The Larrikin’s Hop: Larrikinism and Late Colonial Popular Theatre

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Along with the shearer, the suffragist and the bohemian, the larrikin is one of the standard characters through which late colonial Australia is imagined. Time and again, we hear the same things said about him: that his name probably came from the expression ‘larkin’ about’; that he could be identified by his swagger, his leer and fancy boots; that he belonged to street ‘pushes’ with rogueish names like the Flying Angels; and that he acted as a repository for anxieties about sexuality and urban life. Accounts of larrikinism are commonly based on key sources—police reports, newspapers, social commentary and literature. What emerges from these is a highly theatrical image of the larrikin. He appears as a colonial bovver-boy, kitted out with red neck-cloth and lustful grimace—or else as a rough diamond with a heart o’ gold and a taste for jollity.

Given the ‘staginess’ of prevailing images of the larrikin, it is surprising that we have heard so little about his relationship to popular theatre. Discussions of colonial larrikinism rarely draw upon theatrical sources. This is the case even though larrikin characters enjoyed a certain popularity in Australian variety theatres during the 1890s. More significant, however, is the fact that larrikins themselves drew from the variety repertoire in order to craft their collective persona. Crucial to the making of this persona were the characters of the ‘coster swell’ and the ‘coon’, the first drawn from English music halls and the second from American minstrelsy. Much the same could be said for the larrikiness, or ‘donah’, who wore gaudy dresses and large feathered hats. The larrikin and donah were indeed self-consciously theatrical, their identities drawing on impersonations familiar to the popular stage.

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‘Variety theatre’ is an umbrella term used to denote theatrical entertainment made up of disparate parts. The minstrel show was, in this sense, a form of variety theatre. It typically featured a first act of black-face singing, a second act starring specialty performers such as ventriloquists and dancers, and a third act made up of a comic burlesque or farce. Minstrelsy regularly featured in Australia from the mid-1800s, but later in the century it faced stiff competition from other theatrical companies. Many of these incorporated
routines from English music halls and/or emerging American vaudeville theatres, and it is with them that the term ‘variety’ is most closely associated.5

Whatever precise form it took, variety entertainment was a regular, taken-for-granted feature of Australian life in the late Victorian era. Staged alike by overseas and local companies, it appealed to diverse audiences. Some people encountered variety at amateur fund-raising efforts; many more went to professional shows in the suburbs or country towns. During the week, these venues took in a motley of shopworkers, clerks, tradespeople and labourers. Saturday matinees were for women and children; Saturday nights were for ‘the mob’, a largely masculine group of labourers and the criminal underclass out for a lark. Uptown theatres such as the Tivoli catered for an elegant clientele, but their cheaper seats still included working people out on a spree.6 This is why variety can be called ‘popular’, then: it formed part of the texture of day-to-day living for a broad sweep of the population.7

Descriptions of larrikins first emerged in the 1870s. This was in large part because of the growth of ‘slummer journalism’, in which writers such as John Freeman and ‘The Vagabond’ presented gripping insights into the colonial underworld. These writers described visits to opium dens, bare-knuckle prize fights, and the notorious ‘saddling bars’ at the back of some colonial theatres.8 Theatres featured prominently in their commentary, especially that on larrikins. Larrikins were often found at ‘low’ concert-halls, wrote The Vagabond, where variety acts were followed by giddy dancing from the crowd. They also loitered in the vestibules of glitz theatres, and afterwards packed into the cheap gallery seats upstairs to create mayhem during the show.9

While the larrikin emerged as a cultural figure in the 1870s, it was not really until the 1880s that he achieved a vivid currency in the colonial imagination. Fears of street misrule ran hot in this decade, inflamed by angry reactions to Ned Kelly’s hanging in 1880, and by sensational rape allegations. The Mt Rennie Case was the most heavily reported of these; it involved the trial of eleven larrikin youths for a gang rape in 1886; four of these youths were later executed.10 At the same time, however, variety theatre and much else was booming in the 1880s. It is not perhaps so surprising, then, that larrikins began appearing on the variety stage, not just among its audiences, towards the end of the decade. The first entertainer known for playing a larrikin was an Australian minstrel singer, Will Whitman. Later described as ‘famous for his larrikin songs’, he appears to have first performed one around 1887, called ‘The Larrikin’s Hop’. In 1889, he again appeared as a larrikin, scoring ‘a big hit in Melbourne’ with a song called ‘Woolloomooloo’, and a year later, he was once more performing ‘The Larrikin’s Hop’ with two travelling American minstrel companies.11

