which he called the Theatre Royal. This structure was transported from Pietermaritzburg using ox-wagons and coaches. The rapid succession of opera seasons suggests that Searelle's efforts were successful. However, the arrival of rival companies marked the end of this success. J.P. Malan notes that Searelle was outclassed by 'superior finance' with the establishment of the Standard Opera Company and the opening of the Standard Theatre in 1891. Searelle's contributions to opera in Johannesburg represent just one of many cases that still merit further investigation. See J.P. Malan, 'Searelle, Luscombe (Isaac Israel)', in *South African Music Encyclopedia*, vol. IV, 223–4.

[15] Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (London, 2003), 323.

[16] Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 323.

[17] Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 328.

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In the context of this rapidly evolving urban space, cultural imports played a central role in the construction of identity. While Afrikaners grappled not only with socio-economic challenges but the development of their own corpus of literature, drama and music,[18] the British could continue recreating the Metropole in the Union for English-speaking South Africans. Writing in the context of the British colony of Natal, George Jackson asserts that musical tastes in the latter half of the nineteenth century were largely shaped by British settlers whose musical heritage encompassed late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British music (like Dibdin's operas), enriched by a variety of contemporary continental influences.[19] English works (alongside some Italian opera) thus formed the core repertoire for touring companies, with those that catered to these preferences obtaining great success.[20] The light-operatic works of Gilbert and Sullivan in particular featured prominently in the playbills of touring companies throughout the colonial world.[21]

In addition to the replication of metropolitan theatre trends, processes of cultural colonisation were propagated through a diverse array of media apparatuses, encompassing British journals, magazines and the British press – particularly underscored by the London-based Reuters, which monopolised the dissemination of both internal and external news in the Dominion. Additionally, radio broadcasts via the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and later, from 1936, through the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), which was modelled after the BBC and tasked with transmitting British programmes into South African households, further contributed to this phenomenon. Another key aspect of cultural colonisation pertains to the adoption and display of token symbols of the British nation, such as the Union Jack; and the anthem 'God Save the King', which was performed at numerous private, semi-official and official events, represented the loyalty of English-speaking South Africans towards the Crown.[22] This performative nationalism was apparent during a wave of royal events during the 1930s, which further instilled British pride amongst settlers. These events include the Silver Jubilee of George V (1935), the accession and abdication of Edward VIII (1936) and, most importantly for this article, the coronation of George VI (1937). For Afrikaners, such conspicuous displays arguably heightened their sense of cultural alienation, fuelling the rise of nationalist sentiment that eventually led to the National Party's ascent to power in 1948. Once in power, the party formally implemented apartheid, using the policy to advance its own political and social interests.

The Carl Rosa's tour to the self-governing Dominion of South Africa was timely, in light of the articulations of settler identity in 1930s Southern Africa. Considering the Balfour Declaration (1926) and the Statute of Westminster (1931), the 1930s saw a period of what

[18] Afrikaans was only recognised as an official language, alongside Dutch and English, in 1925. In terms of artistic and cultural development, this meant that Afrikaans-speaking communities had a significant amount of catching up to do, especially compared to the more established English and Dutch cultural traditions. This is where groups like the *Dertigers* (a literary movement of the 1930s, named after the decade in which they were active) played a crucial role in the cultivation and promotion of Afrikaans culture. These writers, poets and intellectuals worked to elevate Afrikaans as a legitimate cultural and artistic medium, contributing to the development of a distinct Afrikaner identity through their literature, criticism and cultural advocacy. See J.C. Kannemeyer, *Die Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur*, vol. 1 (Pretoria, 1984), https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/kann003gesk01_01/kann003gesk01_01_0027.php.

[19] George S. Jackson, *Music in Durban* (Johannesburg, 1970), 2.

[20] Hale, for example, has compared the success of Luscombe Searelle, who incorporated 'quintessentially British' works like Gilbert and Sullivan, with that of Italian impresario Augusto Cagli, who focused on Italian opera seria. See Hale, 'From a Comedy of Errors'.

[21] Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain, 1876–1953* (Manchester, 2001), 33.

[22] See John Lambert, 'An Identity Threatened: White English-speaking South Africans, Britishness and Dominion South Africanism, 1934–1939', *Kleio* 37/1 (2005), 50–70, at 60–1.

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Peter Marshall has called 'intensive settler nation-building', as this legislation finally granted former colonies some semblance of independence, recognising them as 'autonomous [c]ommunities' within the Empire, 'equal in status'.[23] However, as Christine Boyanoski stresses, if decolonisation resulted in political independence, cultural independence in these regions was more difficult to obtain.[24]

John Lambert outlines several ways in which English-speaking South Africans maintained their Britishness. While the political ideology of South Africanism, through the vehicle of the South African Party, sought to unite white language groups (i.e. English and Afrikaner), Lambert draws on Calpin's term 'Dominion South Africanism' to encapsulate the notions of 'British cultural superiority and [...] pride in British traditions and achievements', that manifested amongst English-speaking South Africans.[25] Though the tensions between Britishness and South Africanism steadily escalated during the 1930s, Lambert writes that the former was particularly strong among the English-speaking demographic, with the group remaining 'culturally colonised' by the metropole that defined their cultural values.[26] This was particularly poignant during the late 1930s, as the coronation of George VI (1937) bolstered feelings of unity throughout the Empire following the death of George V (1935) and the abdication of Edward VIII (1936).

While a tour to South Africa had, however, been a long time coming, with murmurings of negotiations with the Carl Rosa dating to the 1890s,[27] the 1937 tour was one of several events that sought to promote British culture in line with coronation celebrations of George VI across the Empire. Significantly, the Carl Rosa's arrival coincided with coronation celebrations. To contextualise the importance of this, a review of coronation celebrations in the city of Johannesburg foregrounds 'the combination of pageantry'. 'Hearing of the service, broadcast from Westminster Abbey,' the correspondent Becky Sharp wrote, 'made everyone long to be in London, where they could have closer personal contact with the great events; yet, the links of Empire are so strong that they are binding even this great distance away.'[28] Referred to unofficially as the 'Coronation Tour' by the British press, the Carl Rosa's visit

[23] For more information see Peter Marshall, 'The Balfour Formula and the Evolution of the Commonwealth', *The Round Table* 90/361 (2001), 541–53.

[24] Boyanoski cited in Lize van Robbroeck, 'Afrikaner Nationalism and Other Settler Imaginaries at the 1936 Empire Exhibition', in *Troubling Images: Visual Culture and the Politics of Afrikaner Nationalism*, ed. Federico Freschi, Brenda Schmahmann and Lize van Robbroeck (Johannesburg, 2020), 43–66, at 43.

[25] Lambert, 'An Identity Threatened', 52.

[26] Lambert, 'An Identity Threatened', 58.

[27] In 1898 it was reported that negotiations for a Carl Rosa tour of the colony had been finalised by Mr B. Wheeler of the Wheeler Brothers Company (American theatre impresarios who reigned supreme at that time). The reasons why this tour never materialised are unclear, though it may have been a consequence of the growing unrest in the colony: unrest that ultimately resulted in the outbreak of the South African War (1899–1902). Touring activities resumed shortly after this war, with the Wheeler Brothers securing the D'Oyly Carte Company for a colony tour in September 1902. Again in 1904, the Wheelers actively sought guarantees from the public in the form of bookings to help secure a visit from either the Carl Rosa or the Moody-Manners opera companies, described as 'Two Leading English Opera Cos. of the United Kingdom'. The provisional plan was a limited grand opera season in the 'Four Principal Cities' (Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and Port Elizabeth). To entice prospective audiences further, the call included a repertoire of operas from which twelve would be selected for production, urging subscribers to voice their opinions to help finalise the selection. Ultimately, for reasons unknown, negotiations resulted in the Moody-Manners company touring the colony in 1904, and the Carl Rosa's visit was once more put on hold. However, according to local news, the ensemble that toured was made up of both Moody-Manners and Carl Rosa soloists and chorus members. See *De Express en Oranjevrijstaatsch Advertentieblad* (26 April 1898); *Rand Daily Mail* (11 June 1904); and *Rand Daily Mail* (22 October 1904).

