Visual Delights – *two*
Exhibition and Reception

Edited by Vanessa Toulmin and Simon Popple
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Introduction

There always are, always have been, always will be, people who are willing to be 'entertained', i.e. amused, by a 'show' of some kind. Not only willing are they, but eager for such amusement. And they will travel miles and part from their money with no other object to view.¹

This collection of essays is drawn from the second in the series of the Visual Delights conferences, held at the University of Sheffield in July 2002. This tri-annual event is an exploration of the different audiences, media technologies and exhibition contexts enjoyed by popular cultural forms in the period leading up to the First World War. The Victorian and Edwardian periods are rich in detail for historians of popular entertainment incorporating magic lanterns, fairground shows, magic, the development of circus and of course the cinematograph. Additionally the overlap between photographic history, printing technology and the development of the popular press has resulted in a rich vein of archival material that records these shows. Although now important archival resources, there were originally ephemeral pieces of advertising often mass produced solely for the purpose of attracting an audience in the ever competitive world of popular entertainment. These performances could be found on the fairground arena, within a travelling or fixed circus, in a show of optical and scientific wonder at permanent halls or on the high street. Everything and anything was presented under the banner of education and entertainment. Many of these areas have developed their own individual histories and bodies of work that have explored the chronological development of these performances without emphasising the cross-fertilisation that occurred at the time.

The conference attracted an extremely rich variety of papers and performances exploring the dominant popular cultural forms of this era and approached them from a fascinating range of methodological perspectives. A dominant sub-theme was the development of representational strategies related particularly to notions of gender. In addition the Bamforth Photographic and Film Company of Holmfirth was celebrated with a day of performance and presentations dedicated to celebrating the rich visual history of the company from the 1840s to the 1960s. The Bamforth
Day was held in the firm's original cinema built in 1913 and the local setting of the magic lantern slides, films and postcards was keenly received by both the conference audience and the local participants.

All of the essays presented in this book are strongly indicative of the diversity of focus and approach evident at the Visual Delight conferences and demonstrate the exciting potential of intermediad and intertextual readings of popular cultural forms offered by many of the authors. Their specific approaches are often rooted in well established disciplinary traditions but one of the great successes of the conference series has been the opportunity to experience and assimilate complimentary methodologies and critical strategies and thus create new and inclusive readings of many early popular cultural forms. We hope that this experience is replicated by reading the selection of papers contained in this anthology and taken from the second event held in 2002.

As part of the ongoing process of developing new readings of popular cultural forms the journal, Living Pictures: The Popular and Projected Image before 1914, which supports the conference series has been re-titled and re-launched. Early Popular Visual Culture is a peer-reviewed, academic journal dedicated to stimulating research and interdisciplinary studies in relation to all forms of popular visual culture pre-1930. The journal will develop the approaches developed in the Visual Delights conference series in examining the use and exploitation of popular cultural forms such as (but not limited to) cinema, photography, magic lanterns and music hall within the fields of entertainment, education, science, advertising and the domestic environment. In common with the conference and these proceedings the journal will also be concerned with the evolving social, technological and economic contexts which such popular cultural products have inhabited and defined. Both the journal and the conference series are providing historians of visual culture and performance histories an arena in which inter-disciplinary approaches will provide an empirical and analytical body of use to the variety of research communities that study this rich historical period.

Vanessa Toulmin and Simon Popple
May 2005

Note
Viewing Deadly Targets for Feminine Identity: Alar, the Human Arrow

Peta Tait

Picturing Alar

[T]he lady is actually shot from a monstrous cross-bow, and traverses some 30 [feet] of hot vitiated atmosphere before striking the target. [...] The distance is short, the regulation net is used and the target, on being touched, retires as gently and as gracefully as the ‘Arrow’ herself does shortly afterwards. [...] powerful springs have more to do with this aerial flight – than the strings of the bow.⁴

In this death-defying aerial stunt, the human arrow, Alar, was projected into the air through a paper bull’s eye target and caught by her older sister. This risky action was performed by British teenager, Pansy Murphy (Frances Elizabeth Mary Murphy),² who was with The Flying Zedoras, international stars with Barnum and Bailey’s (BB) Greatest Show on Earth, by 1896. The contribution of the aerial catcher, Adele (Adelaide Murphy), also made the act important, as female catchers are rare even today. The act was almost certainly invented and patented by Adele’s husband, Tony Zedora. Pansy began classes in singing, dancing and acting at twelve, and by fifteen she had joined her sister in aerial performance.³ She subsequently had a twenty-year stage career as a versatile music hall entertainer.⁴

