

NON-  
FICTION

HISTORIES

David Timson  
**The History of Theatre**

Read by **Derek Jacobi** and cast



NA419912D

CONTAINS 50 EXCERPTS FROM WORLD THEATRE

1	PROLOGUE	3:17
2	THE GREEK DRAMA 5th c. BC	3:53
3	GREEK TRAGEDY	3:50
4	GREEK THEATRES	3:19
5	OEDIPUS: 'Torment, Torment...' from the last scene of OEDIPUS – Sophocles (c.495-406 BC)	2:36
6	GREEK ACTING	3:50
7	GREEK COMEDY	4:10
8	KINESIAS: It's O, so long since you and I have known The rites of love! – won't you come back, my own? MYRRHINA: Not I, by Jove, unless you men make peace, And stop the war. from 'LYSISTRATA' Aristophanes (c.444- c.380 BC)	3:02
9	ROMAN THEATRE 3rd c. BC-250 AD	2:48
10	THE MEDIEVAL THEATRE: Its Origins (10th c.)	1:48
11	'1st. VOICE: While the third lesson is being chanted let 4 brethren vest themselves...' from 'Concordia Regularis' Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester (10th c. AD)	2:14
12	GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF MYSTERY PLAYS (14th.-16th.c.)	6:00
13	'The effect associated with Heaven and Hell were veritably prodigious' Description of stage machinery in Valenciennes (1547)	3:10
14	'GOD: Ego sum Alpha et Omega, vita, via, Veritas, primus et nouissimus.' The Creation and fall of Lucifer, Abraham and Issac 2nd Shepherds Play	4:27

15	DEVELOPMENT OF MIRACLE AND MORALITY PLAYS	3:20
16	THE ITALIAN COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE (15th.c.)	12:43
17	THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRE (16th.c.)	4:30
18	THE STRUCTURE OF A PLAYHOUSE	1:55
	– Description of Burbage's Acting by Richard Flecknoe	
19	'...Think when we talk of horses that you see them Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth' from the Prologue to HENRY V by William Shakespeare	2:16
20	An Attack on the Theatre by John Stockwood 1578	0:21
21	CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES	1:32
22	TAMBURLAINE: 'Forsake thy King, and do but join with me, And we will triumph over all the world' from TAMBURLAINE Act I Scene 2 by Christopher Marlowe	0:59
23	FAUSTUS: 'The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike, The devil will come, and Faustus must be damn'd.' from the last scene of DR FAUSTUS by Christopher Marlowe	3:31
24	WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616) AND HIS PLAYS	5:51
25	Excerpts from Shakespeare's plays: As You Like It • Romeo and Juliet • Henry V • Henry IV pt.1 • A Midsummer Night's Dream • The Taming of the Shrew • Hamlet • The Merchant of Venice • King Lear • Cymbeline • The Tempest	5:19
26	THE JACOBEAN THEATRE (1603-1642)	2:24

27	DUCHESS: 'Now what you please, What death? BOSOLA: Strangling: here are your executioners.' from THE DUCHESS OF MALFI Act IV Scene 2 by John Webster	1:44
28	DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRIVATE THEATRE Description of a Private Audience by John Marston (1601)	0:58
29	BEN JONSON (1572-1637)	0:49
30	URSULA: Hang 'em, rotten, roguy cheaters, I hope to see 'em plagued one day (poxed they are already, I am sure) with lean playhouse poultry, from BARTHOLOMEW FAIR Act II by Ben Jonson	3:08
31	SPANISH THEATRE IN THE RENAISSANCE	4:24
32	SIGISMUND: 'The rich man dreams his riches, dreams his cares; from LIFE IS A DREAM by Pedro de la Calderón (1600-1681)	1:30
33	THE FRENCH THEATRE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY	4:32
34	PHEDRE: 'There love will always live. Even as I speak, ah cruel, deadly thought! They flout the fury of my insane rage.' from PHEDRE Act IV by Jean Racine (1639-1699)	2:15
35	THE STRUCTURE OF FRENCH THEATRES	1:03
36	MOLIERE (1622-1673) (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin)	4:25
37	MR JOURDAIN: ...And now I must tell you a secret. I'm in love with a lady of quality and I want you to help me to write her a little note I can let fall at her feet. From LE BOURGEOIS GENTILHOMME by Molière	2:48

