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# Maurice E. Bandmann and the Beginnings of a Global Theatre Trade

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## Abstract

This essay outlines the remarkable but today largely forgotten career of the Anglo-American actor and theatre manager Maurice E. Bandmann (1872-1922). In the course of a thirty-year career Bandmann established a theatrical circuit that extended from the Mediterranean to the Far East. It argues that Bandmann refined theatrical management from an actor-centred to a manager-centred enterprise which enabled him to move several troupes performing various genres around the circuit on a carefully calibrated rotation system. The essay explores how Bandmann created a successful theatrical product that could cater to a highly diverse theatrical public. It argues that the theatrical trade routes established by Bandmann worked on a principle of repetition, whereby troupes sustained a culture of promise and expectation that transcended a specific work or performer.

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When Maurice E. Bandmann died in Gibraltar in 1922 aged forty-nine of typhoid fever, the only obituaries published were in Eastern newspapers: in India, the Straits Settlements, Rangoon, and beyond. The obituaries were unanimous in their admiration for his achievement. As an impresario, theatre owner and manager he had contributed significantly to the provision of professional theatrical and cinematic entertainment along a chain of theatres stretching from Gibraltar to Yokohama. An erstwhile actor turned theatre manager, in his heyday Bandmann was recognised by his audiences as a trademark, a 'guinea stamp among itinerant theatrical circles'<sup>1</sup>. The name Maurice E. Bandmann stood for the presentation of professional large-scale productions of mainly musical comedy but also of Shakespeare, contemporary drama, vaudeville and even, on occasion, grand Opera. As the sole possessor of the rights to George Edwardes and of the Gaiety Theatre productions in the British colonies, Bandmann became a purveyor of fine Edwardian froth to the furthest flung reaches of the British Empire and beyond. While the colonial settlements were his main ports of call, they by no means limited his reach, which at different periods of an incessantly peripatetic career also included South America, the West Indies as well as Canada, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines and Japan. Although a household name for over twenty years, the name Maurice Bandmann quickly disappeared from collective memory and the theatre-historical record. Today his

legacy can only be reconstructed from scattered traces in newspapers and private collections.<sup>2</sup>

Maurice Edward Bandmann was born in New York in 1872, as the son of the famous German-Jewish tragedian, Daniel Bandmann and his second wife Millicent Bandmann-Palmer. After his parents separated, he was educated in England and Germany. Following in his parents' footsteps, Maurice became an actor in England in the early 1890s playing alongside his mother. By the mid-1890s he had already become proprietor of two theatrical companies known as the 'North' and the 'South' Manxmann Companies working the English provinces. As an actor he was best known for the roles Svengali in *Trilby*, Pete in *The Manxman* and as Marcus Superbus in *The Sign of the Cross*. In the late 1890s he began touring in the Mediterranean on a circuit, which included Gibraltar, Malta, Alexandria and Cairo. Around the turn of the century he visited South America, the West Indies and Canada. His first foray into India was in 1901, which coincided unfortunately with the death of Queen Victoria and a temporary lack of interest in musical comedy. In 1905 he resumed operations there and made Calcutta his headquarters. He rapidly established a circuit, which by his own account took in 'Gibraltar, Malta, Egypt, India, Burmah, with the Malay States, the Straits Settlements, China, Japan, Java and Philippine Islands.'<sup>3</sup> In 1908 he built a large modern theatre in Calcutta, The Empire. This was followed in 1911 by the construction of the Royal Opera House in Bombay, which after a chequered history of closure, refurbishment as a cinema, and impending demolition is currently being restored back to its original state as an opera house.<sup>4</sup> He owned or leased many theatres along his circuit, thus extending commercial control over all aspects of theatre production and reception. In India he was also instrumental in establishing early cinema, projecting films in his theatres when theatre troupes were not available. A stranger to modesty, an expert in self-advertisement and ruthlessly litigious, for almost twenty years the name Bandmann stood for high quality theatrical entertainment aimed at European and local audiences alike. On his death in 1922 he left two registered public companies in India, a considerable fortune,<sup>5</sup> an estranged, disinherited wife, three daughters in the care of a nurse, and a secretary to whom he bequeathed a quarter of his estate. Despite his death his companies continued to operate and it was not until the late 1930s that the Bandman Eastern Circuit and its attendant companies finally closed down.