[28] 'Vanity Fair', *Rand Daily Mail* (13 May 1937), 9.

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took on added cultural and political importance within the broader context of British imperial identity and colonial relations.[29]

The Carl Rosa play Johannesburg

Tying into the pageantry of the coronation festivities, the Carl Rosa adeptly seized every opportunity, transforming the tour into a meticulously orchestrated spectacle. Judging from the activities outside the theatre, which included trips to prominent local landmarks and exclusive luncheons with local politicians and interest groups, the members of the Carl Rosa were seen as entertainers and representatives of the Empire, to be wooed and impressed by what South Africa had to offer. As the company made its way to the country, the press reported on its movements in true *paparazzo* style, documenting their every step and performance. Articles in local news publications, such as the Johannesburg-based newspaper *Rand Daily Mail*, highlighted the company's itinerary, described interactions with local audiences and provided behind-the-scenes glimpses of the performers. This intense media attention not only kept the public informed but also fuelled excitement and interest in the tour, adding to the company's widespread popularity.

A week before the Carl Rosa was due to sail to South Africa, the *Rand Daily Mail* announced the company's departure. Elegant black and white headshots of the 'Carl Rosa Stars' supplemented this feature: bass-baritone Phillip Bertram, baritone Leyland White, guest soprano Luella Paikin, soprano Helen Ogilvie and dramatic soprano Pauline Maunder (with White and Ogilvie in costume) smile at the reader. Short biographies of the soloists, the owner and manager H.B. Phillips and conductor Charles Webber were provided, with Phillips boasting that he was the first person to take the company on tour outside the United Kingdom. The *Rand Daily Mail* mentioned Webber's involvement at Covent Garden and (ominously in retrospect) Siegfried Wagner's admiration of him, as well as Paikin's performances under Toscanini at La Scala, where Mussolini had personally congratulated her. The publication cannily mentioned no dates, merely that the company would begin the season at the Empire Theatre in Johannesburg in the middle of May.[30] A week later, opening night was revealed to be 10 May[31] – two days before the inauguration of George VI.

The company arrived at the Cape Town docks on the morning of Monday 3 May; they had sailed from Waterloo on 16 April aboard the newly built *Dunnottar Castle*, and despite the fatigue of spending several weeks at sea, they made their way to Johannesburg via train that very evening. Travelling in specially marked coaches, they made several stops over the course of two days on their way to the city, and were welcomed by music lovers at principal stations.[32] This was heart-warming to company members. In an interview, Luella Paikin described South Africans' hospitality as 'astounding', recalling that there were people to welcome them at 'almost every stopping place' on their way up from the Cape.[33] A 'big welcome' was also planned for their arrival in Johannesburg, with a 'large crowd of music lovers' expected to be present at the station to welcome the 'famous company'.[34]

After their welcome at Johannesburg station on Wednesday morning, the company travelled straight to the aptly named Empire Theatre, the venue that would be their home

[29] *The Scotsman* (16 April 1937). As the most popular opera company in Britain at the time, it is plausible that the Carl Rosa received requests to tour other dominions. It was not possible to accommodate such requests due to the company's Autumn touring schedule, as company manager H.B. Phillips clarified in a statement to the British press.

[30] 'The Carl Rosa Sails Next Week', *Rand Daily Mail* (9 April 1937), 5.

[31] *Rand Daily Mail* (16 April 1937).

[32] 'Carl Rosa Here on Wednesday', *Rand Daily Mail* (1 May 1937), 18.

[33] 'Soprano Mussolini Praised', *Rand Daily Mail* (6 May 1937), 17.

[34] 'Carl Rosa Opera Company: Big Welcome Planned for To-Morrow', *Rand Daily Mail* (4 May 1937), 18.

for what they thought would be the next four weeks. The Empire, completed the year before, was one of many owned by theatre magnate I.W. Schlesinger, an American impresario who since 1913 had steadily amassed wealth and influence with his company African Consolidated Theatres (ACT).[35] Upon completion it was expected to be the 'most elaborately equipped theatre in the country, comparable in all respects with some of the newest overseas',[36] and it was tailored for modern production. It comprised two revolving stages (contained within one another), with a proscenium arch opening of over ten metres, including ninety sets of lines for hanging scenery.[37] Each of the 1,800 seats was reported to give its occupant an unobstructed view of the stage. Acoustically, the theatre was also considered to be superior; care had been taken (including with the installation of proscenium arch sound boxes) to ensure that audiences at the back of the theatre could hear everything at full volume, though that claim was soon disputed when it was found that the theatre's acoustics did not prove sufficient for opera and as a result the Carl Rosa had to rely on microphones. This resulted in some awkward stage action and changes in tone quality, as singers had to abandon stagecraft and move to the front of the stage to sing into the microphone in order to be heard by the entire house.[38] However, the theatre was air-conditioned, with lounges, a tearoom and a bar, and with an understated interior decorated in greys, greens and blues[39] – perfect for a overseas touring company of renown like the Carl Rosa.

To further lend a sense of exclusivity to the company's visit, a 'preferential' booking scheme was announced two weeks before opening night.[40] For those wishing to attend six or more of the Carl Rosa's performances, bookings could be made at the Central Booking Office, Publix Drug Store, Carlton Hotel. The demand was unprecedented. On the morning of 27 April, queues started forming at 6.30 a.m., an hour and a half before the booking office was due to open.[41] By 7 a.m., there were reportedly one hundred people in the queue, and so the office decided to open one hour earlier to start processing bookings. Nevertheless, 'the queue had grown to 150 by 7.30, and as fast as people left the queue others joined at the end'.[42] Bookings, either in person or via messenger, continued throughout the day. It was reported that one man booked seats to the value of £100, with several orders ranging between £40 and £50.[43] This is a hefty sum, with £100 being the equivalent of £7,659 in 2024.[44] According to an advertisement, tickets for evening performances were 14s., 10s. 6d. or 5s. 6d., with tickets for matinée performances costing between 10s. 6d. and 3s. 4d.[45] In 2024, this equates to roughly £53.62, £40.21 or £21.06, and £40.21 and £12.79.[46] The scheme proved highly successful, running six days before general bookings were due to open on Saturday 1 May.[47] Given the demand, the booking office also opened on Sunday 2 May, a day normally closed for trade, for those unable to purchase their tickets during the week.

[35] The company had started as the African Theatres Trust Ltd. See Martin Coetzee, 'Cinematographs, Crystal Valves and American Cultural Imperialism: The Role Played by IW Schlesinger's Media Organisations at the Genesis of South Africa's Film and Radio Industries, 1913–1937' (MHCS diss., University of Pretoria, 2019), 3.

[36] 'Two Revolving Stages for the New Empire', *Rand Daily Mail* (15 August 1936), 5.

[37] 'Two Revolving Stages', *Rand Daily Mail.*

[38] Segment of 'Women's Diary', *Rand Daily Mail* (12 June 1937), 9.

[39] 'Two Revolving Stages', *Rand Daily Mail.*

[40] 'Booking for the Operas, *Rand Daily Mail* (24 April 1937), 16.

[41] 'Queue Lines Up at 6-30 A.M. to Book for Opera', *Rand Daily Mail* (27 April 1937), 15.

[42] 'Queue Lines Up at 6-30 A.M.', *Rand Daily Mail.*

[43] 'Queue Lines Up at 6-30 A.M.', *Rand Daily Mail.*

[44] This was calculated using 'Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1270 to Present', MeasuringWorth (2024), www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/.

[45] *Rand Daily Mail* (30 April 1937), 14.

[46] 'Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount'.

