

# The History of Theatre



People have been acting out stories since ancient times. The first recorded theatrical performances were in Ancient Greece, during a festival that honored the god Dionysus. It is said that a man named Thespis won a competition at the festival, which is why actors are sometimes called thespians.

By 300 BC, Rome was full of artists. Romans began writing their own versions of Greek plays. While tragedies had been popular in Greece, Romans loved comedies. Roman citizens loved seeing plays, and soon theaters were being built all over Rome.

During Medieval times, religion ruled Europe. People lived their lives according to religion, and thought that entertainment was a sin. Those that did not approve of theatre started putting on their own plays that were about religion, so that they could be performed in church. These plays became so popular that they had to move them out of churches and into the cities.

During the Renaissance, people became interested in art. Italy started *commedia dell'arte*, the first improv troupes. These kinds of performances were done on the fly, using whatever props the actors had with them.

Though art was accepted during this time, theatre was still thought of as lowly. However, Queen Elizabeth was a big fan of theatre, which helped it become popular. It was during this time period that Shakespeare became famous, and wrote the poems and plays we still read and perform today.

For many years, theatre was a form of entertainment for the upper classes, but in the later part of the 1800s, a new style of theatre called vaudeville became popular. Vaudeville shows contained many types of performances, from singing to acting to juggling to magic, in just one show. From this style of theatre came musical theatre, a type of play that uses acting, singing, and dancing to tell a story.