What can this rather brief and now almost entirely forgotten career tell us about theatrical trade routes? Or help us understand how they functioned and what cultural and economic impact they had? Paradoxically, Bandmann's disappearance from the theatre-historical archive highlights the necessity for a fresh perspective, which can only be termed global-historical. As Bandmann was evidently a household name, 'a guinea-stamp' east of Gibraltar – the many obituaries emphasize unisono his considerable impact and importance for the establishment of high quality theatrical entertainment throughout the region – we need to examine how a theatrical practice functioned that by definition spanned half the globe and performed successfully for audiences from Cairo to Shanghai. The answer to these questions will follow two main trajectories which themselves provide the framework for the wider question of accounting for his historiographical evanescence. Bandmann's theatre was organised as a business, with commercial exigencies trumping artistic imperatives, although the latter were not unknown to him. Secondly, the very mobility of the enterprise, its indifference to a

specific national or municipal locale, needs to be examined as its *differentia specifica* and assessed as such. Above all, it is necessary to examine the theatre-historiographical implications of a theatre model predicated on mobility and circulation?

In many periods of European theatre history, the provision of performance was entirely reliant on itinerant troupes. Once we move outside the major metropolitan centres, we can observe a practice of visiting companies rather than permanent ensembles, the latter being, even today, outside Central Europe, the exception rather than the rule. And with the exception of the Italian commedia dell'arte companies, these practices have been little studied in comparison to the metropolitan theatrical cultures. A case in point is the comparatively little research available on the itinerant Elizabethan companies active compared to their Italian compatriots.

The itinerant theatre is by definition primarily commercial in orientation, and less motivated by the imperatives of community or nation. Theatre on the move leaves few traces: some playbills, newspaper advertisements, the occasional article and review, and perhaps a scrapbook here or there. But when one considers that all professional theatre in the English-speaking world in the period under consideration was commercial, then the itinerant variety represents the geographical extension of a norm, not the exception. While mobility and commerce certainly condition one another – no movement, no trade – their mutual entanglement result in almost total theatre-historiographical amnesia. Mobility and commercial orientation combine to exclude such theatre from serious scholarly examination.

## The Bandmann Circuit: From Actor-Manager to Public Company

Bandmann's theatrical enterprises provided a quality although heterogeneous product to a geographically and culturally dispersed market. The special quality and features of his manifold undertakings must be understood in the light of this particular economic configuration. Tracy Davis (2000) has studied in great detail the financial workings and ideological implications of the industrial model of theatre production in late nineteenth-century Great Britain and its subsequent export to far-flung colonies and markets: 'changes in the logistics of [theatrical] touring carry significant implications for the entrenchment of imperialism throughout the English-speaking and Anglo-colonized world along the routes of British maritime trade, they also help forecast the cultural capital of the arts undergoing globalization' (Ibid., p. 336). According to Davis, touring, whether national or international, was designed to maximize profit by capitalizing on investment. A successful West End run could generate a large amount of 'cultural capital' as well as quite literally an economic capital investment. The most profitable markets for British theatrical product were the USA and the British colonies, although the costs were in fact quite high and 'cost-benefit ratio in going to distant lands was often marginal at best' (Ibid., p. 337).

A central cost factor was the travel itself, as it implied both cost and lack of income: except for occasional performances on board ships, travel time was invariably 'down time' (Ibid., p. 338). Despite these risks on the margins of economic viability, touring was an essential component of the late-Victorian and Edwardian theatre industry as it

became increasingly integrated into the whole imperial system of open markets, low tariffs and comparative ease of transportation.

