



## Performing Arts Timeline – abridged

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534 B.C.

Thespis wins the first public contest for tragic poets in Greece, and the term thespian derives from his name. He also introduces masks, which become a staple of Greek and Roman theater.

525–385 B.C.

The Athenian or Classical period introduces a dramatic era of tragic poets that includes Aeschylus (*Agamemnon*, 458 B.C.), Sophocles (*Antigone*, 441 B.C.; *Oedipus Rex*, 430 B.C.) and Euripides (*Medea*, 431 B.C.).

Euripides, considered the first choreographer, incorporates dance into his plays.

350–250 B.C.

The Hellenistic or Colonial period marks an era when comedy is preferred over tragedy.

Old Comedy, buffoonery and farce that often attacks individuals and portrays the foibles of a social class, evolves into New Comedy, a more polished and refined humor that centers on the shortcomings of the middle class.

Comic drama moves from politics and philosophy to everyday life.

C. 500–800

Theatre is all but extinct in both the western and eastern Roman Empires during the Dark Ages because Christians oppose the entertainment.

C. 900

The church introduces dramatic performances to Easter services, acting out the story of the Resurrection. Ironically, the institution that discouraged theatre is responsible for its rebirth.

1495

*Everyman*, the best surviving example of a morality play, is written. The morality play touches on large contemporary issues with moral overtones and describes the lives of everyday people facing temptation.

1489

Ballet is performed for the first time.

1550

Commedia dell'arte flourishes in Italy and Western Europe. Literally "professional comedy," the theater form features improvisation from a standard script and stock characters.

1570

Count Giovanni Bardi debuts the Elizabethan masque, an aristocratic form of entertainment that features music, dance and elaborate costuming.

1576

The Theatre, the first commercial theater, opens in London. It is also the first Elizabethan playhouse.

1594

The Chamberlain's Men, the leading Elizabethan and Jacobean theatrical company of the day, is formed. William Shakespeare is the chief playwright and Richard Burbage its most famous actor. After 1603 the group is known as the King's Men. The Admiral's Men, the group that performs the works of Christopher Marlowe, is also formed and rivals the Chamberlain's Men.

1597

Jacopo Peri's musical fable, *Dafne*, often considered the first opera, is performed at the palace of Jacopo Corsi. Opera becomes the preferred entertainment of the aristocracy.

1598–1608

William Shakespeare writes *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*.

1607

Claude Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, regarded as the first masterpiece in opera history, is performed and revolutionizes music by establishing a tonal system and giving the recitative a more flexible accompaniment.

1619

Teatro Farnese in Parma, Italy, uses the proscenium arch for the first time.

1637

Venice becomes the home of the first public opera house, the San Cassiano Theater.

1642–1660

Following the civil war of 1642, the Puritans close or burn down all English theaters and forbid acting.

1643

Molière incorporates an acting troupe called Illustre Theatre. Although initially unsuccessful with his troupe, Molière goes on to be one of history's most famous and enduring playwrights. His work includes *Tartuffe* (1664), *Misanthrope* (1666) and *Bourgeois Gentleman* (1670).

1660

Women start appearing in French and English plays. Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle are among the pioneers.

1685

Alessandro Scarlatti founds the Neapolitan School of Opera, which establishes the da capo, or three-part aria.

1689

The young women at Josias Priest's finishing school in Chelsea, England, perform Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, the first English operatic masterpiece.

1730

*Romeo and Juliet*, the first play by Shakespeare to be presented in America, is performed in New York.

1733

*La Serva Padrona* by Giovanni Pergolesi is performed in Naples, heralding the popularity of opera buffa or comic opera.

1762

Christoph Willibald von Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* premieres at the Hofburgtheater in Vienna, marking revolutionary changes and reform in opera seria.

1778

Milan's Teatro alla Scala, Italy's leading opera house and one of the world's most renowned, is built.

1786

Mozart collaborates with Lorenzo da Ponte on *The Marriage of Figaro*, which premieres in Vienna. He completes *Don Giovanni* the following year, and it premieres in Prague.