38	ELMIRE: What? is there no avoiding your pursuit. Will you not give me time to breathe? From TARTUFFE Act IV by Molière	4:11
39	THE ENGLISH RESTORATION THEATRE (1660-1700)	9:51
40	Thomas Jordan's Prologue to THE MOOR OF VENICE (1660)	1:26
41	THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESTORATION COMEDY	1:55
42	HARRIET: 'I was informed you used to laugh at love, and not make it.' From THE MAN OF MODE Act IV scene 1 Sir George Etherege (1634-1691)	1:22
43	LORD FOPPINGTON: ...my life, madam, is a perpetual stream of pleasure, that glides thro' such a variety of entertainments, I believe the wisest of our ancestors never had the least conception of any of 'em. From THE RELAPSE Act II Scene 1 by Sir John Vanbrugh (1664-1726)	1:22
44	MRS PINCHWIFE: 'Dear Sweet Mr Horner' ...So...' My husband would have me send you a base, rude unmannerly letter... From THE COUNTRY WIFE Act IV Scene 2 William Wycherley (1640-1716)	1:26
45	From A SHORT VIEW OF THE IMMORALITY AND PROFANENESS OF THE ENGLISH STAGE. (1697/8) by Jeremy Collier	1:59
46	MILLAMANT: Positively, Mirabell, I'll lie a-bed in a morning as long as I please. MIRABELL: Then I'll get up in a morning as early as I please. From THE WAY OF THE WORLD Act IV Scene 1 by William Congreve (1670-1729)	3:22
47	From THE DIARY OF SAMUEL PEPYS (1667)	0:47
48	EUROPEAN THEATRE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY	4:50
49	GERMAN THEATRE IN THE 18TH CENTURY	5:54

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50	ELIZABETH: Say then, what surety can be offer'd me, Should I magnanimously loose your bonds? from MARIA STUART Act III Scene 4 by Johann Schiller (1759-1805)	1:55
51	THE ENGLISH THEATRE IN THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY	4:32
52	THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH PANTOMIME	3:28
53	THE INTRODUCTION OF THE THEATRE LICENSING ACT IN ENGLAND (1737)	2:11
54	DAVID GARRICK (1717-1779) AND THE ENGLISH THEATRE IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY	6:41
55	Description of Garrick as Abel Druggier in THE ALCHEMIST	1:42
56	THE PROGRAMME OF AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH THEATRE	1:59
57	AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY AUDIENCE	2:38
58	SIR ANTHONY: Why, Mrs. Malaprop, in moderation, now, what would you have a woman know? from THE RIVALS Act I Scene 2 by Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816)	2:27
59	BEAUMARCHAIS (1732-1799) AND THE FRENCH THEATRE IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY	2:14
60	THE COUNT: With your brains and character you could hope for advancement in the service. FIGARO: Brains a means to advancement! from THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO Act III by Pierre Augustin Beaumarchais (1732-1799)	2:05
61	THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEATRE IN AMERICA (1800-1860s)	6:26
62	ROMANTIC MELODRAMA IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE	5:37
63	THE DEVELOPMENT OF FARCE	3:19
64	HENRY IRVING (1838-1905), AND ENGLISH THEATRE	0:47

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65	IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY Description of Irving in THE BELLS by Edward Gordon-Craig	3:48
66	THE BEGINNING OF THE THEATRE OF IDEAS AND REALISM	2:19
67	HENRIK IBSEN (1828-1906)	5:40
68	HELMER: To forsake your home, your husband, and your children! And only think what people will say about it! From A DOLL'S HOUSE Act III by Henrik Ibsen	4:57
69	GEORGE BERNARD SHAW (1856-1950)	1:29
70	HIGGINS: Say your alphabet LIZA: I know my alphabet. Do you think I know nothing? From PYGMALION Act II by George Bernard Shaw	1:48
71	ANTON CHEKHOV (1860-1904)	4:36
72	THE SEAGULL BY ANTON CHEKHOV	1:51
73	NINA: The horses are waiting for me at the gate. Don't see me off, I'll go by myself... From THE SEAGULL Act IV Anton Chekhov	2:17
74	STANISLAVSKY AND THE MOSCOW ARTS THEATRE	0:38
75	From the writings of Stanislavsky	0:58
76	THE GROWTH OF ENSEMBLE COMPANIES	2:31
77	LADY BRACKNELL: ...Now to minor matters. Are your parents living? JACK: I have lost both my parents. From THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST Act I by Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)	2:00
78	THEATRICAL EXPERIMENTS IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY	5:41
79	THE THEATRE OF LUIGI PIRANDELLO (1867-1936)	2:09