Like his father and mother, Bandmann's understanding of theatre was synonymous with touring and its usual rhythm of not performing for not more than a week at any one place. A professional actor at eighteen and manager of his first company at twenty-three, Bandmann's touring and managerial skills were honed between 1890 and 1900 when he travelled throughout the British provinces in a variety of companies. Bandmann was part of a substantial industry of itinerant and competing troupes employing thousands of performers and staff in companies that usually numbered between twenty and forty people. Hundreds of towns and cities in Great Britain had by the end of the nineteenth century performance venues that could be used and were indeed frequented by such troupes. While most remained in the British isles, Bandmann, perhaps inspired by his father's peregrinations that led him literally around the world, extended his operations.<sup>6</sup> In 1899 he founded the Bandmann Comedy and Dramatic Company and made his first foray into the Mediterranean, using the British enclave of Gibraltar as his base. A year later he was calling himself 'Governing Director of the Mediterranean Entertainment Syndicate, Ltd', which had no office, just a postal address care of the *The Era*, the most widely read theatrical trade paper in Great Britain.<sup>7</sup> The degree of diversification which was to become Bandmann's hallmark was already apparent, however, as only a few months earlier in August and September he had been touring the English provinces with his local company performing *The Three Musketeers*, *Little Christopher Columbus* as well as hardy annuals such as the *The Manxmann* and *David Garrick*. Although the Mediterranean enterprise was short-lived – by 1902 he was engaged in a legal dispute with the syndicate now featuring the expanded moniker of the 'Mediterranean and the East Entertainment Syndicate' –, he had now practically left the British Isles to concentrate entirely on foreign touring.<sup>8</sup>

In the early years of the new century Bandmann's company seems to have travelled extensively around the American continent in both hemispheres. In September 1901 *The Times* announced plans for a forty-strong Light Opera Company under Bandmann's direction to visit Jamaica and the West Indies. The enterprise stood in direct connection with the 'new direct mail line of steamers' running from Avonmouth, Bristol.<sup>9</sup> We find traces of him as Svengali in *Trilby* in Buenos Aires in 1902. In January 1903 *The Acadian Recorder*, a weekly published in Halifax, Nova Scotia outlined in some detail Bandmann's itinerary of the previous year:

They left England on their present trip last February, and went to the Mediterranean, Gibraltar and Malta. From there they went to Marseilles, then to Buenos Ayres [sic!] where they performed for seven weeks, and other places in the Argentine Republic, then to Montevideo, round the straits of Magellan to Valparaiso in Chile, then to Santiago, the capital of Chile, afterwards to Iquique then to Lima in Peru and then on to Jamaica via Panama and Colon. Mr. Bandmann has entered into an arrangement with George Edwardes of London, for the rights of his operas for a number of years. The majority of the members of the company have now been together for nearly three years and during that time they have travelled 50,000 miles.<sup>10</sup>

When the company finally arrived in Halifax in August 1903 to perform at The Academy, their arrival was heralded by advance publicity that was a trademark of Bandmann's operations. Not only were the names of prominent prima donnas highlighted: 'Marie Elba (from Covent Garden Theatre, London), Florence Wilton (from Gaiety Theatre, London), Annie Roberts (from the Savoy Theatre, London)', but details of scenery, and costumes together with their designers were explicitly mentioned: 'Each opera and play will be presented under the personal direction of Maurice E. Bandmann. They will be presented with new scenery by Signor Fantini, H. L. Lee and Albert May; modern dresses by Worth, Madames Elise and Vernon, and naval and military uniforms by J. Hyman & Co.'<sup>11</sup>

The mention of 'an arrangement' with George Edwardes alludes to one of the economic foundations of the Bandmann enterprise, which was predicated on a close cooperation with Edwardes and the Gaiety Company in London.<sup>12</sup> Edwardes, who practically invented the genre of musical comedy and produced numerous hit productions over a thirty-year period, entered into an agreement with Bandmann around 1903 with the result that the latter obtained sole rights for the British colonies of the Gaiety works. Bandmann toured not only the latest London hits and talks of the town but also many of the performers associated with them. His publicity material is replete with references to his performers' recent London accomplishments. His artistic capital consisted therefore not only of valuable copyrighted material but also of the human capital required to perform it.