The human arrow trick – further details of the Zedoras’ performance are given towards the end of this article – facilitates a discussion of how an aerial performer’s body can be ‘conceptualized and articulated within different cultural discourses’.⁵ How is an aerial body extracted from written and/or visual discourses? The discursive evidence from visual records is of primary importance to an investigation of acrobatic performances. As Samuel Raphael asks, ‘How often has the visual been the original prompt for an historical inquiry?⁶ Yet he maintains that pictures remain neglected as historical sources, and argues that even photographs represent ‘theatricality’ rather than transparent evidence of reality.⁷ We have little patience
with pictures which keep their secrets. In the example of Alar, the poster drawings place the body mid-air while the photographs locate it standing or perched ready to begin. They deliver a question: how was the performer traversing the space in between? The body’s motion in the trick, its performance, remains invisible in the visual record; performance history keeps its secret.

The arrow trick was probably the climax to the Zedoras’ act and can be reconstructed because the visual material is supported by a number of written descriptions in the publicity, reviews, and nineteenth-century circus hyperbole. The latter also offers a useful clarification of cultural images surrounding this aerial trick. The problem of researching the composition of the body’s motion in this aerial performance predates the preservation of the movement of aerial bodies on film – aerial performances remain notoriously difficult to film. The action and movement of the Zedoras and other nineteenth-century aerialists must be notated from incomplete multiple sources. While the visual legacy informs the desire to see and see more, it presents either artistic impressions or momentarily inactive bodies; moving bodies as blind spots in the scopophilia of performance. These are bodies in action that fragment and disappear within their representation. As Peggy Phelan writes: “The enactment of invocation and disappearance undertaken by performance and theatre is precisely the drama of corporeality itself.”

Like the action of the arrow trick, the membership of the Flying Zedoras, Pansy’s later groups, and the details of her long working life are hard to verify even with photographic evidence. The composition of Pansy’s acts can be pieced together speculatively from visual material, the studio photographs and publicity posters. A photograph taken in 1894 when Pansy was fifteen corroborates the poster; the three-member Flying Zedoras (Pansy, Adele and Tony) are suspended on wires in a theatre. Pansy stands above the stage area at the back, on a structure that looks like a large ironing board tilted upwards – the bow. Adele is sitting mid-air on apparatus out over the audience in the auditorium, and Tony is sitting on other mid-air apparatus. It is possible that both were catchers for Alar at different points in the act.
A studio photograph taken in 1895 shows Pansy advertising her performance persona. Alar is a fifteen-year-old with a mass of loose curly hair dressed in an acrobat's smocked top and bloomers, and soft shoes, and in a standard pose with her left foot behind and her right foot turned out, her hands behind her head with her elbows out. Her 1896 studio photograph makes an arrow in her hair visible, with a neck frill and a sash across her hips. By 1897 Pansy and her sister Adele were photographed in New York with the standard smocked, bloomer suit cut higher on the thigh, wearing bows, and with flowers in their hair.

Although the images in photographs and drawings are invaluable, their 'theatricality' is static. A photograph captured an aerialist off-stage, in repose rather than in motion. A sequence of drawings was used generally to represent the body's progression through the act. Even the poster drawing which shows Alar in the air, with her arms outstretched like a prototype of superwoman, references rather than captures the body's trajectory. Ironically then, the active body in this aerial act must be found in descriptive words rather than pictorial records. This raises questions about the extent to which audience perception of a performer's bodily identity was influenced by the words that surrounded the act, the circus hyperbole, as much as the actual viewing of the act. In her own words, Pansy remembers:

I am 88 and from the age of 16 was shot from a giant bow. I was billed as Alar, The Human Arrow in music halls and circuses and in many countries. I know the Sensation of being shot, I have never been shot from a cannon but there have been about 3 that I remember. Well it is so quick that you hardly realize it. I was shot from a bow and caught by my sister hanging by her ankles in mid-air.

Pansy continues her letter with a comment about her pity for ill-treated circus animals.

The human arrow act was very controversial, not only because it was dangerous but also because the 'Arrow' body was that of a young female. John Munro writes that:

In 1895 a sixteen-year-old girl was shot through a target from a bow, and caught by another girl hanging in mid-air by her feet, a stunt which prompted questions in the House of Commons concerning the young lady's safety. Parliament was reassured, however, by the President and Managing Director of the Aquarium, who announced that every possible precaution had been taken.