[47] 'Booking for the Operas', *Rand Daily Mail.*

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Initially, the Carl Rosa planned four weeks of evening performances and matinées at the Empire Theatre.[48] With an arsenal of eighteen translated operas, the company could entertain audiences from Monday to Saturday, offering a different opera every day (twice a day when there was a matinée), with some repeat performances of operas scheduled a few weeks apart to prevent boredom. This was a monumental undertaking, but the company, built upon touring principles, came prepared. The musicians were in top form, having just completed a tour of Scotland prior to their departure, and they rehearsed daily during their voyage to South Africa.[49] Different casts singing in different operas every night meant that the principals only sang three times a week and could therefore rest adequately in between.[50] H.B. was careful in his choice of repertoire, and kept to the tried and tested works that had proved popular in Britain – English translations of *Carmen*, *Faust*, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *La Bohème* and *Madama Butterfly* – arguing that when new repertoire was added to regular programming, it 'takes considerable time to become popular'.[51] *Die Fledermaus* and *The Barber of Seville* were two such additions: he credited the operas' 'bright, tuneful music' and 'comedy' as major draws.[52]

The press anticipated that the Carl Rosa's opening night, presenting *La Bohème*, would be one of the Empire Theatre's 'great first nights'.[53] Despite the Empire's new booking system, which was intended to minimise queueing, there were indeed queues, and the demand for *Bohème* tickets was so great that two extra matinées had to be arranged for 26 May and 2 June.[54] On opening night, the theatre vestibule was filled with attendees long before the start of the performance, and the entire house, which was booked to capacity, was seated before the curtain rose at 8 p.m. The performance exceeded expectations. The correspondent wrote 'even after their first performance, in which only about a third of the company had been able to show its strength, one can say that the season of opera that is ahead of us will be a great time for lovers of music, and the theatre'.[55] The correspondent also praised 'some remarkably fine voices',[56] and commended the standard of production.

It is essential to note that, at this time, the Carl Rosa was not the only group presenting opera in Johannesburg. Scottish organist John Connell, a stalwart of the opera scene in Johannesburg since 1928, dived headfirst into organising a celebration of Englishness for the Coronation. In tandem with his responsibilities as organiser of the elaborate Coronation pageant,[57] Connell staged a set of 'Coronation Operas' – Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* and Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Yeoman of the Guard* – performed the very week that the Carl Rosa arrived in the city. Produced by the City of Johannesburg for the occasion, the cost of Connell's production mounted. Correspondent Becky Sharp reported that 160 costumes were made for the two operas. Descriptions of designs underlined the lavishness of

[48] *Rand Daily Mail* (1 May 1937), 12.

[49] *Daily Herald* (17 April 1937). In an interview, Phillips explained that the company rehearsed every day, with six rehearsals running concurrently. *Rand Daily Mail* (6 May 1937).

[50] 'Radio Cause a Boom', *Rand Daily Mail* (6 May 1937), 17.

[51] 'Radio Cause a Boom', *Rand Daily Mail* (6 May 1937), 17.

[52] 'Radio Cause a Boom', *Rand Daily Mail* (6 May 1937), 17.

[53] 'Opera on Monday: A Great First Night Coming', *Rand Daily Mail* (7 May 1937), 6. The anticipation was amplified through the correspondent's claim that the last visit to Johannesburg by a professional company had been in 1931, when the Gonzales Opera Company played at the old His Majesty's Theatre. However, the D'Oyly Carte played in Johannesburg in 1933 (see *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 July 1933). Such discrepancies in reportage highlight the importance of further research into touring opera during this period.

[54] 'Opera on Monday', *Rand Daily Mail.*

[55] 'No Latecomers for Brilliant First Night of Opera', *Rand Daily Mail* (11 May 1937), 12.

[56] 'No Latecomers', *Rand Daily Mail.*

[57] A float by the Johannesburg Repertory Society had the theme 'Gilbert and Sullivan'. See 'Vanity Fair', *Rand Daily Mail* (5 May 1937), 11.

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production, with designer Mrs I. Cook '[buying] up almost every available yard of red velvet available in the city'.[58] The performances of Connell's coronation operas took place at the City Hall, a mile east from the Empire Theatre where the Carl Rosa were resident at the time. Tickets for this event only cost 1s. (£3.83 in 2024) – significantly more affordable than tickets for Carl Rosa performances. Connell's operas also played to a full house (just like the Carl Rosa); however, a disparity of quality between these competing opera productions is clear from the reviews, which praised Connell's as 'fine amateur performance[s]' while making clear that the Carl Rosa was a professional outfit.[59] Over the weeks, many of the Carl Rosa soloists were singled out for particular praise, notably Helen Ogilvie in *Butterfly*,[60] and Luella Paikin, who had made a name for herself in London by stepping in for an indisposed Luisa Tetrazzini in 1925, and recording arias for the Vocalion label.[61] She was praised for her 'delightful' performance on 19 May as Olympia, Offenbach's mechanical doll.[62] The Carl Rosa also 'broke a rule' in allowing for a very welcome and unexpected encore of Olympia's aria.[63]

The company's visit undoubtedly inspired some musical Johannesburg residents to think about a career in opera. Initially it was reported that over fifty requests for auditions were filed with the company, and it was decided that calls would be held at the Empire Theatre on Friday 11 June.[64] It was made clear that successful auditions would not lead to engagements with the company during the tour but rather the possibility of work overseas. Ultimately on the day of the auditions, more than sixty men and women performed for the panel composed of company manager Phillips, conductors Webber and Mudie, and producer Mr Kingsley Lark, over a period of two hours.[65] The auditions were run on lines similar to those of modern television talent shows, with a 'silencer' present to stop the no-hopers, with varying degrees of success. Some singers attempted arias far beyond their vocal gifts,[66] and a tenor singing 'When the stars were shining brightly' from *Tosca* apparently 'went completely off the rails halfway through the aria'. The accompanist stopped playing, '[d]istress signals came from the auditorium', the silencer tried in vain to silence the hapless singer, but 'the stars went on shining to the bitter end.'[67] H.B. commented that there were many talented singers but that their voices are 'small': 'for opera we need not only quality but quantity'.[68] While this is likely true, due to the relatively young state of opera training in the country at that time, it also suggests a confidence in the superiority of the operatic talent from the metropole. It implies that while there may be many talented local singers, their voices were inadequate, underscoring a preference for voices that are not only of high quality but also possess greater volume, as typically found in European or metropolitan opera traditions. This view reflects an implicit hierarchy of cultural worth, where local talent is seen as inferior to the perceived standards set by European opera traditions.

Due to the 'tremendous public enthusiasm and thousands of requests for many operas to be repeated', the Carl Rosa extended the Johannesburg leg of the tour for two additional

[58] 'Vanity Fair', *Rand Daily Mail* (5 May 1937), 11.
[59] *Rand Daily Mail* (13 May 1937).
[60] 'Madame Butterfly', *Rand Daily Mail* (20 May 1937), 3.
[61] *The Sketch* (13 October 1926). Paikin also received glowing reviews during the Carl Rosa's tour of Scotland, immediately preceding the South African tour.
[62] 'Fantastic Tales of Hoffman', *Rand Daily Mail* (20 May 1937), 3.
[63] 'Fantastic Tales of Hoffman', *Rand Daily Mail.*
[64] 'Aspirant Opera Singers: More than 50 Apply for Audition', *Rand Daily Mail* (7 June 1937), 15.
[65] *Rand Daily Mail* (12 June 1937).
[66] *Rand Daily Mail* (12 June 1937).
[67] *Rand Daily Mail* (12 June 1937).
[68] *Rand Daily Mail* (12 June 1937). The Carl Rosa arranged auditions in every city they played, but only one singer – a coloratura soprano from Durban called Rose Alper – was invited to perform with the company.