The question of performance rights was crucial in determining where the Bandmann enterprises operated. It is one reason we do not find him at all in the USA, the country of his birth, because other companies such as the Shubert Bros and Erlanger & Klaw had already secured the rights to the successive London hits. Outside the transatlantic and Australasian circuit, where J.C. Williamson reigned supreme, and later South Africa, which was to be dominated by the monopolist Isidore Schlesinger's African Theatres Trust, the world was effectively Maurice Bandmann's theatrical oyster.

Bandmann was a master of generating journalistic buzz both before and after his visits. He employed, as did most itinerant troupes, advance agents who arrived several days before the troupe to make not only practical arrangements but also to give interviews to the press. These well rehearsed exercises in self-praise followed a familiar routine. Particular emphasis was placed on the size of the company. The fact that complete scenery was being transported, the size of the repertoire and even the physical weight of the baggage ('Forty Tons of Magnificent Scenery') - presumably the greater the weight, the greater the artistic impact - were enumerated in exact detail.<sup>13</sup> This pre-performance puff invariably emphasised the previous sell-out successes achieved by the company as well as the next ports of call, which extended into geographical infinity.

Although theatrical touring in itself was nothing new, Bandmann seems to have introduced a new economy of scale. His operations represent a significant shift from the older actor-manager model represented and practiced by his parents and many other itinerant theatre troupes. The actor-manager was, however, an almost pre-modern business activity in as much as at the close of the nineteenth century it did not differ greatly from the touring English or Italian troupes of the late-sixteenth and early

seventeenth century. Its features were strong familial ties, often a husband and wife as the lead performers and business managers supported by about a dozen performers. Economically, the actor-manager was an extremely precarious business model because capitalization was minimal and the companies could only absorb a limited number of poor houses before bankruptcy loomed.

Bandmann's approach was different in as much as he was not only satisfied with one troupe being on the road, but at the height of his activities, he had several, moving around the globe in a rotating chain of changing genres and programs. He had begun this practice on a small scale in England in the 1890s with his two Manxman companies. In an interview given in 1906, by which time he had relocated the centre of his operations to Calcutta, he described in detail his new rotation system. He planned to keep companies 'going in regular rotation, working to and from London via the Mediterranean and Cairo to India and then up the Far East, and returning by the route that his present company is doing i.e. Burmah, Calcutta, Ceylon, and Bombay.' He also intended to have quick changes once the system became fully functional so that 'during the next two years Calcutta will never be without some theatrical entertainments':

[my dramatic repertoire company] will play a week's season, and that will carry us well on into January. In February my new musical comedy company arrives, and I shall open with them at the Theatre Royal on 1 February 1907, with an entirely new repertoire. I shall play in Calcutta seven weeks, with two changes a week. (...) At the end of the seven weeks there will be another company on the road, and in May and June, 1907, you will have my Gilbert and Sullivan repertoire company. In July the dramatic company will be on its way back from the Far East, and will play in Calcutta for about a month, and in its turn make room for the musical comedy company. I shall probably reorganise and play the cold weather season with one of my companies in Calcutta.<sup>14</sup>

What is astounding from an economic perspective, is the size of the companies. The dramatic repertoire company consisted of twenty-two actors, the musical comedy company including musicians and stagehands numbered fifty to sixty. A repertoire could consist of up to a dozen different works performed in one locale over the course of a week to ten days.