But was the British House of Commons reassured, as Munro claims? It does not seem to be the case. The public campaign to ban juvenile performers actually gained more support, and two years later the minimum age was raised from fourteen to sixteen for males and eighteen for women under The Dangerous Performances Act 1897. This horrified reaction, by some members of the public, to an act in which a young woman's body is used to crash through a target may have been heightened by the publicity. The reaction suggests the social impact of Pansy's gender and youth, which were deliberately promoted as part of the act. In the poster publicity, the performing body is coded as feminine by long, flowing hair. Alar is described as graceful, beautiful and delicate. The difficulty of the trick and its implied violence as a circus attraction were accentuated because it was executed by a young female
performer. The trick’s promotion depended on implicit social beliefs that a female body is weaker in physique and therefore more vulnerable than the male body. It is likely, however, that Pansy’s smallness and lightness gave her an advantage over male counterparts in this type of stunt, as it does with the execution of some flying tricks in trapeze acts.

As I argue elsewhere, aerial acts are performances of liveness carried out by, and watched by, bodies as phenomena that are lived social entities.\textsuperscript{14} They happen in the present. An understanding of the impact of an act from aerial history as visual spectacle together with its music, depends on what is filtered through written accounts by eyewitnesses. Granted, words can be pictorial.\textsuperscript{15} The effect of liveness, however, was and is achieved by performing bodies that engage spectators bodily. The reception of Alar’s body in the aerial motion was dependent on visual perception in tandem with the responses of a phenomenological, sensory body of a spectator. The sight, sound and what Maurice Merleau-Ponty terms the ‘corporeal schema’ of movement\textsuperscript{16} from the watching body, influenced by habitual cultural beliefs and inherent limitations in seeing, are translated into words describing the action. In this retrospective retranslation of physicality through written languages and static images, active aerial bodies go missing.

\textbf{Caught in the act}

The Flying Zedoras had four seasons with America’s BB Circus, the last one on tour back in London. Publicity drawings of the act on a poster show a male performer walking upside down with his feet in a line of rings, the human arrow act, a blindfold dive to a female catcher, possibly some kind of fall from the trapeze bar to a net which had become fairly common in aerial acts, and a female performer doing an iron jaw, or dental act. Pansy almost certainly did an iron jaw act during her career. (In the iron jaw act the performer clenches a leather mouth guard in his or her teeth and suspends him or herself from a bar or, hanging upside down from his or her knees, suspends another performer below.) If most of these tricks were an established part of the aerial repertoire in the late nineteenth century, the arrow stunt gave this act uniqueness. Even so, the sprung projection of aerial performers into space and the use of a target were well-established strategies, and it was the bow and arrow apparatus framing the arrow trick that was new, as were several techniques for movement. In an interview, Mr [Tony] Zedora explains that the Human Arrow took time and money to invent. Speaking of their group as having five members, he explains that:

\begin{quote}
We may certainly claim to have introduced our style of diving, the passing leaps side by side, the Human Arrow and the general mounting of the aerial act.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

This apparatus had been legally patented in England, the continent and in the USA. The centrality of female performers on this new apparatus gave such acts additional appeal as a popular attraction. Thus, the gender identity of female aerialists was promoted to heighten the impact of the act. It is worth noting that circus publicity of the time linked extreme risk-taking to ideas of social change in female behavior. The circus made use of the phrase ‘the new woman’ in its posters and publicity.\textsuperscript{18} Aside from its opportunism, this practice of cultural quotation in its promotion
suggests that the circus was deliberately making connections between these extreme displays of female physicality and muscular prowess and the social campaigns to achieve greater suffrage rights and freedoms for women. The political effect of spectators identifying with gender subversion within popular theatrical performance may be longstanding. Female circus performers repeatedly defied traditional beliefs about the physical limitations of female bodies. They were the muscular equals of their male counterparts and it seems likely that these physical achievements, which were very popular, had significance for ‘the new woman’ outside circus. The performance showed that fearlessness and courage were not exclusively attributes of the male body. Even if the publicity surrounding Alar’s act emphasised her embodiment of feminine difference, her vulnerability and beauty, to enhance its marketable appeal, the gender codes of aerial bodies became interchangeable for the duration of the performance.

Admittedly, circus appropriated any new fashion and aesthetic for its sensationalist value. Circus plied a trade in cultural extreme and excess. Alar and the new women were billed in a programme that included images of exotic orientalism ranging from Indian dancers and jugglers to fakirs. These were bodies pushed to extremes. The 1897 BB season included contortionist, Francis Era, known for his animal imitations. To some extent then, aerialists were viewed as the embodiment of exceptional cultural others because circus set out to present extraordinary bodies. But because Alar was depicted as young and feminine in an act that defied all notions of weakness and dependency, she challenged the perception of what it meant.