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weeks.[69] The repertoire presented would be that for which the company had received the most requests. While bookings continued at the Carlton Hotel, the booking office infrastructure also expanded to include a Publix Drug Store in Yeoville, Reef Theatres, and the Capitol Theatre in Pretoria.[70] While the arrangement of a booking office in Pretoria, a city 30 miles north from the centre of Johannesburg, indicates that the Carl Rosa's popularity was not limited to the immediate region, this may also be seen as part of a wider coronation mania. Like most other cities in the Union, Pretoria hosted its own coronation celebrations, and the promotion of a British company like the Carl Rosa was in keeping with the spirit of the day.

On Monday evening, 21 June, the company presented a programme with acts from four operas, with a performance of *Rigoletto*, their most requested opera, on 22 June – their final performance in the city. The programme for Monday comprised the Prologue and Act I of *Pagliacci*, Act 2 from *Tales of Hoffmann*, Act 3, the 'Miserere' scene from *Il Trovatore* and Act 4 from *Faust.*[71] This 'potpourri' allowed the company to present audiences with highlights from operas sung by a large proportion of the cast. The variety of repertoire the Carl Rosa had performed during their six weeks seemed to have pleased the overwhelming majority. However, one person did voice an opinion on the limited number of performances of the English operas *Maritana* and *The Bohemian Girl.*[72] According to the Carl Rosa's original programme, the operas were scheduled for the Saturdays of weeks three and four, with an additional performance of *The Bohemian Girl* provisionally scheduled for their fifth week.[73] In a letter to the editor, AWP writes that while they are reluctant to voice their dissatisfaction with the company, they are curious as to why these operas were not afforded a single additional performance. It seems the Carl Rosa decided to cut the performance of *Bohemian Girl* as scheduled, as AWP laments that they 'regret the decision of the management to cut out any further performances of the English operas named'.[74] AWP clarifies that both of these operas were well supported with full houses. It is possible that the Carl Rosa opted to concentrate on their identity as a company that sings opera in English, rather than English opera.

Throughout the Carl Rosa's time in Johannesburg, a strong narrative emerged wherein critics sought to challenge only knowing the popular tunes from an opera. On several occasions it was mentioned that it was a mistake to regard an opera as a work comprising one famous aria. H.B. Phillips himself weighed in on this point upon the company's arrival, stating that broadcasting had popularised opera in Britain, and once an aria or excerpts from an opera had been heard, people wanted to go to the theatre to see the real 'thing'.[75] While seeing a live opera was more feasible in Britain at that time, it appears that both British and South African audiences were naïve about the sources of their favourite tunes. Phillips revealed that people knew operatic melodies but not the works from which they originated.[76] Critic LS of the *Rand Daily Mail* stated the same thing in a review of *Tales of Hoffmann.* Referring to the work's well-known Barcarolle, LS writes, 'it is strange that an opera should live in the popular mind so largely due to one of its airs and that by no means the most important of them.'[77]

[69] *Rand Daily Mail* (26 May 1937), 12.
[70] *Rand Daily Mail* (26 May 1937), 12.
[71] 'The Carl Rosa is Off to Pretoria', *Rand Daily Mail* (19 June 1937), 11.
[72] 'English Operas Wanted', *Rand Daily Mail* (10 June 1937), 12.
[73] *Rand Daily Mail* (26 May 1937), 12.
[74] 'English Operas Wanted', *Rand Daily Mail.*
[75] 'Radio Cause a Boom', *Rand Daily Mail.*
[76] 'Radio Cause a Boom', *Rand Daily Mail.*
[77] 'Fantastic Tales of Hoffman', *Rand Daily Mail.*

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Programming settler identity

While the mere performance of opera in English in a former British colony speaks to the cultivation of settler identity, the commemorative programme published by ACT to accompany the Carl Rosa tour poignantly illustrates the articulation of Dominion South Africanism amongst English-speaking (British) audiences in the Union.[78] Writing about the programme booklet as a theatrical paratext, Lars August Fodstad emphasises its understated nature, the fact that it is not aimed at drawing attention or audiences to the theatre. Rather, '[the programme] is supposed to cause some effect with the spectator who has already purchased [their] ticket: to inform, guide, motivate, provoke or confuse [them], to contextualise or explain something, to make the [performers] look interesting, or maybe to support or subvert certain presuppositions about a [performance]. It is an accessory of theatrical performance – and a part of the history of reception and interpretation.'[79] Mark Gauntlett reflects on how theatre programmes are in fact used by audiences, presenting three obvious instances of reading: before the event, after the event or not at all. These scenarios do not take into account the potential browsing during intervals inside the venue.[80] While the programme's main goal is to be informative, to 'provide an interpretive framework for the reception of the performance', paratextual elements such as editorials, synopses and advertisements, as well as their placement and design, also influence the audience.

These paratextual elements exhibit the visible expressions of a new national settler identity which, Lize van Robbroeck states, was expected to be evident in both highbrow and popular cultural arenas. This extended beyond crafting a national narrative for settlers, to stimulating tourism and commerce between domains.[81] 'The challenge', Van Robbroeck writes, 'was to generate an iconography that would produce distinct white national identities that accorded with the goals of empire, while simultaneously pacifying and/or suppressing potentially resurgent anti-imperial nationalisms.'[82] Labelled 'one of the most lavish [African Consolidated Theatres] have prepared', the programme for the Carl Rosa's 1937 tour to Southern Africa is bound in thick regal red-stock paper.[83] The front cover features the company name 'The Royal Carl Rosa Opera Company' printed and embossed black lettering, topped with a gilded crown insignia.[84] This visual reference to the Crown not only ties in with references to the company's Royal Charter, granted by Queen Victoria in 1893, but also speaks to the use of British iconography to foster national pride, as discussed by Lambert. In addition, the image of the crown links with the tour's 'Coronation' title.

The forty-page booklet contains a short history of the company, and biographical details about company manager H.B. Phillips, and conductors Charles Webber and 21-year-old Michael Mudie. Company founder Carl Rosa is praised for his 'wise decision' of presenting opera in English, and a sense of British pride is instilled through the mention

[78] The provision of a commemorative brochure covering the season is of course a standard practice for opera houses. The Carl Rosa 1937 programme housed in the Western Cape Archives and Records Centre is signed with the surname 'Schirach' and dated 19 July 1937, placing it firmly during the Cape Town leg of the Carl Rosa tour. Another copy resides in the Africana Library of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality in Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth). At present, no material from the 1937 tour has been found in the Carl Rosa Trust Archive, Central Library, Liverpool, UK.

[79] Lars August Fodstad, 'Refurbishing the Doll's House? The Theatre Programme as Paratextual Trace', *Ibsen Studies* 6/2 (2006), 149–87, at 151.

[80] Mark Gauntlett, 'Theatre-going, Theatre Programmes, Tourism', *Australasian Drama Studies* 22 (1993), 113–27, at 124.

[81] Van Robbroeck, 'Afrikaner Nationalism', 43.

[82] Van Robbroeck, 'Afrikaner Nationalism', 43.

[83] 'Opera on Monday', *Rand Daily Mail.*

[84] At Covent Garden, the special programme cover also featured a Royal Coat of Arms.

of 'the foremost English singers of the last decade [that] have worked under the banner of Carl Rosa'.[85] Detailed synopses of all the operas performed, their respective casts and settings of the decor are framed by intricate collages comprising production photos. Each production page features a photograph of the lead characters, framed by a star to suggest their celebrity status with a short blurb of career highlights to emphasise their talents, acting as a header to the opera synopses. Apart from the centrefold, which features the synopses of the double-bill of *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *I Pagliacci*, all synopses are coupled with advertisements that fulfil a particular function in the cultivation of a settler imaginary in 1930s South Africa.

