



Theater

A closer look

Theater: A Closer Look

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Why do we go to the theater? In an age where there are various entertainment options, including Television, internet, sporting events among other things why do we continue to seek the theater for entertainment?

The concept of the theater goes all the way back to Greek Civilization. But, the exact origins of how the theater came to be are still unknown. The two elements of theater are storytelling and Imitation. These along with other fundamental elements, were an important part of religious observance and rituals one example can be found in ancient Egypt, where there was an elaborate ritual concerning the god Osiris. The story of Osiris begins with him becoming the ruler of Egypt. He eventually marries his own sister Isis. Osiris is murdered. As the story goes, he is avenged and resurrected. The ritual of Osiris was performed over a period of 2,000 years from around 2500 B.C.E. to 550 B.C.E (p.232).

The Greek theater started to emerge through various ceremonies honoring the god Dionysus. Dionysus was the god of wine, rivalry, and fertility. It is believed that dithyrambic chorus came as a result of this. In the sixth century B.C.E., a chorus member named Thespis stepped out of the chorus and started to act. Thespis became the world's first actor and because of his efforts, the term Thespian was invented.

The Greeks had developed a religion based on worship of a particular group of gods and goddesses. The leader of this group was Zeus and Hera. An annual festival was held in honor of the gods and theater was the main attraction. The festival included a satyr play. A satyr play was a take on Greek Mythology and its history. It was the final play in a series of three tragedies performed in Athens. Normally found in a satyr play was half goat-half man. Since the theater was a religious and civic event, the government undertook it. About eleven months before the festival a government official must choose, what plays were going to be presented. The government official appointed a choragus. A choragus was the Greek

version of a producer for each of the selected playwrights. Usually the playwrights will write plays based off myths. Myth was passed down from generation to generation. Myths attempts to explain the human and natural phenomena.

The Greek tragedy started to emerge though playwrights like Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The Greek tragedies had themes ranging from noble families and lofty themes. During this time, the trilogy was being developed. The best known playwright of his style was Aeschylus who was the master at the trilogy. The best known of these trilogies was Orestela (p.235). The Greek comedies of this period were known as the old comedy to distinguish itself from the comedy. In an old comedy, the focus was the make fun of social, political or anything in the culture. An example today would have been Mad TV, SNL, and Family Guy. Unlike the tragedies, Old Comedies did not have the same climatic structure. During the fourth century, a type of comedy was on the verge. It was called New Comedy, as in most situation comedies today. The new comedy dealt most with domestic problems and romantic situations.

When the Greek Civilization started to decline, a new power started to rise. Rome started to make a name for itself around 500 B.C.E. When Rome had thoughts about the theater, they look to Greece as a format for their theater. "Many Popular entertainments are theatrical in nature. Some historians believe that twentieth-century American culture, with its highly developed popular entertainments was much like the roman culture " (p.245). The roman invented an odd stage form called Pantomime. The Pantomime or what the English called it today panto. Initially, a pantomime had only one dance, a chorus and musical accomplishment. The emperor sponsored the entire performance.

Even though Rome was very popular for several centuries, the work of only three plays which was the only one to have survived were the comedies of Plautus, Terence, and the tragedies of Seneca. Roman theater production practice differed from those in Greece. The Roman festivals was

under the order of the jurisdiction of a local official that was in charge of the hiring of an acting troupe. The head of the troupe was usually the lead actor. The role of the lead actor ranges from making financial arrangements, bought dramas from the playwrights, and obtaining costumes. The Roman ignored the three-actor rule that was implemented during the Greek Period. The official acting company of the theater had six actors. The pantomime relied on vocal delivery and board physical gestures.

Despite having prospered of centuries, the fall of roman theater was due to the onset of Christianity. The Christian Church was against the theater and had it shut down because it offended the church leaders. Because the considered it such a threat the moral fiber of the community. The church issued a decree stating that anyone who was at theater instead of a church is excommunicated.

While Rome was winning the war for souls and slowly losing the battle for common sense another part of the world was experiencing there version of the theater. The Asian theater was performed in various different parts. India had their style of drama known as the Sanskrit drama. Sanskrit comes from the language of the noble classes. The plays relied on themes from Indian epics literature. The most popular and famous was Shakuntala. By the end of Arabs had begun to invade India and most of the traditions was fading away. Meanwhile in china around 714 B.C.E the academy of the Pear Garden School for dancers and singers is founded. By the 980 the development of the professional theater companies had started.

There are just a few examples of how theater affects different parts of the world. But, what about our theater, The American Theater? The American Theater is a melting pot of different cultures combined. The American Theater has a wide range of specialist theaters. Contemporary theater consists of Broadway-style show like cabaret of cats. However, it can also consist of a genre called Rock Operas. The Rock Operas is an example of Specialty musical plays in this category consist of Rock and

Roll musical. The Rock opera started in the late sixties with production of the musical "Hair". Jesus Christ Superstar and Tommy soon followed leading it own sub-genre within the contemporary theater.

Another type of theater is Avant- garde and Traditional Theater. The Avant-garde Theater relies on getting back to the ritualistic. Breaking away from the mainstream this type of theater relies on a small audience. The Avant-garde artist has confronted the idea of the modern day theater and its notions.

There are other specific theaters geared toward a particular groups or causes i.e African American Theater, Gay and Lesbian, Hispanic Theater. In the 20th century, the theater faced series of challenges with the constant evolution of Digital World. But, despite these changes the theater did not suffer as most would expect it to. Mainly because of the presence of the live performer and the trill, that something can go wrong at anytime. We can be sure that the theater will survive in a powerful way . Whatever the digital would throw at the constant threat of the media, the technology will lead into a new world. No matter what form of theater, the theater will be around for years to come.

References

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