In early 1892, an English entertainer, E. J. Lonnen, worked up a larrikin act as part of a burlesque at Melbourne’s Gaiety Theatre. Promotional material incorrectly claimed he was the first performer to portray a larrikin on stage.12 Lonnen may genuinely have believed himself to be first in this regard, but more likely he was influenced by other larrikin acts in theatres small enough to be under the radar of the metropolitan press. Whatever his inspiration, a modest swag of larrikin songs appeared in the early 1890s. Historians Edgar Waters and Clay Djubal each list a fair number of these, so I will not repeat all of them here – especially given that the words ‘Woolloomooloo’ and ‘The Push’ featured repetitively in their titles.13 In April 1893, for example, an entertainer calling himself Master Zetter sang a song called ‘I’ve Chucked Up the Push for My Donah’, composed by J. C. Williamson, at the Alhambra in Melbourne. In 1894, Frank M. Clark sang ‘The Push’ and ‘Hooligans’, while Whitman reprised ‘The Larrikin’s Hop’.14

Given the paucity of commentary on variety performances, it is hard to tell exactly what entertainers were doing when they played the larrikin. There are only a few cases in which the text from their songs survives. Whitman’s ‘Woolloomooloo’ is one of these. If it is anything to go by, theatrical depictions of the larrikin made little attempt to replicate his speech or comment on his peculiarities. True, Whitman’s standard costume was reminiscent of larrikin dress, including greasy hair and bell-bottomed trousers.15 He performed in black-face, however, making it obvious that his was no naturalistic portrayal of the larrikin. ‘Oh, my name it is McCarty / And I’m a rorty party’, he sang:

A larrikin so hearty
That’s a fact, oh, strike me blue!
I’m a perfect daisy
Won’t work because I’m lazy
Gone way along the boozing throng
That loaf round Woolloomooloo ...
After spending years in gaol, I began to quail,
I resolved to live upon a different lay.
Soon I enlisted in the ranks of the Salvation cranks,
You can bet I made the blooming business pay.
‘Hallelujah!’ I yell out, for I know my way about;
I kid the mugs that I’m converted too.
All the lassies, too, I mash, and I’m never out of cash,
For I spank the drum all over Woolloomooloo.16

The image of Whitman’s character banging a Salvation Army drum is of a piece with many other portrayals of ‘low life’ in English and American popular theatre. Characters who fooled their superiors with improbable hard-luck stories, or who knowingly mugged respectability, appeared regularly in music halls and minstrel shows. Mockery of the Salvation Army was also an occasional feature.17 In England, the Salvos opened themselves up as a target for ridicule because of their opposition to the bawdiness of the music halls.
The halls were indeed notorious for their ribaldry. They provided their audiences, it was said, with ‘one long streak of rich, corrugated blue’. Given this, it is possible that Whitman made double entendres out of the notion of being ‘struck blue’, if not also of ‘spanking the drum’.

Variety theatre’s seeming lack of interest in ‘Australianness’ has often been commented upon by observers. Nationalist papers such as the Bulletin spoke about it in aggrieved tones: ‘in what variety house can Australians hear a reference to their own country?’ was a regular refrain. This critique has been echoed by historians ever since. Edgar Waters notes in disgust, for instance, that after an upsurge of acts in the early 1890s, the larrikin appears to have disappeared from the Australian variety stage until he was resuscitated by the comedians Stiffy and Mo, in the 1920s. For a time ‘it had looked as though the variety stage might exploit the larrikin as a distinctive Australian type’, he said. Regrettably, that did not last. Popular theatre is a frustrating form for anyone looking for naturalist depictions of Australian life. While there were some pantomimes and plays with Australian locations, performances were more frequently set in London. When variety theatrelings did include Australian material, they usually did so by changing the lyrics of an imported song. Topical material was an important part of variety performance, but it was generally included in improvised asides or allusions rather than as the focal point of an act.