Pistorius has briefly touched on the significance of advertisements in opera programmes specifically. Writing on the 1956 staging of *La Traviata* by the so-called 'coloured'[86] Eoan opera company, Pistorius points out that the group's lavish staging, which mirrored a 'lifestyle reserved for the affluent classes of white South Africa', also extends to the advertisements in Eoan's playbills.[87] Ranging from exquisite silverware to premium liquors, these advertisements, Pistorius argues, not only appealed to an affluent and refined (white) audience but also projected notions of privilege and sophistication onto the audience. Citing Gauntlett, Pistorius contends that advertisements serve to affirm the reader's inclusion to a social cohort characterised by elevated social status and refined cultural sensibilities. She writes:

> people who attend theatre productions and read their programmes are distinguished, and the advertisements they encounter are designed to emphasise their status. The advertisements extended beyond merely peddling goods, and served to create a public – one in possession of money, sophistication and class.[88]

While Pistorius discusses this phenomenon within the context of 1950s apartheid, these dynamics were already in evidence two decades earlier. The advertisements for luxury items in the Carl Rosa's 1937 programme similarly underscored the perception that the operas performed, and indeed the Carl Rosa Opera Company itself, were targeted towards audiences who aspired to the refined tastes and lifestyles associated with the Metropole. Promotions for fur coats by expert furriers Astor and Co., and diamonds cut by Katz and Lourie Ltd. at a factory soon to be opened in the city of Johannesburg, not only showcase the allure of high-end fashion and jewellery but also suggest a cultural sophistication and affluence expected of opera-goers – mimicking fashion trends found in the capital that formed part of newspaper articles on a daily basis. Advertisements for Peugeot Sedans and Cabriolets, priced at £222 10s. and £245 respectively, made an even more explicit association of opulence and refinement with attending the opera, describing the cars, and by extension their owners, as 'always [being] in the centre of an admiring circle'.[89] These advertisements not only served to entice audiences with the promise of indulging in luxurious experiences but also perpetuated the idea that participation in cultural events like the opera was synonymous with embracing the trappings of elite society, echoing the cultural aspirations of the colonial elite.

[85] Western Cape Archives and Records Service (hereafter WCARS). Accession A1745. Mrs M.C. Schirach. Vol. 3, Royal Carl Rosa Opera Company (African Consolidated Theatres, Ltd., 1937).

[86] This is an apartheid era racial classification.

[87] Juliana M. Pistorius, 'Inhabiting Whiteness: The Eoan Group *La traviata*, 1956', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 31/1 (2019), 63–84, at 74.

[88] Pistorius, 'Inhabiting Whiteness', 74.

[89] Carl Rosa Programme 1937, WCARS. Accession A1745. Mrs M.C. Schirach. Vol. 3, Royal Carl Rosa Opera Company (African Consolidated Theatres, Ltd., 1937), inside back cover page.

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In addition, great emphasis is placed on replication or evocation of 'home' and the comforts of Britain in the Union of South Africa, while crucially distancing settlers from the land and colonised peoples. Eccles Luxury Caravans, for example, provide 'all the amenities of a luxury hotel' when visiting the 'most beautiful spots in this beautiful country' that are not easily accessible. The advert (Figure 1) features a caravan, parked on a grassy clearing in a secluded woodland spot surrounded by trees. A man, dressed in a white shirt and sweater vest, reaches through the caravan window to pet the family dog. This image reinforces the colonial imaginary by presenting a sanitised and idealised version of settler identity. The man's clothing and demeanour suggest a sense of refinement and European gentility, while the presence of a pet evokes domesticity and companionship. This representation of settler identity serves to reinforce the perception of white settlers as civilised, cultured and inherently superior. The caravan itself functions as a mobile extension of British domestic life, suggesting that the comforts of the metropole can be seamlessly transported to the colonial landscape. The comparison of the caravan to a 'luxury hotel' suggests that the colonial environment is not a space for integration and engagement. The caravan and striped lawn chair beside it symbolically position settlers as experiencing the 'colonial' landscape from a distance – literally and metaphorically removed from the land and its people. While the lawn chair implies occupying a more immersive position with the landscape, it still frames the landscape as something to be viewed and enjoyed in comfort, rather than something to engage with directly. This representation constructs the landscape as a picturesque backdrop for leisure, available for the enjoyment of the colonisers but detached from any real engagement with the land or the peoples that inhabit it.

A similar narrative plays out in an advert for the Tourist Branch of the South African Railway (Figure 2), allowing one to 'travel in comfort by train'. Here, a curious combination of 'scenic South Africa' is presented, comprising a steam ship in the harbour with Table Mountain in the background, holidaymakers in the surf on a beach, a steam train, and a somewhat out-of-place and oversized lioness, presiding over these scenes. The image of the lion here resonates with the symbol of the Barbary lion in English visual culture. Its large and somewhat incongruous appearance perhaps suggests a tenacity and bravery that accompanied the ruthless expansion of the British empire, asserting dominance and control over the land and its inhabitants. The lion also stands for South Africa's wildlife in general (since no lions roamed free close to Table Mountain or Cape Town's beaches), perhaps speaking to the commodification and/or exploitation of African resources for financial gain.

In terms of recreating the metropole, the advertisement for 'Africa's Greatest Hotel', the Carlton Hotel, is paramount (Figure 3). Constructed between 1903 and 1906, shortly after the end of the South African War (1899–1902), the Carlton represented progress and prestige. Its name was inspired by the Carlton Hotel in London, a 'byword for luxury and elegance' at the time, and the Johannesburg Carlton epitomised European sophistication. Its entire (white) staff was recruited from London, with furniture and fittings also sourced and imported from England – a direct transplantation of imperial culture and aesthetics.[90] The acclaim garnered by the Johannesburg Carlton, particularly in London circles, positioned it as a landmark within Johannesburg's urban landscape, standing apart even from other grand colonial hotels. This strategic pairing of advertisement and cultural event underscores the aspiration to project an image of sophistication and cosmopolitanism, echoing the ideals of the metropole. The hotel, as Rogerson points out, 'rose above the corrugated iron buildings in the former mining camp to become an oasis of luxury, a place for the city's wealthy and

[90] Jayne M. Rogerson. 'Johannesburg's Iconic Hotels: The Life and Death of the Two Carltons', in *New Directions in South African Tourism Geographies: Geographies of Tourism and Global Change*, ed. Jayne M. Rogerson and Gustav Visser (Cham, 2020), 55–74, at 58.