Alar's act was very dangerous. It appears that there was at least one accident and probably more. A caption to an unidentified newspaper drawing proclaims:

'Stunned the Human Arrow', String was pulled too soon and Alar was knocked senseless on her loft perch at Madison Square Garden, New York City.

The drawing shows men on a rope ladder, Alar laying on the platform and behind her the cross bow hanging by ropes. As well, the 1897 BB route book entry for Wednesday, 11 August, Owosso Michigan: 'Pansy Zedora attempts the arrow act again today, but meets with another accident'.

Joseph Roach explains that definitions of performance ‘commonly assume that performance offers a substitute for something else that preexists it. Performance, in other words, stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace. In Alar’s act, the performer’s body literally embodies and replaces an arrow as apparatus. But the accompanying idea of flight suggests how the performer stands in for more elusive entities in cultural fantasy. As Helen Stoddart explains ‘By the mid-nineteenth century metaphors of flight became attached more exclusively to equilibrists and trapeze artists’. But the performance encompassed much more than imitations of flying. It performs a cultural idea of physical risk. But the risks are performed and can be illusionary as the accident reports reveal. Falling out of the air was less likely than apparatus failure. Crucially then, in imitating flight, the live aerial body performs danger. The pre-existing idea in Alar’s embodied substitution is a dead body, both literally because she performed the risk of dying and, as I will argue below, metaphorically in alluding to dead cultures.

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The 1896 publicity for Madison Square Garden boasts: ‘Unapproachable and most brave performances on patent aerial gymnastic apparatus by the celebrated originators’. A BB handbill for the first show in 1896 describes Alar’s act as the ‘The Crowning Miracle of Physical and Mechanical Sensation’. There is a comparison with a cannon ball’s flight and it continues:

Beautiful ALAR. The Only Human Arrow. Shot Headlong from a Monster Crossbow across the Great Arena in Full View without intent or possibility of the slightest deception. A lith, winsome, living weapon, governed by such Heroic Nerve and Skill and aimed with such precision that ALAR pierces a distant target and is caught in mid-air by a lady suspended from a trapeze. That the phenomenal character of this feat may be appreciated, it should be understood that the Catapult is an engine resembling a massive crossbow, used by the ancient Greeks and Romans for throwing huge stones, arrows, spears, etc., and its terrific propulsive force would alone rend an ordinary mortal piecemeal. As an Exact Reproduction of this Gigantic and Formidable Crossbow of Ancient Times, the one used by Alar is of itself a great curiosity, but when upon its massive and mighty string the dainty feet of the Bravest of all Living Artists take the place of insensate wood and stone, and her delicate form responds, with scathless speed, grace and accuracy, to a force they can scarcely withstand, the result must be enthusiastically and unanimously proclaimed The Martial Miracle of Aerial Motion.

Audiences were familiar with human projectile cannon acts, which dated from 1877. Farini’s Zazel and George Loyal were described as humans fired from cannons in acts in which the apparatus also starred. The human body was substituted for the cannon ball. The target in Alar’s trick was functional and, together with the bow and arrow, symbolised older and less lethal machinery. Perhaps the female presence also enhanced the suggestion of games and playful competition. Balsamo writes that:

Gender, like the body, [...] is at once related to physiological sexual characteristics of the human body (the natural order of the body) and to the cultural context within which the body ‘makes sense’.