Generic diversification was another special feature of the Bandmann enterprises. Each genre had its own company so that at different times he managed under the umbrella company Bandman Eastern Circuit Ltd, companies such as the Bandman Varieties Limited Calcutta, The Bandman Opera Co., The Bandman Comedy Co., The Bandman Concert Party Pierrot Pie, a Gilbert & Sullivan Opera Co, The Bandman Farcical Comedy Company. By this time genre specification had become a defining feature of a highly diversified theatrical culture that was sustained beyond the domain of the large metropolitan centres where it emerged and from whence it was artistically sustained.

Bandmann was a purveyor of fine entertainment, whatever the genre. It is therefore not surprising that he developed a profitable sideline in the new medium of cinematography. By 1908 he was presenting cinema programs parallel to the visits of the companies. Initially, the showings seem to have been integrated into the theatrical

performances, but very quickly they became autonomous. The centre of his operations was Calcutta, and more widely, India, where he developed a chain of projection venues, many of which were theatres of which he was the lessee. In both Calcutta and Bombay the venues were located at the respective *Maidan*, large urban parks, which also hosted many other outdoor recreations. In both cities tent cinemas were erected which quickly became permanent fixtures. By 1910 authorities on both cities decided to phase out the tent shows for safety reasons. In 1909 the public works department in Bombay asked Bandmann to move his operations elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> In Calcutta, he was already using his own theatres.

When the First World War broke out, Bandmann entered an agreement to become the sole distributor of British official war films in the East. He thereby obtained a monopoly on this highly sought after commodity, for which he later garnered criticism in the local press. In 1917 a Singapore newspaper carried a report criticising Bandmann's Eastern management: 'there have been general complaints respecting the heavy percentages of the receipts from the shows which he has demanded. The terms are alleged to have been so unreasonable that the films have not been exhibited so widely or so well as they might have been, though as valuable means of war propaganda it is important that they should be used to the best advantage.'<sup>16</sup> Clearly, Bandmann's patriotic contribution to the war effort was not without considerable financial benefit to himself.<sup>17</sup>

Although the name Bandmann rapidly became a 'guinea stamp' of artistic quality of a particular kind, the operations were frequently conducted through various artistic partnerships. Sometimes he would simply act as an impresario for another company, for example the Shakespearean tours of Matheson Lang (later of Mr Wu fame) and the Lang-Holloway company, or the famous American magician of The Great Raymonde. The most important of these partnerships was with the American actor-manager Henry Dallas, the stage name of James Ryder (1866-1917). Dallas made his name in English theatre in the early 1890s and seems to have first pioneered the touring circuit that Bandmann came to dominate. Initially the partnership ran from 1904-1906 under the heading Bandmann-Dallas Company until the two directors fell out and engaged in litigation. In 1908 Dallas resumed his partnership with Bandmann but in a more subservient role.

Shortly before the First World War Bandmann entertained a partnership with the Australian-based impresario Harry Rickard in order to include music hall and vaudeville performances on his Eastern circuit, a genre that he had hitherto avoided. An article in the *Bombay Gazette* of 1914 outlines this plan:

The idea is to run regular music hall performances with a change of program weekly in Calcutta, Bombay and perhaps other cities in India and the East with companies which will work from England to Australia, calling in Egypt and then running through India and East to Australia. These companies will include stars of the music hall at home, and the idea of the combine will be to give to India pucca music hall shows after the fashion of the Empire programmes at Home. The Empire Theatre at Calcutta is to be converted into a music hall for the greater portion of the year as is also one theatre in Bombay.<sup>18</sup>

By late 1914 The Empire Theatre in Calcutta was indeed offering variety shows to a mixed-race public. Although it might appear doubtful whether Indian audiences were particularly inclined towards ‘pucca music hall shows’, especially since on an earlier occasion Bandmann had emphasised their insistence on unexpurgated versions of Shakespeare and a disinclination towards variety show structures, this did not deter him from advertising in Bengali newspapers such as *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*. An advertisement from October 1914 shows that Bandmann had renamed his flagship theatre as a ‘Palace of Varieties’, and was showing a mixture of films and live acts. The advertising specifically frames the Empire as a ‘House for refined Vaudeville’, targeting Indian audiences.<sup>19</sup> The matinee at 6pm was ‘specially organised for the Indian gentlemen’ and an additional note emphasizes the ‘Special Arrangement for Zenana Ladies’, which refers to a deliberate attempt to attract higher class Muslim spectators by providing segregated seating.<sup>20</sup>