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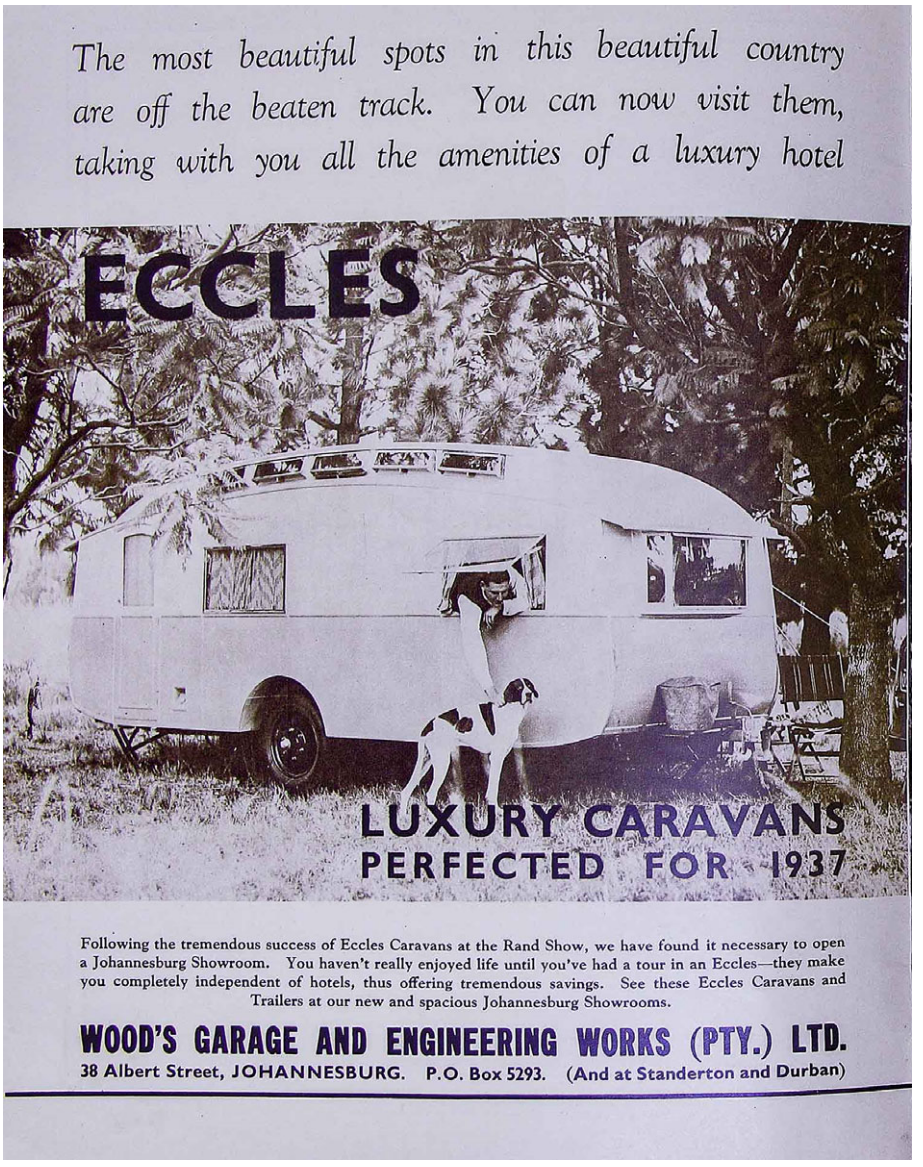

Figure 1. Advertisement for Eccles Caravans, Carl Rosa Programme 1937, p. 2. WCARS. Accession A1745. Mrs M.C. Schirach. Vol. 3, Royal Carl Rosa Opera Company (African Consolidated Theatres, Ltd., 1937). Reproduced with permission.

famous (and infamous) to meet, mingle, party and stay'.[91] Apart from leisurely activities, the hotel also became a site of political significance. On the evening of the coronation, for example, the Carlton hosted a grand military ball, underscoring the connection between the monarchy and the military power that helped secure the colonial empire.[92]

[91] Rogerson, 'Johannesburg's Iconic Hotels', 57.

[92] Years later, in 1947, the Carlton hotel would host the Royal Family on their tour of the Union.

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Figure 2. Advertisement for South African Railways and Harbours, Carl Rosa Programme 1937, p. 14. WCARS. Accession A1745. Mrs M.C. Schirach. Vol. 3, Royal Carl Rosa Opera Company (African Consolidated Theatres, Ltd., 1937). Reproduced with permission.

The advertisement for the hotel in the 1937 Carl Rosa programmes describes the Carlton as 'Africa's Greatest Hotel at the hub of the golden city'. While this makes apparent the association between Johannesburg and gold, this reference arguably also underscores the link between accumulated wealth and the British mining magnates of the previous century, such as imperialist Cecil John Rhodes (1853–1902). In addition, it strategically aligns with the synopsis for *La Bohème*, which is printed on the right-hand page of the double-page spread, underscoring the aspiration to evoke a cosmopolitan ambiance akin to European cultural

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Figure 3. Advertisement for Carlton Hotel, Carl Rosa Programme 1937, p. 8. WCARS. Accession A1745. Mrs M.C. Schirach. Vol. 3, Royal Carl Rosa Opera Company (African Consolidated Theatres, Ltd., 1937). Reproduced with permission.

centres and a desire to evoke European cultural ideals in the colony. The hotel, like Puccini's *La Bohème*, represented an escape into a world of elegance, refinement and cosmopolitanism. However, in light of the opera's characters mostly hailing from backgrounds of poverty, this framing could be read as offering audiences a voyeuristic gaze into the world of the 'Other', where the wealthy audience is offered a romanticised view of poverty, privy to the struggles of the poor from a safe, detached perspective.

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Moreover, the monopoly of the BBC in terms of broadcasting the Empire into settler homes is fuelled by advertisements for the latest radiograms by the British General Electric Company and His Master's Voice (Figures 4 and 5). The byline in the advertisement for His Master's Voice radiograms, sold by Polliacks, proclaims that 'every lover of good music should own a radiogram', directly equating cultural refinement and taste with the possession of a radiogram, implying that access to high-quality music technology is indicative of sophistication and discernment in musical appreciation.

Similarly, the importation of British goods reinforces connections with individuals who share homogeneous cultural backgrounds and tastes. The advertisement for Old Bond cigarettes (Figure 6) highlights the product as being imported, yet affordable, allowing one to enjoy the same experiences as counterparts in the metropole. A sense of refinement and exclusivity is suggested by the advertisement for Westminster Filter Tip cigarettes (Figure 7). The viewer encounters a couple dressed in formal wear; the man wears a tuxedo complete with waistcoat and white tie and the woman is pictured in an elegant floor-length gown. This imagery suggests an association with high social status and sophistication, again echoing the stereotypical opera audience. The accompanying text reinforces these notions of social acceptability and class: the couple is described as bringing the cigarettes to a surprise party, thereby 'enlarging their circle of good companions.' This phrase implies that the product is not just a commodity but a means of social mobility, emphasising the cultural capital gained by consuming British goods.

No advertisements for liquor appear on the inside pages of the Carl Rosa programme booklet. Rather, the outside back cover page (the most coveted and expensive space for advertising) features a very minimalistic advertisement for Castle Beer (Figure 8). Produced by Castle Brewery, owned by British-South African Breweries Ltd. (a British owned company), Castle Beer was famously popular among miners on the Rand, many of whom were working-class Afrikaners. In contrast to the more elite-focused Westminster Filter Tip advertisement within the programme, the Castle Beer advertisement suggests an effort to appeal to a wider audience. It is important to note that while Castle Beer catered to the white working class, its broad market also extended to black migrant mineworkers, albeit in segregated social and consumption spaces.[93]

The placement of the advertisement on the back cover serves to reach beyond the elite audience attending opera at the Empire Theatre, including working- and middle-class individuals. While British settlers generally sought to 'retain a high level of "Britishness" through the purchase of imperial commodities', as Malcolm Purinton has recently shown, beer was a product that crossed class and cultural lines within the British Empire.[94] Castle Beer, as a local product, symbolised accessibility and could speak to both Afrikaans- and English-speaking settlers. Its placement on the back cover suggests the programme could serve as a broader tool of mass marketing, reaching beyond the confines of highbrow opera culture.

Rather than reinforcing cultural divisions, the Castle Beer advertisement reflects the hybridity of Johannesburg society. The social mobility facilitated by the context of Johannesburg meant that many in the audience, for instance tradesmen and their families, might aspire to the refinement of opera while still engaging in everyday working-class consumption patterns.

[93] The inclusion of Black miners as a consumer demographic highlights the racially segregated dynamics of South African society under apartheid, where Black labourers played a critical role in the mining industry, yet were marginalised in social and cultural spaces, including through limited access to leisure activities like opera. This racialised labour divide underscores the deep class and racial distinctions in South Africa's settler society, even as advertisements like those for Castle Beer attempted to appeal across class lines within the white community.

[94] Malcolm F. Purinton, 'Empire in a Bottle: Commodities, Culture, and the Consumption of Pilsner Beer in the British Empire, c.1870–1914' (PhD diss., Northeastern University, 2016), 121.

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Figure 4. Advertisement for the British General Electric Company, Carl Rosa Programme, p. 10. WCARS. Accession A1745. Mrs M.C. Schirach. Vol. 3, Royal Carl Rosa Opera Company (African Consolidated Theatres, Ltd., 1937). Reproduced with permission.

