

The Fascinating Political History of Ensemble Theatre Making: From Rebellion to Revolution

Ensemble theatre making, an approach that emphasizes collaboration, collectivity, and grassroots activism, has had a profound impact on the world of theater. With roots stretching back over a century, ensemble theatre has not only entertained audiences but also acted as a powerful vehicle for political and social change. In this article, we delve into the rich political history of ensemble theatre making, exploring its origins, key movements, and influential figures.

The Origins of Ensemble Theatre

Ensemble theatre emerged as a response to the hierarchical and commercialized nature of traditional theatre, which often prioritized individual performances and profit over the collective creative process. The concept of ensemble theatre was introduced in the early 20th century by the Moscow Art Theatre, founded by Konstantin Stanislavski and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko in Russia.

Stanislavski, a renowned Russian actor, and director, believed that ensemble work could break free from the constraints of a star-centric model and create a more organic and emotionally resonant theatrical experience. His revolutionary approach focused on the development of a comprehensive system, known as the "Stanislavski System," for training actors and fostering collaboration among all members of a production.

Theatre Studios: A Political History of Ensemble Theatre-Making by Tom Cornford (1st Edition, Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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Text-to-Speech : Enabled



Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
Word Wise : Enabled
Print length : 358 pages



Ensemble Theatre and Political Activism

The political dimension of ensemble theatre began to flourish during the 1930s, amidst the global rise of fascism and authoritarian regimes. The Great Depression served as a catalyst for political awakening, with artists turning to ensemble theatre as a means to express dissent and advocate for social justice.

In the United States, the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), a New Deal initiative established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, played a crucial role in shaping ensemble theatre's political agenda. Led by Hallie Flanagan, the FTP aimed to provide employment for thousands of theater professionals while creating socially relevant productions that spoke to the struggles of the working class.

Meanwhile, in Europe, prominent figures such as Bertolt Brecht and Vsevolod Meyerhold were crafting ensemble-based works with fiercely political messages. Brecht's epic theatre sought to provoke critical reflection and inspire political action among audiences, while Meyerhold's biomechanics approach merged physical training with political observations.

Ensemble Theatre in the Post-War Era

The post-war era led to a further evolution of ensemble theatre and its expansion into different cultural contexts. In the United States, the 1950s and 1960s saw the rise of Off-Off-Broadway, a movement that championed experimental and alternative theater forms. Groups such as The Living Theatre and the Open Theater embraced ensemble work to challenge societal norms and confront political issues.

Across the Atlantic, the Theatre Workshop in the United Kingdom, led by Joan Littlewood, became a hotbed for ensemble experimentation. The company's productions, including the groundbreaking "Oh, What a Lovely War!" and "A Taste of Honey," offered biting social commentary and engaged audiences in debates surrounding war, class, and inequality.

Contemporary Ensemble Theatre and Global Impact

As we progress into the 21st century, ensemble theatre continues to evolve and incite change. Artists around the world have adapted its principles to address contemporary political issues, including climate change, immigration, and racial injustice.

Ensemble-based theaters, like the Belarus Free Theatre and the Wooster Group, have gained international recognition for their daring productions that challenge oppressive regimes and raise awareness about human rights violations.

The Legacy and Importance of Ensemble Theatre

Ensemble theatre making remains a vital force in theater and political activism, embodying the spirit of collaboration, artistic freedom, and social responsibility. By fostering a sense of collectivity and challenging dominant power structures, it continues to serve as a driving force for societal change.

In , the political history of ensemble theatre making is a captivating journey that reflects the power of collective action in the face of adversity. From its origins in Russia to its global impact today, ensemble theatre has illuminated political, economic, and social issues, offering a transformative theatrical experience that connects artists and audiences in the pursuit of a better world.



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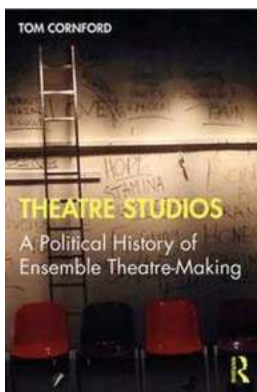


Theatre Studios explores the history of the studio model in England, first established by Konstantin Stanislavsky, Jacques Copeau and others in the early twentieth century, and later developed in the UK primarily by Michel Saint-Denis, George Devine, Michael Chekhov and Joan Littlewood, whose studios are the focus of this study.

Cornford offers in-depth accounts of the radical, collective work of these leading theatre companies of the mid-twentieth century, considering the models of ensemble theatre-making that they developed and their remnants in the newly publicly-funded UK theatre establishment of the 1960s. In the process, this book develops an approach to understanding the politics of artistic practices rooted in the work of John Dewey, Antonio Gramsci and the standpoint feminists. It

concludes by considering the legacy of the studio movement for twenty-first-century theatre, partly by tracking its echoes in the work of Secret Theatre at the Lyric, Hammersmith (2013–2015).

Students and makers of theatre alike will find in this book a provocative and illuminating analysis of the politics of performance-making and a history of the theatre as a site for developing counterhegemonic, radically democratic, anti-individualist forms of cultural production.



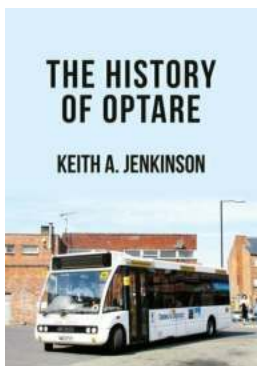
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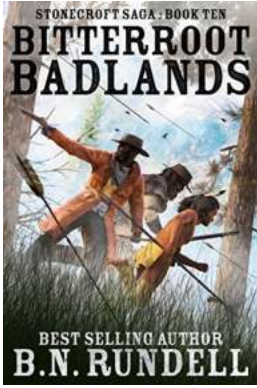
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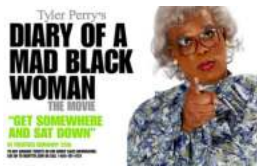
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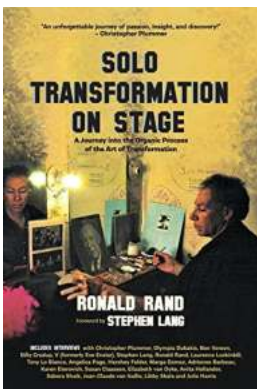
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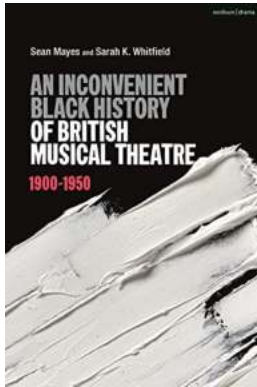
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