The body in the arrow act was depicted as feminine, which made cultural sense as a passive presence and at the same time made the completion of the trick seem all the more extraordinary. The absence of cannon fire made Alar like a dart, something thrown as much as fired. The coding of the body’s naturalness was prefigured in descriptions of its physical vulnerability. Publicity descriptions emphasised how Alar might not withstand the force of propulsion. As Elizabeth Grosz explains, the female body is polarised as belonging to a category of nature. The body’s passivity in the action of propulsion through space coincided with its femininity, and thus signified nature and its inexplicable wonders. The consequences of impact for the actual body were unseen. The speed of the body’s motion was the crucial element of the act and its suggestion of flight. The cannonball apparatus was emblematic of the triumph of technological progress in the industrial age and made the human body seem part of an invincible man-made machine. It demonstrated how machine inventions were destined to conquer nature and its limited bodies. These acts personified the new age. The speeding body suggested one able to compete with machines.
Alar's act, however, would seem to have generated a different discourse to that of cannon acts. The images in the advertisement cited above, convey how the act was designed to appeal to the late nineteenth century's fascination with flight, but configures it in ancient Greece and Rome, in bygone dead worlds. The idea of the human body as an object catapulted into the air was diverted from the mimicry of futuristic technology to an imaginative re-invention within a neo-classical aesthetic of seemingly timeless cultural space. As Raphael points out, notions of period are aesthetic concepts, and historical illustrations including neo-classical images became widely available in the nineteenth century. Alar's act was presented in promotional descriptions in an aesthetic that framed Alar's social identity as other-worldly. The references to stone and wood in the publicity suggest how the human body stands in for an inanimate entity that might be a classical statue. If the social labels that were accorded to the performing body recognised it as not quite human, its action made it more than human. The act expanded on the earlier cultural association of aerialists with birds and their human hybrids, angels, in the 'miracle' of Alar's act. The imitation of flight became a performance of surpassing the material limits of humanness. The aesthetic in the act's publicity alluded to the spaces inhabited by mythic gods and goddesses watching over life and death below. If the act specified deadness in weapons, places and potential dangers, this was offset by a cultural imaginary of an everlasting golden past and its legends. The performing body would move beyond becoming a dead entity. As Alar's flesh substituted for an inanimate arrow piercing the target, an inert entity, the action of the living body acquired a supernatural aura. The descriptors for the performing body in this trick evoked flight as divine wingless action, as they camouflaged its mechanistic propulsion. The act triumphed because the feminine identity of the performer and the motif of flight had pre-existing ideas culturally conjoined in insubstantiality. The arrow act set up a liminal space in which a natural body's action was surpassed in a performance of supernaturalness.

Epilogue: tracking the Flying Zedoras and after Alar

A group called The Flying Zedoras existed by 1893 and consisted of one man and at least two or three women. In a photograph of the group it is unclear if Pansy was already a group member, but it is likely that Adele was an original member of the group. Pansy's name appears in a photograph of the group taken in 1894. The Zedoras were working at Tudor's Circus, Cambridge, and regional England in 1895 and London's Royal Aquarium. At the beginning of 1896 the group was working with Poole's Myriorama in Bristol after a successful season in Hamburg in which they received a tribute of gold medals. Booked by BB's manager to open at Madison Square Garden 1 April 1896, The Flying Zedoras consisted of Adele and Pansy and Tony. By the time The Flying Zedoras reached England in 1897 for the season at the Olympia, they had become 'The Five Unapproachable Zedoras' The publicity advertises 'A Quintette of Champion Aerialists in most wonderful feats' The act went on to work in Europe where the halls and theatres were able to accommodate it more easily. For the Christmas season in 1900, the group was again working with Poole's Myriorama and had grown to six members. The 'Flying Zedoras created quite a sensation' and held audience spellbound with
‘marvellous mid-air’ feats. An interview with Mr Zedora in his Colston Hall dressing room reports:

Yes, we are perhaps quite as well known on the continent as in England, indeed we have just returned from a tour in France, to join Mr Poole, travelling from Lyons.

It would appear that the group with four members may have had a three month season with Cirque Rancy and one with Cirque Plége. They would appear to have been with Poole’s in Bristol through into January 1901, and again in Sheffield in 1902. Very sadly, the reason for the change of the group’s name and its break-up is probably the death of Adele. Pansy’s hand-written notebook of bookings between 1901 and 1903 records ‘Adele died’, July 1902. John Turner writes that she was 32 when she died on 30 July 1902. Pansy survived the dangerous human arrow act, and performed much less risky but still spectacular aerial tricks with later groups. By 21 November 1904 Pansy was in a group of two women and a man, probably The Uniques. They were working at Alhambra, The National Theatre of Varieties, in an ‘Original Gymnastic Ladder Potpourri’ by 17 July 1905. Nonetheless there are additional photos of the Zedoras dated around 1906–07.

Although Pansy married Horace Osborne in 1904, it is unclear when the Mars Trio, the Mars Military Sensation Gymnastic Potpourri Act, first started. It placed an advertisement in The Performer Annual, 25 December 1909. The trio promoted themselves as military gymnasts on their publicity labels. They described their act at the Royal Hippodrome as:

A sensational climax is reached when one of male gymnasts mounts a high horizontal bar and with body perfect rigid, describes a series of revolutions, his feet presumably being locked to the turning bar, though the connect is invisible to the auditorium.

