

2014

THE WONDER SHOW

PRESENTS

THE

ARCTIC THEATRE ROYAL

A POLAR SPECTACULAR

A NEW ENTERTAINMENT OF GREAT INTEREST
AND OF THE MOST RATIONAL AMUSEMENT!

SUMMER



CITIZENS!

BEHOLD! AN EVENING OF NOVELTY WHICH MAY NEVER
OCCUR AGAIN; AN OPPORTUNITY TO PASS INTO THAT
DISTANT AND MYSTERIOUS REGION:
THE FROZEN ZONES...

FOR FULL PARTICULARS, SEE INSIDE

THE ARCTIC THEATRE ROYAL IS:

CAROLYN GENNARI

LAURA BROWN-LAVOIE

FAY STRONGIN

JEREMY RADTKE

TESS BROWN-LAVOIE



ACCOMPANIMENT:

ORIGINAL MUSIC: DOUG POOLE
&
CAPTAIN PARRY'S ORIGINAL BARREL ORGAN
RECORDINGS



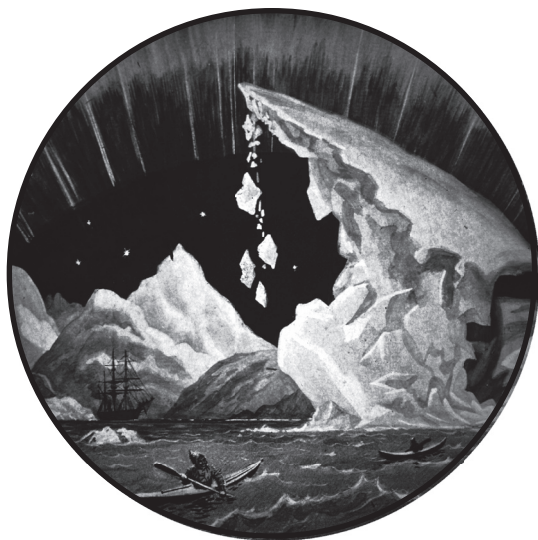
ON ARCTIC SPECTACLE:

“We are all, except the hopelessly dull and soulless, affected by the rising sun, the starry heavens, the ocean, the mountains, great rivers, forests and other natural objects; but I am about to take you into scenery and show you sights which are strange indeed to most of you. Every American, at least every North American, is familiar with winter scenery, wastes of snow, frozen rivers and lakes, but in our temperate climes winter does not attain the awful grandeur of the polar regions, in which ice mountains and frozen torrents are perennial and the solitudes immense, unbroken, awful. Thought itself is arrested in the presence of a nature of such sublimity. The reality surpasses the lights of imagination. All is novel, impressive, astonishing.”



So William Bradford opened the first of his lectures on the Arctic, illustrated by glass lantern slides made from the photographs taken under his direction by Messrs. Dunmore and Critcherson in 1869. Even before the photographic era, hand-painted pictorial glass slides of the Arctic were enormously popular, as viewers followed the exploits of Franklin, Kane, and Hayes with eager interest. And lantern slides were only part of this visual fascination: Arctic dioramas, fixed-circle and moving panoramas, stereoview cards, and built “polar” environments were all the rage in Europe and the United States from the 1850’s to the end of the century. In those days, before film and television, viewers (as Dickens put it) experienced “travel by pictorial means,” as these images metaphorically transported them to the thick-ribbed ice and frozen wastes of the polar regions, enabling them to ‘accompany’ explorers from Parry to Peary. Now, the Wonder Show takes twenty-first century audiences back to this moment, and enables us (excepting of course the dull and soulless) to re-trace the steps of our ancestors’ virtual journeys.

—Russell Potter



Russell A. Potter is professor of English and Media Studies at Rhode Island College, where he specializes in nineteenth-century visual spectacles such as panoramas, dioramas, and magic lantern shows depicting the Arctic regions. He appeared in “Arctic Passage: Prisoners of the Ice,” a 2004 episode of PBS’s NOVA, and his book, *Arctic Spectacles: The Frozen North in Visual Culture, 1818-1875* was published in 2007 by the University of Washington Press. He is also the author of a novel, *PYG: The Memoirs of Toby, the Learned Pig*, published by Penguin in 2012.

THE VOYAGE:

During the 19th century, the arctic --and specifically finding a northwest-passage through it-- was a main subject of national interest in England. One of the most successful voyages of this kind was head by Captain William Parry. This would be the first British naval expedition of the nineteenth-century to winter in arctic conditions, and its activities and precautions became a model for future expeditions.

On May 11th, 1819 Parry's expedition left England only to be halted by ice three months later. The crew retreated to a spot, which Parry named *Winter Harbour* and covered both ships in heavy cloth, anchoring there for over ten months --three of which would be in total darkness. During these months Parry enforced a series of unique methods for fighting scorbatic symptoms including daily doses of limeade and exercise routines. He also kept a small garden of albino micro-greens in his closet. Parry instituted musical and theatrical entertainments, school classes, meteorological and magnetic observations, and even a weekly newspaper, "The North Georgia Gazette and Winter Chronicle." Plays were performed every fortnight at the "Arctic Theater Royal," with written reviews following each act. Every future British vessel, wintering in the arctic, would from this point forward be instituted with a theater.

These expeditions were meant as nationalistic enterprises with scientific objectives. But in this case, we are also given the unique opportunity to peer into the more expressive side of history --which I think in many ways offers a deeper connection to the past. When I first discovered this voyage, I became absolutely fascinated with the details of this expedition and the larger metaphors presented by these shipboard documents. After learning that Parry's second voyage was equipped

with a magic lantern, I felt compelled to develop a Wonder Show on the topic. Moreover, I think Parry's shipboard theater resonates with the objectives of the Wonder Show: to create a theatrical platform that permits history and imagination to coexist on the same stage. All of us are very excited to share our experience of this story with you, and hope to convey some of this shipboard spectacle that occurred nearly 200 years ago!

