

some measure, to reconsider the position occupied by circus entertainment in late colonial life.

The FitzGerald Brothers' Circus gathered itself together in the late 1880s out of the collected experience and operational knowledge of several earlier circuses.<sup>2</sup> Of the three brothers, Dan (1859–1906) and Tom (1865–1906) were the active proprietors of the circus, while John (1862–1922), a New South Wales barrister and State Labor parliamentarian, provided the company with a familial base in Sydney from where he managed finances and legalities for the organisation. It was during the early 1890s, when the eastern colonies of continental Australia were experiencing severe depression and widespread labour unrest, that the company emerged as the largest colonial circus in Australasia.<sup>3</sup> By 1902 the organisation had grown so vast materially that it split into two companies which systematically divided up their established touring routes. A FitzGerald company began touring the colonial outposts of Asia in 1904, showing for two years through the Dutch East Indies, Singapore and the Straits Territories, India, and Shanghai. In early 1906, Dan and Tom both died within three months of each other, and despite the efforts of Tom's wife, Millie, who kept a vestige of the company running for several years through the smaller towns of Australia, the company had ceased to operate by late 1908.

Between the years 1894 and 1904, the FitzGerald Brothers' Circus played eight tours through New Zealand, remaining here for up to seven months at a time as the circus worked the major centres and small towns between Auckland and Bluff. The terrain and the popular taste of the colony had been tested by Dan and Tom FitzGerald on an early visit in 1887 when the Herbert and FitzGerald London Circus crossed to New Zealand from Hobart and spent ten months playing through the colony twice. Analysis of the FitzGeralds' nineteen years of touring reveals that by comparison, Tasmania and Western Australia, colonies also at considerable distance from the dense population centres of continental Australia's east coast, received seven and four visits from the circus respectively between the years 1886 and 1905. During the 1890s, the principally equestrian company consisted of a substantial stud, the largest travelling menagerie of exotic and indigenous species at that time in Australasia, and a performance troupe gathered from the colonies and the entertainment centres of the northern hemisphere. When FitzGerald Brothers played the major centres of New Zealand the performance marquee accommodated over three thousand people, and contemporary newspapers reported that the tent was customarily full. Even a cursory consideration of its performance history indicates that the company enjoyed strong popularity here and that the colony was a sound financial proposition for the circus. The frequency with which the company returned to New Zealand and the length of its tours also confirms that New Zealand was an essential part of the touring territory routinely accepted by entertainment companies of this era.