They were working in Kirkcaldy, Clydebank, Edinburgh in 1909 on tour. A list of venues for the group has forty-three towns. In 1910 the Mars Trio publicity lists thirty-eight towns. The Mars Trio’s Military Gymnast poster depicts their costumes and impressions of their tricks. In one photograph where they are standing saluting, the two men wear striped pants, uniforms with short jackets and little box hats tied under the chin. Pansy is wearing a dress with frills, tights, a little box hat caught under chin, and a short version of the men’s jackets. The poster has diagrams of how the group whirl around with one male performer turning three hundred and sixty degrees on a fixed bar. Another image shows an upright Pansy with a plait, in a dental act but called ‘teeth spinning’. The last image is of a ‘poster’ on a wall with the trio looking at it with backs to the viewer. A contract for the Hippodrome Theatre of Varieties, Belfast, reveals that the Mars Trio did two performances every evening for one week, commencing 2 November 1910, and were paid eighteen pounds but would not do more than twelve night performances if required. They were also contracted not to appear within ten miles for fifteen months prior and two weeks, after except where the population was over 70,000. A review for their performance at the Royal Hippodrome, Eastbourne, possibly towards end of 1910, calls them:

A Sensational Gymnastic Feat […] Now days patrons of ‘the halls’ are accustomed to tall business in the gymnastic line. Evidently, however, the last
text in physical exercises is far from being said, for several of the feats of the Mars Trio (lady and two gentlemen) are alike novel and daring. They are, moreover, performed with such agility and finish that, despite the seemingly dangerous nature of one or two of them, the audience never betrays any apprehensiveness as to the artist's success. A sensational climax is reached when one of the male gymnasts mounts a high horizontal bar and, with body perfectly rigid, describes a series of revolutions, his feet presumably being locked to the turning bar, though the connection is invisible from the auditorium. This tour de force does not fail to bring down the house.

In a 7 October 1912 advertisement, Horace Leighton and Pansy Lindford, now called Leighton & Lindford, are presenting an entirely new trapeze, teeth and dancing act at the Crown Crockfield. This act continues into the next year on 22 February 1913 and Empire Palace, and 14 July 1913 working at the Transfield's Palace Pier circus, probably Brighton. They are billed as 'original gymnasts' with shows daily at three and eight, handwritten on a bill. A programme for Leighton & Lindford, at The Palace Winchester, has them at number seven on 5-7 September (no year), in their 'Modern trapeze and Teeth Performance'. There are posters for Leighton & Lindford in 1913 at the Picture Theatre. It is clear that the duo 'Present Original Teeth, and Dancing Act A Genuine Novelty' in both picture theatres and on variety stages.

A further name change in their promotional material says:


The timing of the transition to Ritz and Ritz is unclear but they performed at the Cornford Exchange, Seaford, 18-20 March (no year), at the Calton Cinema theatre, Monday 13 April (no year), Dover Court 14-16 May (no year). However, the duo were definitely using the name Ritz and Ritz, and listed on a programme as a 'Comedy Act and Gymnastics', by 23-25 March 1914 at The Oxford Hippodrome, with one evening show and a Saturday matinee. On another programme, 22-24 April (no year), The Palace Lymington they are number seven out of eight acts. 'Comedy Act, Gymnastics, introducing Dancing and Teeth spinning'. A newspaper cutting from 8 January 1914 describes Ritz and Ritz as a novelty and very highly appreciated:

The lady performer in her acrobatic performances and step dances being much admired, and her exhibition of teeth holding and swinging is excellent. The gentleman partner does his share and is very amusing in his clownish tricks, etc., keeping his audience in roars of laughter.

This would appear to be for the Taft Wells Cinema where the pictures also are excellent and the star picture is The Snare of Fate. They are still working as Ritz and Ritz in 1915, judging by a receipt for printing brochures. There is an image of Horace with the painted face of a clown in striped top and baggy pants with 'sold' on the front. Pansy is wearing white sailor boy's shorts and top, black stockings, and a big bow in her hair. Two photographs show Pansy, hanging from a trapeze by a hook and leather teeth hold, arms folded, and shoes with big bows.

Clearly Pansy's work continued to present images of physical strength and daring
in conjunction with touches of feminine display long after her performances as Alar ended. Her capacity to become Alar should remain linked to her training as a performer, and her long career as an aerial artist.

Unless otherwise stated, the photographs, posters, drawings, programmes, advertisements, notebook, contracts, receipts, reviews, and personal documents discussed in this article are held at the ‘Pansy Chinery’ Collection, Theatre Museum Study Room Archive Storage, Blythe House, London.