To criticise variety for its lack of realism, however – as also for an insufficiency of local detail – is to misunderstand its logic and appeal. Variety performers were not interested in sitting before a canvas like the Heidelberg painters, or venturing into gambling dens, notebook in hand, like the flaneur journalists. Rather than searching for a spurious nationalist ‘authenticity’, they were explicit about their imitation of other cultural products and practices. Indeed, that was the point. A spirit of parody infused variety theatre, making it well-practised at the transformation of existing texts and styles.

Whitman’s appearance as a black-face larrikin is an example of variety’s parodic logic at work. ‘Woooloomooloo’ was set to a famous faux-Irish minstrel song, ‘Killaloe’. It began:

I happened to be born on a cold and frosty morn
In the famous suburb known as Woooloomooloo.
This was a direct nod to the original, which began:

I happened to be born at the time they cut the corn
Quite contagious to the town of Killaloo.

The audience would, of course, have known this. Most likely, it would have been amused by the juxtaposition of the rustic simpleton of ‘Killaloo’ with the cunning slum-child of ‘Woooloomooloo’. The song’s parodic nature was part of what made it pleasurable, allowing it to take something ‘old’ and transform it into something ‘new’. In this sense, variety’s inventiveness functioned similarly to rap and hip-hop genres, with their knowing re-working of other songs in witty and sometimes surprising ways. From a twenty-first-century vantage, a larrikin assuming the guise of a black American minstrel is an historical anomaly. We are accustomed to an unambiguously Anglo image of the larrikin today, waving the flag and shouting racist slogans in the midst of a sporting crowd. In the late nineteenth century, however, manliness was potently associated with whiteness. This meant an affinity between blackness and other ‘unmanly’ groups operated on the popular stage. It was not uncommon for black-face characters to be substituted for Cockney or Irishmen in minstrel sketches. These characters were all shown to resist work, to gull their superiors through sneaky manoeuvres, and to lack manly self-control.

One of the most famous minstrel characters was Zip Coon, an urban dandy. Zip Coon was first impersonated in Australia in 1848, and enjoyed regular outings over the following decades. Henry Lawson remembered minstrel songs being sung on the New South Wales goldfields during the 1870s, including one called ‘Blue Tail Fly’, about a Zip Coon-like dandy. Such figures provided inspiration for a range of fast-living ‘coon’ songs appearing in Australia from the 1880s. Coon songs were fully entrenched on the Australian variety circuit by the end of the century. Such was their popularity that various Australian printing-houses published songs such as ‘The Lily of Laguna’ and ‘Every Race in the World Has a Flag But the Coon’. The coons in these songs boasted of being ‘black sheep’ and ladies’ men. They referred to ‘red hot’ or promiscuous ‘honeys’, and they described dancing, stealing and razor-wielding as typical coon pursuits.

Like the coons of late nineteenth-century minstrelsy, larrinkins were cast as violent and sexually rapacious, ranking beneath the rest of white Australians on the evolutionary scale. During the Mt Rennie rape case in 1886, the larronkinnen defendants were condemned as being ‘more cruel and degraded than savages’. Even before this, a Melbourne paper described a group of larrinkins dancing ‘like savages’. The Australian press often depicted African-American men loitering about in larrikin fashion in dark urban places. Given these multiple associations between larrinkins and blackness, the idea of a ‘push’ member being portrayed in black-face, singing a song called ‘The Larrikin’s Hop’, is not as bizarre as it first appears.

