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# Preface

My main concern in writing *An Introduction to: The Art of Theatre* was to present a readable and interesting text. To my way of thinking, many textbooks, whatever ground they cover, are too academic. Although I have experience in many facets of theatre — acting, directing, design, and university teaching — I consider myself primarily a writer. Thus, for me, the major criterion for any book is its readability, and I feel that the readability of this book sets it apart.

Although the text covers traditional ground, I have tried to offer different perspectives in a few somewhat neglected areas. For example, as a writer, one of my major interests is playwriting, which often seems to be ignored or treated summarily in the largest number of introductory theatre texts. Of course, only so much material is practical to include for a beginning course.

No one can disagree that theatre is a collaborative art. Certainly it requires teamwork among the various artists. More than that, theatre is a collaboration of those with a myriad of different lifestyles, religions, ethnic or racial backgrounds, and experiences. Due in part to this collaboration and the contributions of many people, theatre is constantly evolving.

Another reason for change in the theatre experience is new technology. Thus, in this text I touch upon recent developments in theatre and drama, such as multimedia productions featuring the Internet and computer programs developed for set design. Theatre continues to evolve in other ways as well.

Of course, an introductory book cannot deal in depth with any one subject. By the very fact of choosing to include or not to include historical facts, for instance, a writer becomes an editor and a censor. An author of a textbook can only hope, if he or she is conscientious, to include that which is most enlightening, most captivating, and most valuable.

What I hope to have accomplished with this text is to instill in you a strong interest in theatre. In addition, I hope to encourage you to further investigate the wide range of minority contributions to American theatre, important historical developments that are mentioned only in passing due to space and time limitations, individual theatre artists and what their work includes, and the collaborative effort required to bring a production to fruition.

One of the main goals of any introductory text is to spark an interest in and appreciation of the subject. This is the reason for including cuttings from books and journals by and about practicing theatre artists. It is why I include a number of excerpts from different plays, ranging from classic to contemporary, and why I address theatre criticism.

This book is divided into three parts in such a way that you immediately become acquainted with the ideas of what theatre and drama are and what they entail. This is the purpose of the first two chapters, which define theatre and drama and show how plays are structured. Chapter 3 discusses style and genre, using illustrations and examples to better explain the material. I believe this is important because it is unique or unusual details that provide interest and involvement.

Throughout all these chapters are excerpts from plays that characterize movements, styles, and general beliefs. Chapter 4 then explains how and where various types of theatre are produced. Here you are given a look at theatre architecture and space, the physical theatre. I have included this chapter because I have found that many students have not had the opportunity to experience plays in more than one or two types of environments. Often they have viewed productions only at proscenium theatres.

Part II explains how various theatre artists work, including the playwright, the actor, the director, the designers, and supporting artists, as well as the sorts of backgrounds these artists have. I have tried to show that there are many different approaches in theatre, but I stress that theatre requires a collaborative effort. Although the artists in a production express their own unique creativity, all the elements of a theatrical production must mesh. Seeing that they do is the responsibility of one person, most often the director.

No matter what the job in theatre, the preparation is exacting. Chapter 8, which deals with designers and supporting artists, explains this preparation, from the designing of light and sound plots to preparing production or prompt books.

The business and house staffs of a theatre, including the technicians, are necessary to the success of any theatre or individual production. For this reason, in Chapter 9 I talk about the roles and responsibilities of the producer, the stage manager, and those other business people who work "behind the scenes" in educational, professional, and community theatre. Finally, this section concludes with a chapter on theatre criticism, not because I imagine a great number of beginning theatre students will become theatre critics,

but rather to show you that with the knowledge you have gained, you can apply standards of judgment to any theatrical production, just as professional theatre critics do.

Part III covers theatre from ancient times to the present. Years back, when I was taking my first courses in theatre, there was little mention of Eastern theatre, except to say that it did exist. Yet, as I explain in the text, Asian theatre has greatly influenced American theatre, and, therefore, it is important to know its roots as well as those of Western theatre.

The instructor, of course, is free to “pick and choose,” as he or she sees fit. Those who wish to devote little time to theatre history may simply refer students to the new timeline at the end of the book, rather than spending time on the history chapters.

Each chapter within a section is complete in itself, so that those instructors who, for instance, wish to deal with directing before discussing acting, certainly will find the text amenable to such switching.

At the end of each of the fifteen chapters is a summary. These by no means cover or include all that is important to each chapter, but simply provide overall highlights as study aids. Second, at the end of each chapter are questions for in-class discussion. These are for the purpose of helping students think through and apply the material they have learned.

Available also is a teacher’s guide with suggestions for further discussion and research.