Notes


2. According to Pansy’s baptism certificate, she was born ‘8 Martii 1879 nata et die 12 Matui’, named Frances Elizabeth Mary Murphy, and her parents were Joseph and Cecilia Murphy, of Liverpool. Pansy Murphy’s sister was Adelaide Murphy. Pansy became Pansy Osborne by her first marriage to Horace Stanley Osborne, 9 June 1904, at the Parish Church of All Saints, Ipswich. He was 26 and a performer, although he lists host in his profession, and the son of a farmer. She was 25 and does not list her own career and lists her father as a tailor. Pansy’s second marriage was to Hugh Chinery, 31 March 1945, at St Nicholas Old Meeting House, Ipswich. He was 71 and listed his profession as carpenter, and she was 66, a tailor, and both were widowed. Hugh Chinery died 24 December 1957 and Pansy Chinery died 6 May 1969 aged 90 resident at 6 Trent Rd Ipswich, although her home had been 10 Cramwell Cres, Lindburgh Road. Pansy’s will left the residue, 340 pounds, 13 pence and 5 p, to Rosalie Muriel May Chinery, and 50 pounds to four other Chineries’, Reginal Charles, Cynthia Evelyn, Blanche Edith and Kathleen Agnes.

3. A Letter from S. Menzie of 70 Oxford St, Liverpool, 15 May 1891, quotes ‘10/6 every ten weeks paid in advance. If two are sent together the terms are reduced to 7/6 each. One hour weekly lessons on musical instruments included banjo and piano.’

4. A poster for the Merchant Seaman’s Orphan Asylum Snaresbrook, on board SS Maritoba. Commander Capt R Griffith. 23 October 1897. ‘The Sailor’s Orphan is England’s Charge’ 3. Dance Miss Pansy Zedora. Pansy featured as a dancer for fundraising appearances even during the period of her greatest international fame as an aerialist around 1897.


8. Ibid 328.


10. By 7 August 1899 Pansy has returned to Ipswich and was photographed in a black dress. In 1906 an older Pansy was photographed wearing her hair up, a frilled neckline and in 1907, she posed dressed as an oriental woman lounging on cushions. She can also be seen posing in what seems to be a tennis costume although not necessarily to publicise her act.


12. John M Munro, The Royal Aquarium: Failure of a Victorian Compromise (Beirut, Lebanon: American University of Beirut, 1971): 21. The Times (London), 22 October 1895. 5. ‘What may be described as a novelty in acrobatic performances is being added to the Aquarium, Westminster. A girl about 16 years of age is being shot from a huge bow at one side of the building and, passing through a target in the centre, is caught by another girl hanging by the feet in mid-air at a distance of 50 feet. This exhibition ... is wholly new to London.’

13. A.A. Strong, Dramatic and Musical Law (London: The Era Publishing Office, 1898): 97. Also see The Music Hall Act, 1752 (ibid 93). The Children’s Dangerous Performances Act, 1879, did not permit ‘any person who shall cause any child under the age of fourteen years to take part in any public exhibition or performance whereby, in the opinion of a court of summary jurisdiction, the life or limb of such child shall be endangered’ (ibid 95).

14. Peta Tait, ‘Fleshed, Muscular Phenomenologies: Across Sexed and Queer Circus Bodies’. In Peta

15. Raphael 36.


18. Barnum and Bailey Handbill (undated) with the information about Alar also reads: ‘The New Woman is also a picturesque and novel exhibition, for not one, but many charming maidens this season are seen in the rings at one time. There are Lady Clowns, Lady Ringmasters, Lady Object Holders, Lady Equestrians, Menagerie Performers...’


20. Route book for the Barnum & Bailey Tour of 1897, 96 (Milner Library Special Collection, Illinois State University). Comparison, June, Indianapolis, Indiana. The troupe consisted of John Georgette and plenty of business, and notes: ‘Twice to-day our canvas tested to its capacity, and the show leaves a lasting impression. Zedora’s aerial work highly commended, the flight of Alar being particularly admired.’ (Route book of Barnum & Bailey Tour of 1897, 81, Milner Library Special Collection, Illinois State University).


25. Farini’s Zazel was a ‘beautiful lady’ ‘Farini’s latest great invention. ... To conclude with her Wonderful Headforemost Dive, a distance of 97 feet 6 inches, and afterwards Fired from the Cannon, a distance of 70 feet’. (Royal Aquarium Programme, 15 October 1877, John Johnson Collection, Bodleian Library, Oxford). Ella Zuula and George Loyal. ‘The only lady who accomplishes the daring feat of riding a bicycle on the high wire; also of turning a complete somersault in mid-air from hand to hand, assisted by Mr. George Loyal, the Human Cannon Ball and Living Projectile, in his incomparable and original performance of being shot from a cannon loaded with powder a distance of 50 feet diagonally and catching a trapeze’. *The New York Clipper* (26 July 1879): 143.