--Carolyn Gennari
The Wonder Show



*As a director's note, the script is almost entirely comprised of text directly from the newspaper and journal, collaged together by Laura Brown-Lavoie. The slides are reproduced from original arctic lantern slides, as well as created from documents at the Athenaeum. The organ music you will hear this evening is recorded from Parry's actual organ that was onboard his voyage, recorded by Saydisc records®.

A TINY THEATER: THE PLAYHOUSE

The construction of our Play-house resonates with both the history of the magic lantern show and spirit of 19th century traveling acts and medicine shows. The name of our traveling theater is also a double entendre; a play-house --or toy house for a child to play in, and a playhouse, --a theater where dramatic performances are given.

Embracing the architecture and wonder of these earlier itinerant acts, The Wonder Show decided to incorporate a physical space that could allow us to tour our performances and explore contemporary notions of the traveling show. The design of our Play-house includes both a live/performance space much like the wagons used in early circus acts, and like the original Arctic Theatre Royal, where the stage and domestic quarters existed as one. The interior of the Play-house serves as both living, studio, and exhibit space while our collapsible stage also functions as a porch. The nature of our design allows for diverse, multi-use projects with the purpose of inviting artists and individuals to create and curate their own programs within this space.

Related to this evening's entertainment, we hope our mobile performance space conjures up Captain Parry's theater at sea, inviting you to imagine a night of spectacle under the arctic stars!

-Carolyn Gennari & Jeremy Radtke

EXHIBITION:

A PEEP AT THE ARCTIC: VISIONS OF POLAR EXPLORATION, 1818-1909

The Travel and Exploration Collection has become one of the most significant holdings in the Special Collections at the Providence Athenaeum with over 75 titles on polar exploration. An exhibition illustrating 19th century voyages to the Arctic from the collections, with loans from the private collection of RIC Professor Russell Potter, will be on display in the Philbrick Rare Book Room through the summer. Materials on display include Captain Parry's journals of his voyages to discover the Northwest Passage, and his shipboard publication the North Georgia Gazette, books illustrating voyages to find the lost expedition of Captain Franklin in 1845, attempts to reach the North Pole, and books about the Inuit inhabitants and zoology of the Arctic. The exhibit is free and open to the public. On view June 15-August 31.

The collection at the Providence Athenaeum originates to 1753 when an industrious group of Rhode Island gentlemen and one woman formed the Providence Library Company. The first shipment of 345 books arrived in the Colony aboard the cargo ship Elizabeth alongside chests of tools, other hardware and haberdashery, to create the first public circulating library in Providence. The books were intended to be "edifying" with general subject strengths in history, literature, classics, biography and travel, as well as "useful" manuals on topics such as farming, penmanship and housewifery. For over 175 years the library has operated in the current location on Benefit Street where it is open to the public for browsing, research and pleasure.

--Kate Wodehouse, Collections Librarian
Providence Athenaeum

CONTRIBUTORS:

Carolyn Gennari (Founder, Lanternist)

Carolyn Gennari is the founder of The Wonder Show, a project that uses the victorian popular mode of entertainment --the magic lantern show-- as a platform from which audiences can observe and investigate the past. She collaborates with artists and community members to create engaging activities that incorporate performance, storytelling, exhibits, and workshops with the purpose of creating opportunities for participants to learn about historic materials in Rhode Island.

Laura Brown-Lavoie (Writer, Narrator)

Laura Brown-Lavoie is a fiction writer, poet, and performer in Providence. She is the co-slammaster of the Providence Poetry Slam, and serves as a mentor and coordinator for the Providence Youth Slam. Her stories and poetry have been featured in publications such as The Los Angeles Review, The Seneca Review, Dark Mountain, and The Brooklyn Rail, and she has represented Providence at the National Poetry Slam, the Women of the World Poetry Slam and the Individual World Poetry Slam. When she isn't writing, Laura works as an urban farmer, growing food in a vacant lot in Providence, and on a larger parcel outside the city, and selling the produce to her neighbors through a CSA, at the Armory Park farmer's market, and to local restaurants. lauralambbrownlavoie.wordpress.com

Jeremy Radtke (Mobile Theater Builder, Technical Director)

Jeremy Radtke is an artist and educator focused on the intersection of art and technology. Working within both digital and physical public spaces, his work evokes nostalgic tendencies that look at old and new technologies and ways of making, allowing for audience participation and play. Jeremy also serves as the Digital Content Producer at the RISD Museum.

Fay Strongin (Cranky, Polar Bear)

Fay Strongin is a co-founder at Sidewalk Ends Farm, a (sub)urban farm with sites in Providence and Seekonk. In addition to being a farm and farm educator, Fay creates contemporary moving panoramas known as crankies, in which she collaborates with local artists, musicians, and storytellers in Rhode Island.

Tess Brown-Lavoie (Video)

Tess Brown-Lavoie is an artist and urban farmer living in Providence, RI. She co-founded Sidewalk Ends Farm and works on regional and national farm policy, serving on the New England Farmers Board of Directors, and on the National Young Farmers Coalition Advisory Committee. Tess also writes essays and poems, creates video art and is a musician. www.tbtlbtl.com.

Doug Poole (Music)

Doug Poole records and performs as Dummer (dpdummer.bandcamp.com) and with Cool World (coolworld.bandcamp.com).



Special Thanks

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Additional information about Athenaeum exhibits, tours, research appointments, programs and memberships are available on our website at www.providenceathenaeum.org

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