[80]	THE POLITICAL THEATRE OF BERTOLT BRECHT (1898-1956)	3:08
[81]	AMERICAN THEATRE IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY AND EUGENE O'NEILL (1888-1953)	2:40
[82]	From A Long Day's Journey into Night Act IV by Eugene O'Neill	4:28
[83]	EUROPEAN THEATRE IN THE 1930s and 1940s; FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA (1898-1935)	1:56
[84]	THE LONDON THEATRE, AND NOEL COWARD (1899-1973)	2:33
[85]	AMANDA: We won't talk about ourselves any more, we'll talk about outside things, anything you like, only just don't leave me until I've pulled myself together. ELYOT: Very well. From PRIVATE LIVES Act I by Noel Coward	1:11
[86]	POST-WAR BRITISH THEATRE AND JOHN OSBORNE (1929-1994)	2:37
[87]	ALISON: (softly) All I want is a little peace JIMMY: Peace! God! She wants peace! From LOOK BACK IN ANGER Act II by John Osborne	2:36
[88]	THEATRE OF THE ABSURD AND SAMUEL BECKETT (1906-1989)	3:26
[89]	VLADIMIR: (sententiously) To every man his little cross (he sighs) and sits on the mound Till he dies. (as an afterthought) And is forgotten. From WAITING FOR GODOT Act II by Samuel Beckett	1:37
[90]	HAROLD PINTER (1930-)	1:50



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91	ASTON: I...I think it's about time you found somewhere else. I don't think we're hitting it off. DAVIES: Find somewhere else? From THE CARETAKER Act III Harold Pinter	2:28
92	BRITISH THEATRE IN THE 1960s AND JOE ORTON (1933-1967)	1:54
93	POST-WAR AMERICAN THEATRE, TENNESSEE WILLIAMS (1911-1983), ARTHUR MILLER (1915-) AND DAVID MAMET (1947-)	1:45
94	WILLY: '...When I was a boy – eighteen, nineteen – I was already on the road.' From DEATH OF A SALESMAN Act II by Arthur Miller	3:50
95	BLANCHE: 'When I think of how divine it is going to be to have such a thing as privacy once more – I could weep with joy! From A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE Scene 10 by Tennessee Williams	4:34
96	EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE IN THE 1960s AND 1970s	4:43
97	DEVELOPMENTS IN THE THEATRE FROM 1970-1990	3:35
98	EPILOGUE	4:25

**Total time: 5:10:10**

# David Timson

## The History of Theatre

*'He that denies then theatres should be,  
He may as well deny a world to me.'*

So wrote Thomas Heywood in 1612, shamelessly borrowing an idea from his contemporary William Shakespeare. It is a thought that echoes through this history, that the theatre reflects the world, and the world, the theatre. Is art imitating life or vice versa ?

The world would have rolled on if the phenomenon of theatre had never existed, but the quality of human life would have undoubtedly been the poorer. Theatre may not be a physical necessity, but as King Lear says 'allow not nature more than nature needs, man's life's as cheap as beast's'.

At its best the theatre is an arena for ideas, stimulating and controversial ideas at that, for it is in its nature to be anarchic and to continually question accepted views. Thus Ibsen and Chekhov raise in their plays social questions the nineteenth century would rather have ignored, and point the way forward in the twentieth century for playwrights such as Bertolt Brecht, George Bernard Shaw and Arthur Miller. Food for

thought is one thing, however, but it is also the theatre's job to entertain and add to the 'gaiety of nations'. Celebration of the human spirit is also important. The feeling of satisfaction as evil is defeated, the joy when a love-match works out, or amusement as a fool is exposed. That is why the long-time symbols for the theatre, recognised the world over, are the masks of Comedy and Tragedy. They balance each other and are inseparable, reminding us that you can't have one without the other. The serious and the ridiculous go ever hand in hand in our story.