Of particular interest and importance are the partnerships Bandmann entered into in Bombay and Calcutta where his operations were centred. In Calcutta he owned two large theatres, the Empire and the Theatre Royal, which he was able to finance thanks to a partnership with a, by his own account, ‘rich Armenian’, Mr Arratoon Stephen (1861-1927). In order to build the Royal Opera House in Bombay in 1911 at a cost of approximately £33,000, he formed a partnership with a Parsi coal merchant and entrepreneur, Jehangir Framji Karaka. Later he joined forces with the Calcutta-based Parsi businessman Jamshedji Framji Madan (1857-1923), who was also expanding his operations with local theatrical performances and was in the process of establishing the foundations of a local film industry. Certainly indirectly and perhaps directly, there is a connection between Bandmann and the beginnings of Bollywood.

At different times of this career Bandmann owned, leased or even built a total of fifty theatres along his trade route. This meant that he also controlled the growing entertainment industry, which developed very rapidly after 1900, although its beginnings predate the turn-of-the-century. When he was not actually performing or showing films in the theatres, he was renting them out to other touring troupes and local groups, so that the buildings generated regular income.

If, in 1905, a visit to Singapore by a Bandmann company was a major and almost singular social occasion, by 1912, there had developed a small entertainment industry, with travelling and local groups competing with each other and the new cinematic medium. For example, in the week beginning 6 March 1912, newspapers advertised the following programs:

Alhambra: Thuness Kovarick and His Violin in conjunction with the pick of the production of: Pathé, American Kinema etc.

Harima Hall cinematograph offering ‘Gaumont’s Greatest Graphic’

Victoria Theatre: Bandmann Opera Company; Chinese New Year entertainment: Part I ‘After the battle’; Part II ‘Mustapha’



Theatre Royal: the Dutch and Malay variety entertainers. PRINCE KOBAT SHARIL: Come and see: charming actresses, clever actors, competent orchestra, comfortable theatre

Teutonia Club: Kilkare Koncert Kompany.<sup>21</sup>

Significant here is the mixture of cultural offerings, professional and amateur, catering for Singapore's cosmopolitan population. But this time the population of the important port city amounted to approximately 250,000 inhabitants, 165,000 of whom were of Chinese descent. The European and Eurasian population comprised little more than 8000.<sup>22</sup> The performance of the Chinese New Year play in two parts in aid of the Chinese Red Cross Society, written by two local authors, and presented in the high temple of colonial representation, the Victoria Theatre, which had been converted from the town hall into a functional theatrical performance space, documents a growing interpenetration of performance cultures. While the local Chinese opera continued to flourish in its own venues, the special performance was clearly designed by its venue as the demonstration of cultural occupation and perhaps even of a certain degree of social mobility in an otherwise highly stratified colonial settlement.

## Circulation, mobility and rhythms of return

The present interest in concepts and metaphors such as 'circulation' and 'mobility' – as articulated for example in Stephen Greenblatt's recent manifesto on cultural mobility (2010) – should give us pause to reflect on what they might mean or what surplus meaning they might generate when applied to a phenomenon such as Bandmann and his various enterprises. It is clear from the above-described business model based on a rotation principle that circulation and mobility were the norm of theatrical production and reception along the colonial trade routes. A fourteen-week season in Calcutta with its population of over one million was the longest period that a Bandmann company remained in one place. A normal sojourn in most cities comprised a week to ten days at the most. A travelling company of the high colonial era could therefore most certainly be considered a form of structured circulation of capital, not just of financial but also of the human and material variety.

