

Your Name
Keyboarding I xx Period
Mr. Behling
Current Date

Theatre

Tonight the house lights will dim, and another performance will begin on Broadway. Perhaps it will be another performance of *The Phantom of the Opera*, the longest-running show in the history of Broadway with 8,251 performances as of November 25, 2007 (Hernandez). Or perhaps it will be the play that replaces *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Somewhere, sometime today, another enactment of one of Shakespeare's plays will take place. It may be in a high school auditorium, or it may be at a professional Shakespearean playhouse.

Theatre has enriched the lives of people for many years. No one really knows when the first play production was performed. However, historians say, "Theatre is as old as mankind. There have been primitive forms of it since man's beginnings" (Berthold, 1991, 1). The more commonly recognized form of theatre, the play, dates back to what is referred to as "Greek Theatre" and "Roman Theatre."

Greek Theatre

Greek Theatre started around 500 B.C. Sophocles and Aristophanes are two of the well-known Greek playwrights whose works are still being performed today.

Religious festivals that honored the Greek god of wine and fertility (Dionysus) were part of the culture of Greece around this time. The Greeks felt that if they honored Dionysus, he would in turn bless them with many children, rich land, and abundant crops. Plays were performed as part of these festivals.

To accommodate the large number of people who attended the plays (as many as 14,000 to 17,000 people, according to historians), theatres were built into a hillside. The plays were staged in the morning and lasted until sunset, since there was no electricity for lighting (Prince and Jackson, 1997, 35).

Roman Theatre

Roman Theatre was the next widely recognized form of the theatre. The first Roman theatrical performance, historians believe, was performed around 365 B.C. Seneca, Plautus, and Terence

are the best known of the early Roman playwrights. Seneca was known for his tragedies, while the other two were known for their comedies.

The Roman plays were similar to those of the Greeks. Unlike the Greeks, however, the Romans did not limit the number of actors in each play. Another major difference between the Greek and Roman theatres was the theatre buildings. The Romans were great engineers and architects. They built theatres that were unified, free-standing structures several stories in height (Prince and Jackson, 1997, 44).

References

Berthold, Margot. *The History of World Theatre*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1991.

Hernandez, Ernio. "Playbill News: Long Runs on Broadway."
<http://www.playbill.com/celebritybuzz/article/75222.html> (accessed November 25, 2007).

Prince, Nancy, and Jeanie Jackson. *Exploring Theatre*. Minneapolis/St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1997.