Another influence on the stage larrikin was the coster, or costermonger, an English music hall character based on itinerant street-hawkers. Costers hauled fruit and vegetables in barrows – their name was said to come from costard, an apple – or drove wares in a donkey-drawn wagon. They had sometimes been portrayed as Jewish or Irish in early nineteenth-century musical theatre. By the 1880s, however, they were far more likely to be depicted as Cockneys on the English variety stage. Cockney costers came...
A larrakin and donah lament changes to New South Wales licensing laws restricting pubs in the city.


to prominence on the Australian stage in the 1870s. During his 1871-74 tour, English performer Harry Rickards performed a coster song called ‘Going to the Derby in My Little Donkey Cart’, attracting notice from the colonial press.

When he returned to Australia in the 1880s, Rickards continued to garner praise for Cockney coster parts, among them a ‘London costermonger out for a bank holiday’; Flash Jimmy, ‘a Whitechapel costermonger’; Rorty Tom, a Cockney crook; and ‘Arry, another egregious Cockney based on stories about a vulgar cad in London’s *Punch* during the 1870s.

It is easier to speak about Rickards’ performances than other Australian variety acts, because of the amount of press commentary and advertising devoted to him. Since variety theatre traded in imitation, however, it is most likely that costers made regular appearances in other variety shows. Certainly by 1892, when E. J. Lonnen’s London burlesque company toured the colonies, Australian audiences were well-versed in the genre. The *Bulletin* spoke disparagingly of the ‘inevitable coster song’ appearing in performances like Lonnen’s. It also noted that the rowdy ‘gods’ in the gallery seats were rapt by his ‘famous “coster song”, “Ave A Glass, Won’t You?”’ When Rickards again returned to Australia in the early 1890s, his initial success owed much to his coster impersonations. He had secured sole colonial rights to the music of various coster singers, most notably Albert Chevalier and Marie Lloyd. Rickards ‘hit the blot’ singing these songs in 1892, shortly before taking over Sydney’s Garrick Theatre and calling it the Tivoli. His coster sketches were ‘encored six times on an average’ when he performed them in Sydney, with his rendition of Chevalier’s ‘Wot Cher!’ or

Knocked ‘Em in the Old Kent-Road’ drawing a ‘Babel of applause’. In Melbourne, ‘Wot Cher!’ attracted so much applause that Rickards gave a speech in gratitude.

It is hard to know precisely why costers held such an appeal for Australian audiences. In England, the popularity of Albert Chevalier’s coster songs has often been attributed to his romantic ‘take’ on the genre. He provided an endearing Cockney stereotype tailored to respectable theatregoers – a stereotype which C. J. Dennis was to recycle as his vision of the larrkin in *The Songs of the Sentimental Bloke* (1915). This, we are told, appealed to the increasing numbers of bourgeois families frequenting the late Victorian music hall. The same explanation has been offered for the popularity of Rickards’ Australian performances. Gae Mary Anderson suggests that Rickards’ coster songs presented ‘quaint, sanitised, and sentimental versions of low-class life’. It was for this reason that they enjoyed a broad appeal, both on the stage and – as sheet music – in ‘the drawing-rooms of polite society’.

Like most broad-brush claims based on class, the explanations just offered are too neat to persuasively account for the coster’s appeal. For a start, sentimental versions of the coster were not the only ones available. In England, Gus Elen played a grittier version of the coster than did Chevalier, singing of the pitfalls of urban poverty. Coster-girl performers such as Jenny Hill and Marie Lloyd sang about getting drunk at the pub and also, allusively, about sex. Even the range of Chevalier’s coster acts extended beyond clownish romanticism, and the same can be said for Rickards’ performances. His characters ‘Arry, Flash Jimmy, and Kent-road Bill are indeed better described as ‘coster swells’ than costers per se. Coster swells represented a demotic twist on the swell characters played by English music hall performers such as Alfred Vance – and also by performers in Australia, including Rickards himself.

In ‘Cicquot, Cicquot! That’s the Wine For Me’, Vance played a hard-partying, champagne-scoffing toff with a penchant for foppish attire. The coster swell was what Australians today would refer to as a ‘bogan’ version of this roisterous dandy. He strove for the glamour of gentleman swell, dressing in cheap knock-offs of the latter’s *haute couture* and drinking something less expensive than Cicquot. Rickards was evidently drawn by these bogan swells, investing his characterisations of them with a ‘leery affability’.