The perpetuum mobile of the Bandmann rotation system meant not only theatrical trade on an almost non-stop temporal basis, but also a spatial imaginary that connected points together stretching halfway around the globe. The itineraries become themselves ways of mapping a newly globalised world. They form a structured route interconnecting distant towns and cities, which then become related to one another by virtue of sharing in the theatrical experiences provided by the companies. The newspaper reports demonstrate very clearly that the papers observed not just the latest theatrical fashions in London, but also the activities in the next colonial settlements. In many ways the activities in Calcutta and Rangoon are more relevant to Singapore than London is. The newspapers themselves incessantly quote and reprint from each other and construct a kind of interrelated colonial public sphere independent of the metropolitan centre.

The theatrical trade routes established by Bandmann represent therefore not just an abstract principle of continual movement but a structured itinerary of set points chosen

for economic reasons. While the common factors included location as a port city, presence of a European population and/or access by rail (Bandmann's companies were active all over the Indian subcontinent from Calcutta to Simla, from Mussorie to Karachi), they were by no means limited and restricted to the British Empire. We need to think of theatrical trade routes such as those established by Bandmann in terms of 'rhythms of return': troupes sustained a culture of promise and expectation; they brought with them the experience of their previous port of call and carried messages to the next. Such visits were predicated on a delicate dialectic, balancing the strange and the familiar. An itinerant theatre company always bears with it a moment of the strange and incommensurable: it inserts itself into a patterned social fabric for a short period, bringing glamour, and behaviours not fully controllable by the local. By virtue of its repetitive nature, however, the visits were also familiar and conformed to a broadly predictable pattern of events and behaviours. And as the obituary in *The Straits Times* stated, the impact of his tours was as much social as artistic:

One of the difficulties of our theatrical manager bringing out companies of good looking artists, both musical and comedy, is the danger of losing them through marriage. In the seventeen years that he has been furnishing entertainment for the public in the East Mr. Bandman has lost many of the members of his company that way. Many of his old artistes now happily married in India, Burma and other parts of the East will receive the news of his death with great regret. So will everyone who remembers how much Mr. Bandman did to make time pass pleasantly for those whose lives have had to be lived here.<sup>23</sup>

If we attach premium value to those activities and products that issue from or reflect bounded geopolitical entities – the village, the town, community or nation – then mobile, circulating products or people are by definition difficult to map onto our scholarly and evaluative templates. This observation has a number of theatre-historiographical implications. Firstly, from a long-term historical perspective a theatre of mobility was as much a norm as the rooted, sedentary variety. Mobility does not necessarily imply ephemerality as the structured rotation system clearly demonstrates. Secondly, while the commercial orientation has helped to obscure the artistic impact of the performances this scholarly disinterest is not just due to the fact of mobility. It would seem to mirror more the problems theatre scholarship has with the whole tradition of late Victorian and Edwardian theatre. As Thomas Postlewait has noted about British musical comedy: 'with rare exceptions theatre historians have shown little interest in this popular form of entertainment. It has remained marginal to our histories of modern British theatre' (2007: 81). Nevertheless over a twenty-year period Bandmann effectively extended the range of the London repertoire around the world: the musical and light comedies, variety and Shakespeare. Not to engage with it means to not engage with British theatre over a period of two decades, although much removed from its place of origin.

## Conclusion

The theatrical trade routes established by Maurice Bandmann and their disappearance from the theatre historiographical record require a revaluation of certain concepts of theatre history. Although theatre is never just trade, it is also that in a cultural world far removed from any notion of state support for the theatrical arts. To move large theatrical

troupes across half the globe on a regular basis required a precise calibration of shipping and rail timetables, hotel and theatre bookings, costs and contracts, and above all an estimation of audience tastes on a circuit that extended from the Mediterranean to Japan. Although Bandmann's enterprises were unique in terms of scale, they were by no means unusual during this period. The globe, or at least large sections of it, was regularly crisscrossed by theatrical touring troupes plying their trade. While we are well-informed about certain tours by prominent artists such as Sarah Bernhardt or the Ballets Russes, the vast majority of this theatre remains obscure. Although so much of this theatrical activity evidently remains below the threshold of most aesthetic benchmarks, a reappraisal of Bandmann and his multifarious enterprises should give us cause and pause to ask what cultural work theatre really performs beyond the two or three hours traffic of the stage. Between providing wives for the colonial establishment and constructing landmark buildings of turn-of-the-century Calcutta and Bombay, Maurice Bandmann's theatrical circuit clearly fulfilled an astonishing range of needs, the full scope of which still needs to be ascertained.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *The Eastern Daily Mail* (Singapore) 16 February 1906, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> As far as I can ascertain, there has been no scholarly interest in Bandmann whatsoever, apart from fleeting references in a few scattered footnotes. The most detailed coverage of his career can be found on private website devoted to one of Bandmann's actors and managers, Stephen Lopez. See <http://www.joydiv.org/familygoingback/career.htm>, date accessed 30 March 2016. For a detailed discussion of his circuit, see Balme (2015a).

<sup>3</sup> *Weekly Sun* (Singapore), 30 September 1911, p.12.

<sup>4</sup> See [www.expressindia.com/latest-news/glorious-days-set-to-return-for-royal-opera-house/313442/](http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/glorious-days-set-to-return-for-royal-opera-house/313442/), date accessed 30 March 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Bandmann's will totalled £33,057, which translates into just under £1 million in today's currency.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Bandmann published an account of his five-year tour of Australasia and the Far East in *An Actor's Tour, or Seventy Thousand Miles with Shakespeare* (1885).

<sup>7</sup> *The Era*, 29 December 1900, issue 3249, p.5.

<sup>8</sup> It is unclear what the dispute was about, but *The Times* records under the chancery division of its law notices a 'short cause' featuring Bandmann against the Syndicate, 1 February 1902, p.5.

<sup>9</sup> *The Times*, 13 September 1901, p.7. The repertoire included *La Cigale*, *La Poupée*, *Little Christopher Columbus*, *The Geisha*, *The Belle of New York*, and *The Casino Girl*.

<sup>10</sup> *The Acadian Recorder*, 6 January 1903.

<sup>11</sup> *The Acadian Recorder*, 25 July 1903.

<sup>12</sup> See the article by Thomas Postlewait (2007).

<sup>13</sup> *The New York Clipper* carried a report from St John, Canada, detailing the actual logistics: 'The companies carry complete scenery for each piece and their repertory includes something like 40 plays and operas. The scenery is made principally of a heavy paper that permits of packing for shipment, and some idea may be obtained of the quantity carried from the total weight of the baggage, which is about 12 tons.' 25 February 1905, p.25.

<sup>14</sup> *Eastern Daily Mail*, 29 September 1906, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> See Bhaumik (2011), here p. 47.

<sup>16</sup> *The Singapore Free Press*, 28 September 1917, p. 8.

- <sup>17</sup> The controversy revolved around the film *Britain Prepared* (directed by Charles Urban) for which Bandmann had secured sole distribution rights on his theatrical circuit. His exclusive rights were disputed by his Bengali competitor in the cinema business, Jamshedji Framji Madan. The dispute is documented in the 'Proceedings of the Home Department, Delhi, 1916, Part B. Nos. 168-181, National Archives of India. For a discussion of this controversy, see Balme (2015b).
- <sup>18</sup> Reprinted in the *Singapore Free Press*, 3 February 1914, p. 7.
- <sup>19</sup> *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12 October 1914, p. 3.
- <sup>20</sup> *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 5 April 1914, p. 3.
- <sup>21</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 6 March 1912, p. 1.
- <sup>22</sup> Cited from Swee-Hock (2007, pp. 319- 20).
- <sup>23</sup> *The Straits Times*, 23 Mar 1922, p. 11.

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