The visibility of the programme's red cover implies that individuals outside the theatre, who may not engage with the context of the programme itself, are still exposed to the advertisement for Castle Beer. Those attending the opera might engage with the entire programme booklet, but passers-by or individuals not attending the performance, like theatre staff, for example, could still encounter the back cover and its advertisement. This design decision could also reflect an attempt to avoid direct association with the elites while still tapping into a wider market, allowing Castle Beer to appeal to a working-class audience

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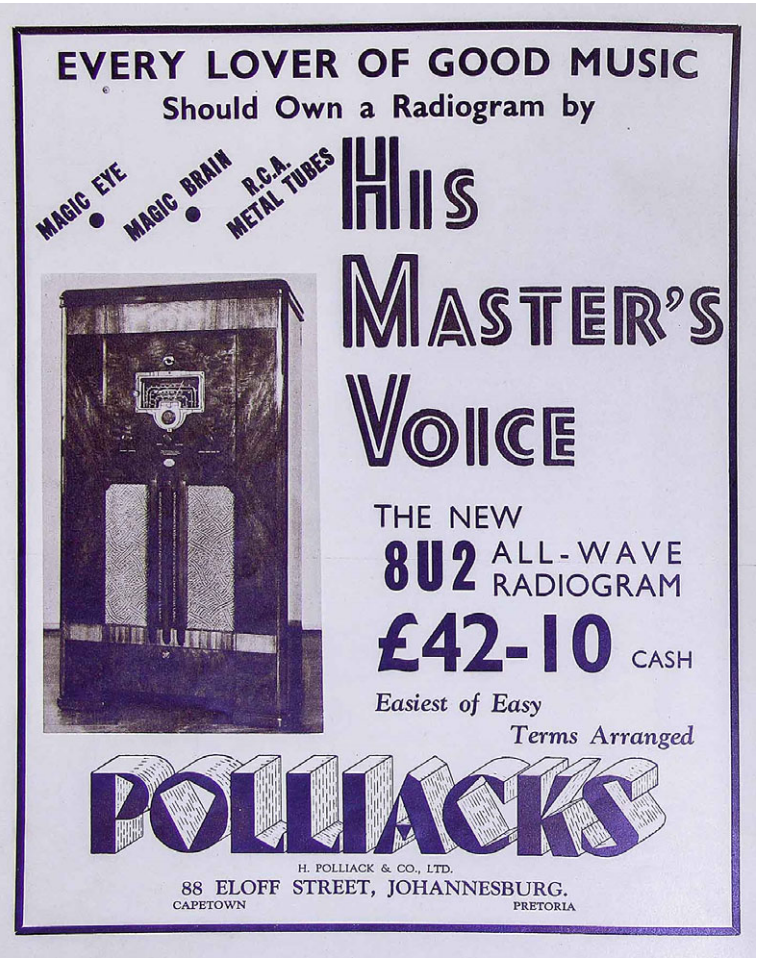

Figure 5. Advertisement for Polliacks, Carl Rosa Programme, p. 24. WCARS. Accession A1745. Mrs M.C. Schirach. Vol. 3, Royal Carl Rosa Opera Company (African Consolidated Theatres, Ltd., 1937). Reproduced with permission.

without alienating highbrow patrons. While it is unclear whether this placement was deliberately designed to reconcile these tensions, it does imply that the programme functioned as more than a promotional tool for opera or products. It may have been a space where cultural and social boundaries, particularly between English and Afrikaner communities, were subtly negotiated and contested, reflecting the broader dynamics at play within the settler population.

Further afield

The Carl Rosa's visit proved immensely successful. Following their sojourn in Johannesburg the company played a week in Pretoria,[95] before touring to Southern Rhodesia.[96] After Rhodesia they made their way to Cape Town, followed by Durban, where the company provided the Theatre Royale with its swan song before the building was demolished in December

[95] 'Brilliant Opera Premiere', *Rand Daily Mail* (24 June 1937).
[96] *Bulawayo Chronicle* (26 June 1937).

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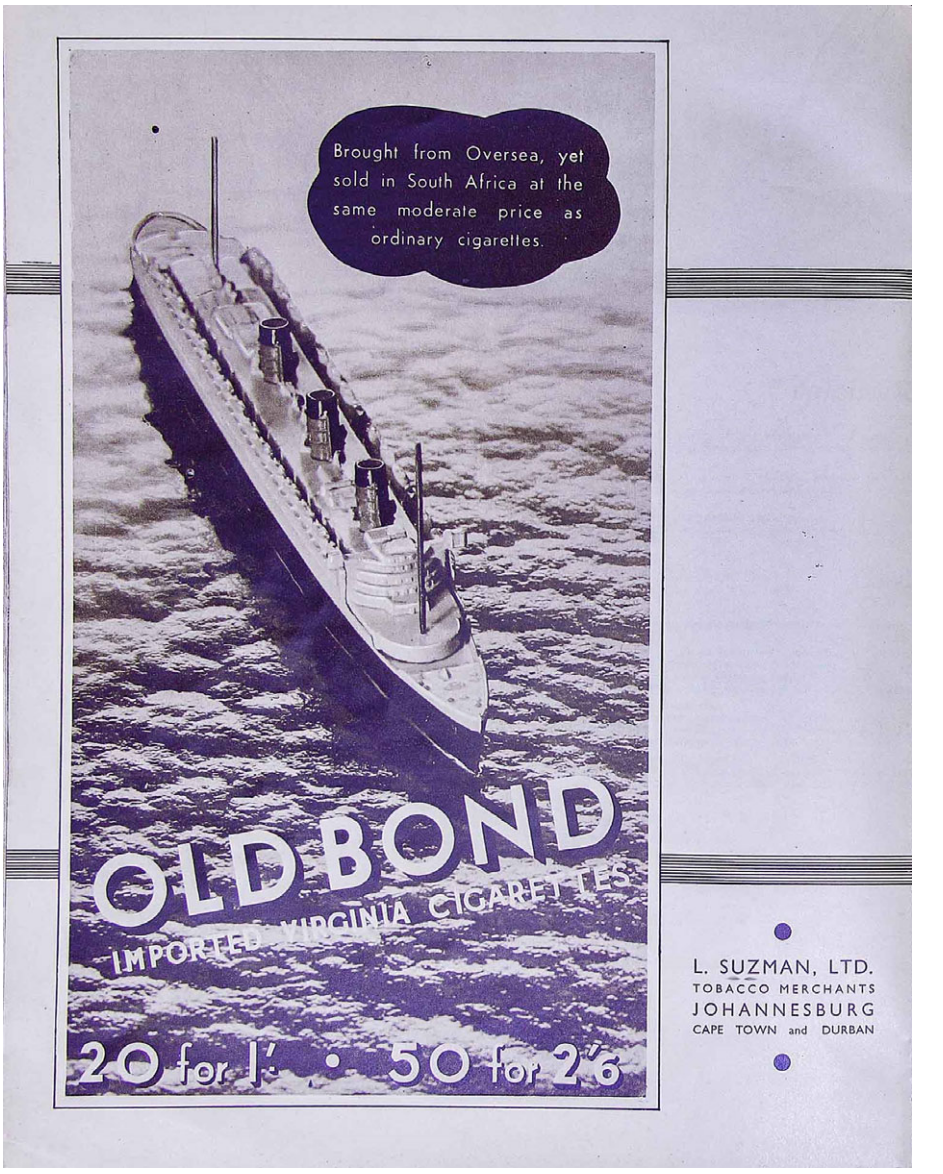

Figure 6. Advertisement for Old Bond cigarettes. Carl Rosa Programme, p. 23. WCARS. Accession A1745. Mrs M.C. Schirach. Vol. 3, Royal Carl Rosa Opera Company (African Consolidated Theatres, Ltd., 1937). Reproduced with permission.