The ‘imperturbable self-confidence’ of the coster swell and coster-girl makes it clear that they were not simply sanitised low-life forms. Coster swells could provoke snobbish laughter on account of their aspirational airs. But at the same time they could burlesque the pretensions of the affluent classes, exaggerating them to the point of ridicule. They could also suggest that anyone ‘with a bit of luck or initiative’ could aspire to a swell life. It was for this reason that Cockney swells were so popular among the larrinkin
The efflorescence of the stage larrikin must be seen in the context of the coster mania taking place in the early 1890s. Even at the time, larrikins and coster swells were acknowledged as inter-related forms. When Lonnen tried out his larrikin routine, the *Bulletin* declared it a “decidedly hybrid performance”.43 Lonnen “has dropped the coster of yore”, it reported, “and substitutes for that ancient friend a just passable imitation of the Australian larrikin”.44 Lonnen also performed an “Australian version” of Chevalier’s coster song, “Mrs Enry Awkins”, with words written by Lance Lenton, lyricist for “The Larrikin’s Hop” and “Woolloomooloo”.45 Lenton then wrote an Australian version of “Wot Cher!” for Frank M. Clark. Called “Knocked Em on the Brighton Road”, it featured a Collingwood swell riding out with his “tart” in a tumbledown horse-drawn cart.46 In each case here, the stage larrikin was recognised as a parody of the coster swell.

So far in this article I have pointed out that minstrelsy and music hall had a lot to do with variety theatre’s representation of larrikin characters. The “coon” and “coster swell” were closely related to the stage larrikin, and this was likely to have influenced views towards larrikins both on and off the stage. But these characters were also a source of inspiration for larrikins themselves. Variety traditions played a crucial role in the development of the larrikin persona. They provided street-youths with the means to style identities for themselves. It was not just a matter of the stage larrikin imitating other stage characters rather than ‘real life’ larrikins. Since street larrikins themselves imitated theatrical characters, the relationship between ‘art’ and ‘life’ was more complex than that.

In contemporary accounts, the defining element of larrikinism was often considered to be larrikins’ distinctive dress. Dress and gesture were what made these people ‘larrikins’, rather than some other loafer or criminal. According to travel-writer Gilbert Parker, for instance, Brisbane had no larrikins. There were abundant low characters in the streets; indeed, as Mark Finnane notes, there was plenty of rowdiness committed by Brisbane’s rough youth. But one did not see evidence of “the slouch-hat, the rakish jib, the drawn features” in Brisbane – all characteristics essential to larrikinism, so far as Parker was concerned.47 Nat Gould similarly claimed that larrikins could be identified by their bell-bottomed trousers. These, he wrote, were the “hall-mark” of genuine larrikinism.48

There were, of course, subtle differences in what some larrikins wore. Some wore bell-bottoms; others, baggy pants. Some were described in collarless shirts; others went to dances in frilled shirts, with a velvet collar or cheap tweed suit.49 In an 1882 poem, a number of larrikin types were depicted. Firstly, there were “fly Nancy’, ‘brazen-faced Annie’ and ‘eery-faced Sue’. Then there were Tommy, the snappy bookmaker, Billy the

boozers, ‘Flash Arty, whose heels make him stand on his toes’, and ‘Jerry the “gaffer” with short rusty coat/A flaming red tie around his bare throat’.50 While there were thus subtle differences between larrikin types, they styled themselves nonetheless through a fairly tight cluster of features. For men, these included high-heeled boots, a rakishly tilted hat and lasciviousness of expression. For female larrikins, it included tawdry hats, flounced dresses and brazenness of face.
In an article on literary representations of the larrikin, John Rickard wondered at the distinctiveness of larrikin dress. 'Where did the larrikin look for inspiration?', he asked. I cannot pretend to know every influence upon larrikin style, but variety theatre certainly had an important part to play. Elements of larrikin dress were supplied by a range of variety characters. Costers were nearly always depicted in bell-bottoms and neckerchief, for example, and sometimes also jackets with ‘pearlie’ buttons. Swells wore fancy suits, colourful cravats, and greased-back hair, and were renowned for the fuss they made of their boots. Coster swells wore even brighter neckcloths, trousers covered in vivid stripes or checks, and hats tipped jauntily to one side. Donahs, on the other hand, wore hats covered in huge ostrich feathers. These varied visual aids formed the props from which larrikins and donahs styled themselves on the street.