1843

The Theatre Regulation Act of 1843 bans drinking in legitimate theaters. Many tavern owners take advantage of the situation and renovate their establishments to accommodate live performances.

1859

The French Opera House, the first great opera house in America, is built in New Orleans.

1871

Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida* premieres in Cairo, Egypt.

The first collaboration of W.S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan, *Thespis*, is performed at London's Gaiety Theatre.

1876

The first complete production of Wagner's *Ring*, a titanic cycle of four musical dramas, opens the first Bayreuth Festival.

1881

The first modern cabaret, Le Chat Noir (The Black Cat), opens in Paris.

London's Savoy Theatre opens and is the first to be lit by electricity.

Vaudeville debuts at Tony Pastor's New 14th Street Theater in New York.

1883

The Metropolitan Opera House opens in New York with Gounod's *Faust*.

- 1890  
Modern dance emerges when choreographers and dancers begin to rebel against traditional ballet.
- 1900  
*Floradora* opens at Broadway's Casino Theatre. It introduces the Floradora sextet, a predecessor to the chorus line.
- 1901  
Founder of the Moscow Art Theatre, Konstantin Stanislavski formulates the revolutionary Stanislavski Method of acting, which requires actors to see and hear on stage as they do in real life, enabling them to react to theatrical situations in the same way they would in real life. He is credited with launching the age of the great director in modern theater.
- 1902  
Claude Debussy introduces impressionism in *Pelléas and Mélisande* at the Opéra Comique in Paris.
- 1904  
The London Symphony Orchestra is established.  
Anton Chekhov introduces modern realism at the premiere of *The Cherry Orchard* at the Moscow Art Theatre.
- 1907  
Florenz Ziegfeld introduces his *Ziegfeld Follies*, the legendary musical extravaganzas.
- 1909  
Serge Diaghilev opens the Ballets Russes de Serge Diaghilev, which begins the era of modern ballet and his 20-year reign as ballet's leading figure. Moving away from full-length works characteristic of Romantic ballet, he creates new, shorter ballets. Mikhail Fokine is Diaghilev's choreographer and is considered the most influential choreographer of the 20th century.
- 1911  
*Der Rosenkavalier*, Richard Strauss's masterpiece, premieres in Dresden.
- 1913  
*Darktown Follies* opens in Harlem and helps to make Harlem a black cultural center.
- 1923  
Harlem's Cotton Club opens and presents all-black performances to white-only audiences. Entertainers include Lena Horne, the Nicholas Brothers and Cab Calloway.
- 1927  
The Broadway musical links with opera in Jerome Kern's revolutionary *Show Boat*.  
Dancer Isadora Duncan dies when her scarf gets caught in the wheel of a moving car.
- 1930  
Jean Rosenthal, one of the greatest lighting designers in theater history, pioneers the concept of stage lighting.
- 1935  
George Gershwin combines black folk idiom and Broadway musical techniques in *Porgy and Bess*.
- 1943  
Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* opens and changes American musical theater by combining entertainment and serious subjects. Agnes de Mille choreographs the musical, capturing the essence of American folk dance.
- 1945  
Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes* premieres in London, which signals the rebirth of British opera.
- 1947  
Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* opens at Broadway's Ethel Barrymore Theatre, with Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski and Jessica Tandy as Blanche DuBois. The play wins the 1948 Pulitzer Prize.
- 1950  
Broadway classic *Guys and Dolls* debuts at the 46th Street Theatre and becomes an instant hit. The show ran for three years and became one of the Great White Way's longest-running shows, with 1,200 performances.
- 1951  
Yul Brynner makes his first appearance as the king of Siam in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The King and I*. Gertrude Lawrence costars (March 29).
- 1957  
Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* debuts on Broadway and brings violence to the stage.  
Eugene O'Neill's *A Long Day's Journey Into Night* is produced posthumously and wins both the Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize.