

Fille de Madame Angot, achieved at the work's initial introduction in Dunedin, Christchurch and Wellington. A different opera every night was a far more usual circumstance.

By contemporary standards, the 1876 tour was not a long one. W. S. Lyster's first Australasian company was on the move almost continuously between the end of March 1861 and August 1868, amassing a total of 1497 performing days. But the Lyster company frequently circled back to its home base of Melbourne, occasionally ceasing activity for a month or two at a time. Some of its Melbourne and Sydney seasons were of considerable duration, and its visit to New Zealand, between 27 August 1864 and 18 February 1865 embraced only the four main centres of Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland.²⁶ Although subsequent opera companies included smaller towns in their itineraries, none had been as large, or as ambitious in intent as the Simonsens.

The very size of the 1876 Company militated against its commercial viability. It was simply too big to make a profit from theatres of the size encountered in many of its venues — even if the houses had always been full. And there was no centre in New Zealand populous enough to allow the Company to settle in for a lucrative two or three months. Even Lyster sometimes failed to make opera pay in Sydney and Melbourne. Martin Simonsen was no Lyster. Like many of those on the touring circuit, he was a performer first and an entrepreneur second. In his enthusiasm to take command of his own opera company, he may not even have thought about the correlation between ensemble size, travelling costs, and box-office potential.

If the Simonsen Company was not a commercial success, at least it was an artistic one. Certainly there were ragged performances and 'off' nights during the tour, all duly noted by reviewers, but the attitude conveyed by contemporary newspaper reports is overwhelmingly one of appreciation. While it is impossible to know the standards against which the critics and audiences of the day passed judgement, clues within the published reviews suggest that critics on most of the leading papers were musically well-informed, and had a good working knowledge of opera. The discussion in Wellington's *Evening Post* of Carmini Morley's introduction of high C sung as a chest note, after the manner of the French tenor Duprez, is a typical instance of informed technical observation.²⁷ Growing up across the Tasman was 'an audience of the Australian-born without its migrant parents' first-hand knowledge of overseas theatrical traditions'.²⁸ In the New Zealand of 1876, this was not yet a significant development. On the whole, the Company's work seems to have been judged by reasonably exacting standards. The number of column inches devoted to its performances, as compared with all the other forms of entertainment on offer, was an indication of the importance it was accorded.