English music hall celebrity, Albert Chevalier, dressed as a coster swell for a song called 'Mafekin' Night'.

The 'love of mischief for mischief's sake' was widely regarded a salient feature of larrikinism. Larrikins were often described as 'dancing mad', and given to larking about. This ethic of pleasure was precisely that celebrated within variety theatre: whether in risqué music hall numbers, or in the toe-tapping nastiness of coon dancing songs. A sense of the darker pleasures of violence and mayhem was particularly apparent in coon songs, where characters routinely thumbed their noses at affluent whites and skirred of their fighting prowess. This kind of threatening braggadocio had been a feature of black-face impersonations well before coon songs came to the fore. Jim Crow, the most famous minstrel character, had this to say to the well-off men in his audiences:

An' I caution all white dandies,  
Not to come my way,  
For if dey insult me,  
Dey'll in de gutter lay.

Further, Irish characters were frequently depicted dealing blows to authority figures on the variety stage. In a typical song of the late colonial era, Frank M. Clark sang about a group of violent Irishmen out on the town one night:
The policeman interfered with us, the man that knocked him down/Was McCormack.57

Intimidatory speech of this kind was a key part of the larrikin persona. Larrikins were repetitively described as being found on street corners yelling at passers-by.58 Some really did lay white dandies in the gutter, of course, `The policeman interfered with us, the man that knocked him down/Was and in this they may have been encouraged by the aggressive buffoonery Leslie Brothers combined `acrobatism and grotesqueries', delivering slapstick violence to one another in black-face guise. No doubt this was what was involved when they performed `Woolloomooloo', a musical sketch, at the Tivoli in 1895.59 The clowns in pantomimes were even more violent figures, brandishing red-hot poker as weapons, flattening policemen in mangles, stealing food and chasing pedestrians.60 The larrikins who reacted to Ned Kelly's hanging in 1880, calling themselves a `second Kelly gang' and storming shops in Melbourne's Hoddle Street, exhibited an almost uncanny similarity to these theatrical figures of misuse.61

Variety theatre used hackneyed props through which to signal key character types: burnt-cork for the negro minstrel, a feathered hat for the coster girl, a champagne bottle for the swell. By providing countless versions of these stock characters, but each time representing them in subtly different possibilities' were explored.62 Audiences were continually given examples of performers taking a well-known act, adding to it local or idiosyncratic features, and thus making it their own. They were also aware that while parody was not necessarily subversive, it was available to be used in this way. By providing an education of this kind, variety theatre contributed to the creation of larrikin identity. And this has a nice irony about it, given that variety has been criticised for its failure to develop `authentic' Australian characters on stage.

Concern about larrikinism reached its pitch in the mid-1880s, when sensational reportage of the Mt Rennie Case inflamed fears of lawlessness in the streets. This concern shows that a struggle was taking place over concepts of citizenship, public space, social order and moral values at the time. Related struggles were also taking place within the theatre over the behaviours deemed acceptable there.63 In the past, social historians have focused on authorities' efforts to contain the larrikin menace. They have talked about the fact that `larrikin' was a moniker imposed upon unskilled young men. Cultural historians have also focused on attempts to make popular theatre more respectable, ensuring that it catered for a modern mass audience rather than a rowdy plebeian one.64 In this article, however, I have focused on larrikinism not just as a label imposed upon `low' youth, but as one assumed by some of them for the purpose of self-definition and social resistance during the conflicts of the late colonial era. I have further shown that popular performance played an important part in this process. Efforts were made to contain the larrikin menace on the variety stage, certainly – but the theatre also functioned as a political resource for larrikins themselves.

NOTES


5 Waterhouse 118; Djubal (2005) 100–63.


Graeme Davison and David Dunstan, “‘This Moral Pandemonium’: Images of Low Life”, in Davison et al. 32–3, 37–43.