Sophocles and Aristophanes, Racine and Molière, Ibsen and Feydeau. These are the playwrights whose work endures from age to age, but the story of the theatre is also the story of actors, "that despicable race", whose inspiration, invention and dedication to their ephemeral art, provide the life-blood of this story. As acting styles continually changed with each generation, moving inexorably towards a more naturalistic 'real life' presentation, so too theatre buildings evolved to match those styles. From the giant arenas of the Greeks,

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the open platform of the Elizabethans, the intimate Court-theatres of Molière, the picture-frame stages of the nineteenth century, to the flexible small studio spaces of the twentieth.

Any history is bound to be subjective, and there will be omissions, and aspects of this history treated too briefly for some. Selection too has meant that this 'History' is essentially a history of Western Theatre. Both Western and Eastern theatre evolved from ritualistic dances linked to religion, but whereas Western theatre sought an ever more naturalistic presentation, the theatre of India, China and Japan retained a highly stylised manner of performance. Their repertoire is unchanging and timeless. It is a different tradition and requires a separate study.

I have tried to give at least a taste of all the major developments in this long and diverse history, which spreads over 2,500 years. I hope the taste will whet the appetite for listeners to go on their own journeys of discovery. I have tried to stick to the highways, but the byways of theatre history are too tempting at times not to explore. My hope is that this colourful and eventful history will contain something to catch every listener's imagination, and that:

*'we shall both make you sad, and tickle ye.'*  
(Thomas Middleton 1613)

### **Notes by David Timson**

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## **GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS NOT FULLY EXPLAINED IN THE TEXT**

**AMPHITHEATRE** – From the Greek *amphi*, around. Literally a theatre that surrounds the action. Developed by the Romans originally for gladiatorial fights, and later drama. The Colosseum is a surviving example.

**APRON-STAGE** – or Forestage. The part of the stage in front of the proscenium arch, and before the curtain (if there is one). It projects into the auditorium, allowing the actors to be closer to the audience.

**BACKCLOTH** – The drop-scene at the back of the stage. Usually painted to represent a scene such as a garden or street, or else just blue to depict the sky.

**BOX-SET** – Used in the 20th century to depict a naturalistic room. Where a setting is made up of ‘flats’ linked together to give the appearance of solid walls and ceiling.

**BUSINESS** – A term which describes any action on a stage, comic or serious, which does not involve dialogue, e.g. ‘He spends the next two minutes silently tearing up all his manuscripts and throwing them under the table...’ (The Seagull)

**FLATS** – A canvas-fronted frame, traditionally placed in rows on both sides of the stage, painted to complement the backcloth,

e.g. in a forest scene, the ‘flats’ would represent trees. Also used to construct a ‘Box-set’.

**GROUND-ROW** – A low piece of scenery at ground level, painted to depict a grassy bank or low wall. It helps in a conventional setting to give a feeling of depth to the scene.

**IMPROVISATION** – Where a production is created without a script. The actors rely on their skills of invention for the dialogue and action. It provided the foundation for the Commedia dell’Arte troupes of the 16th century.

**MASQUE** – Elaborately staged allegorical dramas, involving music, dance and song, with spectacular sets and costumes. They were popular in the courts of Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries, where courtiers and monarchs themselves performed behind the anonymity of masks. The masque contributed to the development of Opera.

**PIT** – Less expensive seating area of the auditorium, usually behind the stalls (the more expensive seats) on the ground floor. Originally called the ‘pit’ after part of the Drury Lane theatre built on the site of a cockpit.

**PLOT** – The story or narrative of a play.

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**PROSCENIUM ARCH** – An often elaborate permanent arch which divides the stage area from the auditorium, through which the audience views the play. Most theatres built during the 19th century placed great emphasis on the proscenium arch being the equivalent of a ‘frame’ for their dramatic ‘pictures’.

**PROPS** – The everyday articles or properties used by the actors to express character or move the plot along, e.g. spectacles, handbags or letters.

**SCENARIO** – A summing-up of the main elements in a dramatic narrative. A rough version of the plot. The basis for the Commedia dell’Arte’s improvisations.

**STOCK PIECES** – Pieces of scenery reused for more than one production, not individually designed, e.g. a Woodland scene. Also applies to reliable plays repeated because of their guaranteed success.

