



## Theatrical Anecdotes

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Theatrical anecdotes are almost as old as the theatre itself. For much of its 2,500-year history, the stage has teemed with real characters and real stories as fascinating as any created by a dramatist. Ranging from the age of Aristophanes to the time of Tennessee Williams, this book is a motherlode of tales about backstage rivalries, thespian eccentricity, the parsimony of producers, and indignities suffered on tour.

Here we encounter Judith Anderson's unique method of working herself into a frenzy for her first entrance in *Medea*: deliberately provoking her co-star and arch-enemy Florence Reed. We get Oscar Wilde's own assessment of the first performance of *Lady Windermere's Fan* ("The play was a great success, but the audience was a total failure"). And we learn of Shakespeare's wild oats and why Moliere's grave had to be dug an extra four feet deep. David Garrick, Sarah Bernhardt, Noel Coward, Donald Wolfit, Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud, Helen Hays, and a cast of hundreds are present in these pages--along with directors, producers, critics, prompters, prop men, designers, and ghosts. Although the book brims with the glittering and the glamorous, Peter Hay does not neglect those legions of near-anonymous players and professionals without whom the stars would not be stars and the theatre could not exist.

The ideal gift book for anyone who has ever been stage-struck, *Theatrical Anecdotes* is both richly entertaining and wonderfully edifying. Organized by topic, it contains hundreds of tips for all theatrical professionals, directs scholars and students to a wealth of historical sources, and treats lovers of theatre to a feast of backstage secrets that will permanently enrich their appreciation of the art.

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## Editorial Review

From Library Journal

This is a hodgepodge of humorous anecdotes, primarily from the British theater, loosely organized under such chapter headings as "The Ages of Acting," "Dramatists," and "On the Road." Some of the anecdotes are quoted directly from other sources, but many are paraphrased by Hay, often awkwardly. The original source of each anecdote is listed at the end of the book. A number of them have explanatory notes by Hay; others need notes. The lack of consistency in the narrative voice creates a choppiness of style that is annoying.

Some of the anecdotes bring a chuckle, and there is a useful index, but overall this is not a necessary item.

Marcia L. Perry, Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Mass.

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About the Author

*About the Author:*

**Peter Hay**, born into a theatrical family in Budapest, was educated at Haileybury and Oxford and worked in Canada as a dramaturge, play publisher, and critic. Living in Los Angeles since 1980, he has taught theatre history and dramaturgy at UCLA and USC. He is artistic director of First Stage, where he helps writers to develop plays and film scripts. He is the author of *Ordinary Heroes* and is working on several other anecdote books.

## Users Review

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