Lorgnette (March 1892): 6; cf Waters 213.


Lorgnette (May 1894, 4th series, no. 173).

Norman 58.

‘Woolloomooloo’, in Waters 211. For the lyrics of other songs referring to larrikins, and/or their social conditions, see: ‘At Black Wattle Swamp I Met My Doom, Parody on Molly Riley-O’, and ‘The Blow It Nearly Killed Father’, in Joe Slater’s Imperial Songster (Sydney: n.d.) no. 15: 26, 33; no. 33: 54.

Waterhouse 88–9.


Waters 220.

Ibid 225.


Lewis 267; James H. Dormon, ‘Shaping the Popular Image of Post Reconstruction American Blacks: The “Coon Song” Phenomenon of the Gilded Age’, American Quarterly 40.4 (December 1988): 452–9; Waterhouse 89–91; Leslie Stuart, ‘The Lily of Laguna’ (Sydney: J. Albert & Son, 1898); Will A. Heelan and J. Fred Helf, ‘Every Race in the World Has a Flag But the Coon’ (Sydney: Albert’s Music Stores, 1900); cf the abundant coon songs in Joe Slater’s Imperial Songster, e.g. ‘Hot Stuff’ in no. 15: 36, 52; ‘De Warm’st Baby in Dis Town’, ‘I’m a Hot Thing’, no. 29: 54, 56; ‘You Ain’t So Warm’, no. 34: 12–13.

Grabosky 92; Melbourne Punch (1 June 1876): 219.


Bulletin (17 September 1892): 8; (22 October 1892): 6.


Anderson 227; Argus (22 August 1892): 7.

Albert Chevalier, ‘On Costers and Music Halls’, clipping in Robbins Stage Magic Collection, Acc. No. 614, Mitchell Library, Sydney. C. J. Dennis was a variety theatre enthusiast, and undoubtedly based his larrikin Bill from Songs of the Sentimental Bloke on the Chevalier-style costers he encountered on stage. For an appreciative and evidently educated account of variety performance, see C. J. Dennis, ‘Variety’ (handwritten script for the Gadfly), 6 February 1907, CY 2422, Mitchell Library, Sydney.


Anderson 252.

Scott 251, 255.

Bratton 106–7.


Bailey 122–3.
For other examples of 'low' swells played in Australia, including coon swells, see 'Looking For a Coon Like Me', 'Can't Stop! Can't Stop! Can't Stop!', 'The Dandy Coon's Reply', 'The Irish Swells', and 'George McGee', in Joe Slater's Imperial Songster, no. 15: 36, 79; no. 22: 8-9, 12-13; no. 34: 33; 'Lah-di-dah', in Bent and Bachelder's Christy Minstrels' Song Book (Sydney: 1882) 14; 'The Man With the Seal-Skin Pants', in Clark and Ryman's Minstrel Songster (San Francisco: Francis, Valentin, 1888) 13.

Star, in Cheshire 75.
Bailey 120-3; Kift 50.
'Knocked 'Em on the Brighton Road', in Frank M. Clark's New Folly Songster.
Gilbert Parker, in Morris 262; Finnane.
Gould 105; Murray 33; Melbourne Punch (4 May 1876): 178; (1 June 1876): 219; Paterson, 'In Push Society', 4; Lawson, 'Captain of the Push', 90.
Rickard 84, n. 5.
Anderson 80, 231-2.
A reference to donahs' hats appears in many variety songs, including 'That's 'Ria!' ('If she's got an ostrich feather down to here/That's 'Ria'), Joe Slater's Imperial Songster, no. 26: 22; cf Ambrose Pratt, King of the Rocks (London: Hutchinson, 1900) 143.
Sir George Stephen, in Morris, 261; Melbourne Punch (1 June 1876): 219; Cheshire 68.
'Jim Crow', in Lott 12.
McCormack, in Frank M. Clark's New Folly Songster 10-11.
Kociumbas 118.
Lorgnette (4 October 1890): 6; McConville 74.