

Performing Arts Timeline

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

Theater 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 theater 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.

1661

Louis XIV officially recognizes dance instruction by establishing the Académie Royale de Danse.

1665

William Darby's *Ye Bare and Ye Cubb*, reportedly the first English-language play presented in the colonies, is performed in Accomac County, Virginia.

c. 1670

Pierre Beauchamps codifies the five foot positions in ballet.

1681

Pierre Beauchamps and Jean Baptiste write *Le Triomphe de l'Amour*, which features LaFontaine, the first woman to dance professionally in a ballet.

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.

1734

French ballerina Marie Camargo stirs controversy when she raises dancing skirts above the ankle for greater freedom of movement.

1735

Ballet arrives in America. Englishman Henry Holt stages the first production for the amusement of the Charleston, South Carolina, elite.

John Hippisley's *Flora*, the first opera performed in America, is also presented in Charleston, South Carolina.

1751

The first professional theater company in the colonies, the Virginia Company of Comedians, opens a temporary wooden playhouse in Williamsburg, Virginia.

1762

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

1766

The first permanent American theater building, Southwark Theater, is erected in Philadelphia.

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.

1816

Gaslighting is used for the first time in American theater at Philadelphia's Chestnut Street Theatre.

Thomas Drummond invents the limelight, which is used in the same manner as the spotlight is used today.

1828

Minstrel dancing debuts with Thomas Dartmouth "Daddy" Rice appearing as Jim Crow in a song-and-dance act.

1830–1850

The Romantic period in ballet sees ballerinas making technical and artistic strides in the art form. Until this period, men dominated the stage.

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.

1865

Former circus clown Tony Pastor opens the first variety theater in New York.

1868

Lydia Thompson and her *British Blondes* bring burlesque to the United States.

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.

1879

Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House, a revolutionary play that centers on the repression of women, deeply offends conservatives and thrills a newly awakened European conscience when it premieres at the Copenhagen's Royal Theatre.

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.

1905

Isadora Duncan establishes the first school of modern dance in Berlin.

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.

1915

Ruth St. Denis and her husband, Ted Shawn, establish the Denishawn dance school in Los Angeles, where Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey study.

1920

Eugene O'Neill's first full-length play, *Beyond the Horizon*, is produced on Broadway and wins a Pulitzer Prize, marking the beginning of modern American drama.

Rising popular interest in African-American literature sparks the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance.

1921

The Cleveland Playhouse opens, becoming the country's first resident professional theater.

1922 Karel Capek's play *R.U.R.* debuts, introducing the word "robot."

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.

1926

Martha Graham, the American pioneer of the modern-dance revolt, gives her first New York performance, which features 18 barefoot, evocatively costumed dancers.

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.

1932

Manhattan's Radio City Music Hall opens.

1933

Sally Rand's fan dance is a hit at the Chicago World's Fair.

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.

1946

George Balanchine and Lincoln Kirstein establish the New York City Ballet. It makes its home at Lincoln Center in 1964.

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).

1952

Jose Quintero's revival of Tennessee Williams's Summer and Smoke premieres at Broadway's Circle in the Square Theatre and is the first major Off-Broadway success.

Merce Cunningham forms his own dance company.

1954

Robert Joffrey Ballet debuts.

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.

1958

Alvin Ailey establishes the American Dance Theatre.

1962

The first dance concert is held at New York's Judson Memorial Church, marking the beginning of the Judson Movement and postmodern dance. Judson dancers also introduce the use of a performance space instead of a stage. Judsonites include Meredith Monk, Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs.

1966

The old Metropolitan Opera House is abandoned as the company moves to Lincoln Center. The new Metropolitan Opera opens with Samuel Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra*.

1968

The rock musical *Hair* opens on Broadway.

1971

The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts opens in Washington, D.C. with the premiere of Leonard Bernstein's *Mass*.

1974

Premier Russian dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov defects and joins the American Ballet Theatre.

1980

Mark Morris establishes the Mark Morris Dance Group in New York and is widely received as the most promising modern-dance choreographer of his generation.

1982

Cats opens on Broadway. Becomes Broadway's longest-running play.

1983

Harvey Fierstein's *Torch Song Trilogy* wins the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and Tony Award for best play, marking the acceptance of gay theater.

1995

The Metropolitan Opera installs screens on audience seats that display captions, to attract a wider audience.