30. John Turner, *Victorian Arena. Vol. One* (Liverpool: Lingdales Press, 1995): 140. The origins of members of the group are unknown at this time. In a 1901 interview Mr Zedora reported working with Barnum and Bailey in 1891 (F.F., 14). In 1891 the European troupe, the Flying Cleo, appeared in the USA with Barnum and Bailey Circus (Route book of Barnum and Bailey, 1891, Milner Library Special Collection, Illinois State University). The troupe consisted of John, George, Laura and Adele but it is recorded in the circus’ Route Book that by 17 August 1891 Cleo (possibly John) and wife were both unable to work because Mrs Cleo is sick. She stays in Detroit for medical treatment. In 1897 the names John and George appear in the Barnum and Bailey programme with the Flying Zedoras in the USA. These names could be in lieu of Tony Zedora (Route Book, Barnum and Bailey 1897, 42, Milner Library Special Collection, Illinois State University). There is a 1887 photograph of Pansy’s brother-in-law taken in a Copenhagen studio wearing satin shorts, tights, top with v-necked decoration, and soft shoes, and a 1891 photograph of Adele Zedora in Iowa with a man in civilian clothing.
33. Barnum and Bailey Souvenir Annual, 1896. The Flying Zedoras on double trapeze were either listed as act No. 10 or 11, Ring 2. ‘The famous Zedoras, in most wonderful performances, concluding with the flight of Alar, the human arrow.’ The 1896 route book has an entry for the 10 April, Saturday, ariels, Zedoras, popular and for 9 June Indianapolis, flight of Alar ‘particularly admired’. (Barnum and Bailey 1896, 62, 67, Milner Library Special Collection, Illinois State University) In 1897 Adele and Pansy Zedora and Tony Zedora were act No. 10 (Route book Barnum and Bailey 1897, 62. Milner Library Special Collection, Illinois State University).
35. F.F. 14.
36. First ad for show at New Colston Hall, Bristol, starting 24 December 1900 with a short season. On Christmas day there were two performances starting at seven thirty and matinees on Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday. Poole’s Myriorama included scenes from The Boer War, The Chinese Crisis, Joseph Poole’s Vaudeville Organization, and ‘The Marvellous Flying Zedoras, Six in number (3 ladies and 3 gents). The most Original Flying act in the World.’ *The Bristol Magpie*, (20 December 1900): 17. The advertisement for Zedoras for 27 December 1900 reads at ‘enormous expense’. A 1901 review of Poole’s Myriorama does not mention The Flying Zedoras in its three-hour programme. *East Anglian Daily Times* (10 September 1901), Poole’s were advertising in 3 September 1901 at Ipswich but no mention of the Zedoras.
38. F.F., 14.
39. There is a programme reference to La Troupe Zedoras at Cirque Plége, and they performed at Newcastle.
42. Turner, loc. cited: 141.
43. The Zedoras had studio photographs taken in 1906 and 1907 in Brixton, the area where performers often lived when working in London. The Uniques as a group of four wearing embroidered costumes were performing their ‘Gymnastic Potpourri Ladder Act’ in 1905. The act consisted of all four balancing off two ladders, and then one group member, probably Tony, holding two ladders (possibly perched midway up a ladder) with the other performers hanging by the knees, doing back bends off the held ladders or doing a vertical balance. The group also performed a four-high pyramid, and a trapeze suspension with dental act possibly done by Pansy. The names of the group members is not evident but included Lauri. There is a photograph taken in 1897 in New York in which a four-to-five-year-old child Laurie is photographed possibly with Adele. There is also a photograph of a Lauri Bailey, dated 2 February 1918. The other woman might have been called Laura and there is reference to Leo 1903.
44. By 1909 Pansy was in a group called the Mars Trio with Horace and her brother Leo, doing variety shows. After 1910 Pansy and Horace became a duo with Mars & Mars, then called Leighton & Lindford by 1913, and Ritz and Ritz by 1914 so that her stage name is Pansy Ritz in 1917. In 1914 Pansy was definitely doing a dental act as well as dancing.
45. From Monday to Friday doors opened at six thirty and two shows on Saturday when doors opened at six forty five and eight fifty and entry cost three, four or six pence. ‘The Hall thoroughly Disinfected. Up-to-date, Warm and Comfortable.’ Further receipts for Leighton & Lindford: 24 December 1912 (paid to Harry Leaton’s Agency) for eleven shillings twelve pence; 16 November 1912 for ten percent commission; paid to Sydney Thomas, 7 December 1912, fourteen shillings.
46. According to the Wright & Company receipt letter, this was printed on 12 May 1915, for a cost twelve shillings and sixpence.