1937.[97] The company also played Pietermaritzburg and Bloemfontein. Midway between Johannesburg and Cape Town, Bloemfontein was added to the touring schedule following several requests by opera lovers there for ACT to arrange performances.[98] Of course, ACT was adamant that guarantees be given for attendance so that it would not operate at a loss. To assuage ACT's

[97] J. Malherbe, *Port Natal: A Pioneer Story* (Cape Town, 1965), 145.

[98] J.L.K. Human, 'Die Musieklewe in Bloemfontein 1900–1939' (DPhil, Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat, 1976), 217–18.

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Figure 7. Advertisement for Westminster Filter Tip cigarettes. Carl Rosa Programme, p. 19. WCARS. Accession A1745. Mrs M.C. Schirach. Vol. 3, Royal Carl Rosa Opera Company (African Consolidated Theatres, Ltd., 1937). Reproduced with permission.

concerns, representatives of the Bloemfontein Repertory Society, the Philharmonic Society and the Choral Society gave their assurances that the performances would be well attended. These requests were met and in August it was announced that six performances were planned for Bloemfontein the following month.

Since touring opera companies rarely made it as far as Bloemfontein, and given the relatively short run, the Carl Rosa's performances were particularly well attended. The audience drew opera enthusiasts both locally and from other regions. District News columns in the *Basutoland News*, a publication from neighbouring Basutoland, report that

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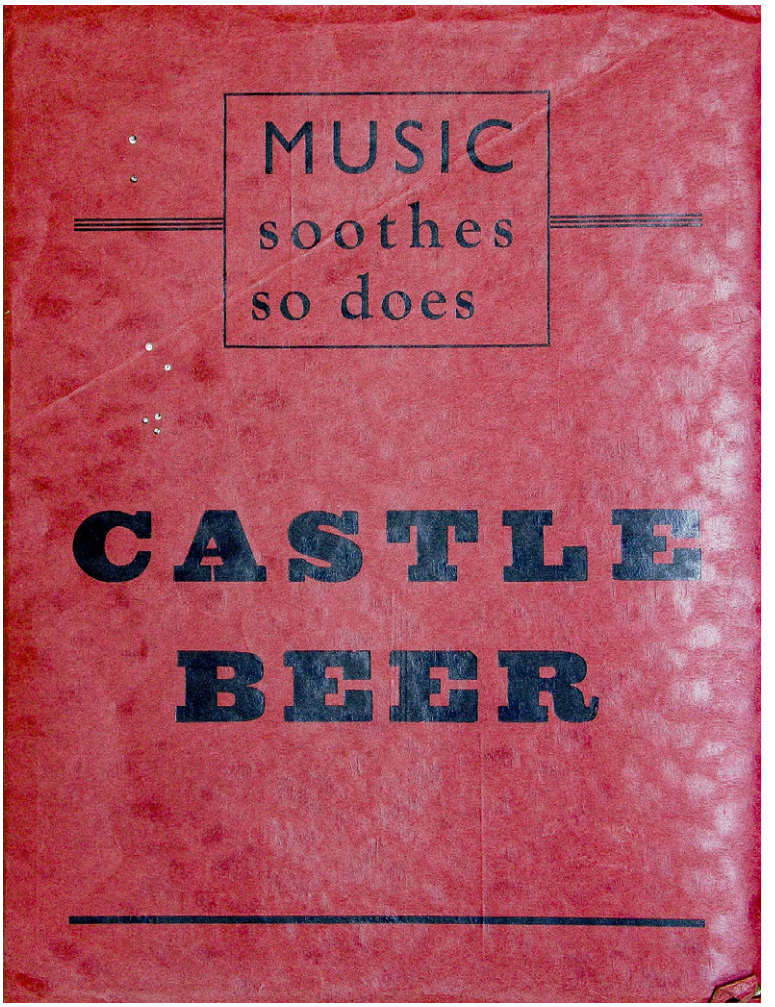

Figure 8. Carl Rosa Programme, back cover page. WCARS. Accession A1745. Mrs M.C. Schirach. Vol. 3, Royal Carl Rosa Opera Company (African Consolidated Theatres, Ltd., 1937). Reproduced with permission.

residents from the cities Maseru, Mafeking and Leribe drove to Bloemfontein to see the Carl Rosa.[99] While the distance between Leribe and Bloemfontein (over 136 miles) indicates that opera lovers would go to great lengths to see a live production, it also speaks to the dedication of British settlers to see and support culture imported from the metropole. The Bloemfontein leg of the tour seems to have been a huge success. The interpretations of the conductors and principal cast were widely praised in the press. Interestingly, the Afrikaans publication *Die Volksblad* took issue with the English translation of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, arguing that the translation resulted in a loss of musicality present in the original Italian libretto.[100] Nevertheless, audiences across South Africa were entranced by the Carl Rosa's talents. The last city in which the company played was Port Elizabeth, during

[99] Now known as Lesotho, Basutoland was a Crown Colony from 1886 to 1966. 'Maseru Murmurings', *Basutoland Chronicle* (14 September 1937), 3; 'District News', *Basutoland Chronicle* (21 September 1937), 8.

[100] This reads as ironic considering the cultural capital sought from translating operas into Afrikaans from the 1960s.

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September 1937.[101] Following the company's return to Great Britain, some events that occurred throughout the twenty-week tour were naturally exaggerated for publicity purposes.[102]

Conclusion

It is essential to point out the discrepancy between the British press's account of opera in South Africa and the reality. While the British press claimed that the Carl Rosa would be one of the first opera companies to visit the tip of Africa, in fact it was one of the last companies to tour South Africa. In this sense, the Carl Rosa's visit represents the end of the era of colonial opera performance there. Crucially, the Carl Rosa's tour asserted British identity in South Africa during the 1930s – not only by means of opera in English, but also, tellingly, through the programme booklet accompanying the tour. Overall, this printed programme booklet, with its advertisements emphasising Englishness, played a crucial role in reinforcing British cultural hegemony during the Carl Rosa Opera Company's tour of South Africa. It served as a visual representation of the settler imaginary, perpetuating ideals of British comfort, refinement and superiority while further distancing settlers from the land and colonised peoples of South Africa.

It would be easy to discount the contributions of South Africa-based individuals such as John Connell and to position Carl Rosa's tour as the first in several years to offer audiences a taste of opera (though this was perhaps the case in smaller towns that did not benefit from the proximity of professional opera facilities). While Connell's efforts in Johannesburg primed audiences for grand opera, the Carl Rosa exposed audiences to professional opera, as evidenced in the plethora of reviews that praise the spectacular sets and artistry imported from the British homeland. Unfortunately, there are some gaps in the information regarding the Carl Rosa's twenty-week tour to the Union of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. Further research into the Carl Rosa's tour and its broader cultural ramifications could shed more light on these transformative moments in Southern Africa's opera history. In essence, the narrative of the Carl Rosa's success in colonial South Africa emerges as more than a mere cultural event: it is emblematic of the broader tensions between British imperialist aspirations and the rising tide of Afrikaner nationalism. The company's tour captivated audiences and reinforced British cultural hegemony. Against the backdrop of colonialism's twilight and the emergence of Afrikaner cultural pride, the Carl Rosa's triumph may act as a reminder of the complexities inherent in colonial encounters.

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[101] No dates have been verified at present, but the company presented *Rigoletto*, *Madam Butterfly*, *The Barber of Seville*, *La Bohème* and *La Traviata* (under those titles). See Eric Attwell, *Port Elizabeth Opera House: The First Hundred Years* (Cape Town, 1992), 43.

[102] Phillips, for example, alleged that a cinema in Johannesburg had been named after Luella Paikin, an assertion which has proved impossible to corroborate. See 'Blazing the Trail of Opera', *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (12 October 1937).

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