**TIRING-HOUSE** – The Elizabethan equivalent of the dressing-room.

**TRAPS** – or Trapdoors. Holes cut in the stage with hinged lids through which actors can descend or ascend as part of the action. Much used in Pantomime, e.g. arrival of the Genie in ‘Aladdin’.

**UNITIES** – The ‘unities’ refers to the classical concept propounded by Aristotle, that dramatic action should occur in one place

and at one time, i.e. the action should not be spread over many years and many locations. It was a strong influence on European playwrights from 16th-18th centuries.

**WINGS** – The ‘flats’ that define the edge of the acting area, screening off from the audience’s view the sides of the stage where the actors assemble to make their entrances. This off-stage area is also referred to as the ‘wings’.



## DAVID TIMSON

It will soon become apparent to anyone listening to **The History of Theatre** that it was written by an actor. David Timson has worked as an actor for nearly thirty years in theatre, television and film, but most consistently for BBC Radio. He won the BBC Student Prize in 1971 and has since made over 1,000 broadcasts, ranging from the title role in *Nicholas Nickleby* to that past institution *Listen With Mother*. He has frequently read serials and short stories for *Woman's Hour* and Radio 4. He has also recorded substantially for Naxos AudioBooks, reading poetry for their collections of Comic and Oriental verse. He has embarked on a project with Naxos to record the complete stories of Sherlock Holmes, and last year, in conjunction with Naxos and Cambridge University Press, he directed the production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

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Death of a Salesman, Arthur Miller, featuring Lee J. Cobb – Caedmon/HarperCollins

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Look Back In Anger, John Osborne – Gordon Dickerson, John Osborne Estate

Waiting for Godot, Samuel Beckett – Curtis Brown



**Derek Jacobi** is one of Britain's leading actors, having made his mark on stage, film and television – and notably on audiobook. He is particularly known for the roles of *I Claudius* and *Brother Cadfael*, both of which he has recorded for audiobook. His extensive theatrical credits, from London's West End to Broadway (where he was appearing in *Uncle Vanya* immediately after making this recording) in works encompassing the whole range of theatre, make him especially suited for narrating *The History of Theatre*.



**Carole Boyd** trained at the Birmingham School of Speech and Drama where she won the principal national prize for voice, the Carleton Hobbs Award, and immediately joined the BBC Radio Drama Company. Vocal versatility is her speciality, from her creation of the notorious character of Lynda Snell in *The Archers* to *Poetry Please* and all the female characters in *Postman Pat*. She has won two prestigious awards for her reading of Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Huth's *Landgirls*. She has also written and recorded her own audiobook, *Lynda Snell's History of Ambridge*.



**John McAndrew** trained at LAMDA. He spent several seasons at the RSC where productions included *Peter Pan*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Edward II* and *School of Night*. Seasons at Manchester Royal Exchange appearing in *The Voysey Inheritance* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. He won the Carleton Hobbs Radio Award and has since appeared in numerous radio plays, including the highly successful adaptation of *Lord of the Rings*.



**Teresa Gallagher** has performed in many leading roles in both plays and musicals across the country, London's West End, and Off Broadway. In addition, she is a well-known voice to listeners of BBC Radio Drama. Her work on film includes *The Misadventures of Margaret* and Mike Leigh's *Topsy-Turvy*.



**Caroline Faber** trained at Webber Douglas. On leaving, she made an immediate impact with performances at the Royal National Theatre, Watford Palace and other theatres in the UK. Her television appearances include *Midsomer Murders* and *Comedy Nation*.



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National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, Andrew Penny	

**Music programming by David Timson**

Cover picture by Hemesh Alles

David Timson

# The History of Theatre

Read by **Derek Jacobi** and cast

Here is the diverse and fascinating story of the Theatre, from the first tragedies and comedies of Ancient Greece to the high-tech mega-musicals of the late 20th century. It is an absorbing tale, encompassing ancient tales, medieval theatre, Commedia dell'Arte, the great dramas of the Elizabethan age, the foppish 18th century, the European developments in France, Germany and Spain with Russia making its main impact in the 19th century. As the 20th century progressed, the theatre moved in different experimental directions, particularly in America and Europe.

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