‘Citizenship’ is a contested term which today inspires both policymakers and radical activists. David Wiles traces this ideal to its classical roots, examining both theatre and citizenship as performative practices. Wiles shows how people function collectively rather than as individuals, for example through choruses or crowd behaviour in the auditorium. He explores historic tensions between the passivity of the spectator and the active engagement of a citizen, paying special attention to dramatists like Aristophanes, Machiavelli and Rousseau who have translated political theory into a theatre of and for active citizens. The book is a fresh investigation of familiar and less familiar landmarks of theatre history, revealing how plays function as social and political events. In this original approach to theatre history, Wiles argues that theatre is a powerful medium for building community, and that attempts to use it as a vehicle for education are very often misplaced.

David Wiles is Professor of Theatre at Royal Holloway University of London. He has published extensively in the fields of classical and Elizabethan theatre, and his Short History of Western Performance Space was published by Cambridge University Press in 2003. This is his ninth book, and previous books have been shortlisted for the Criticos, Society for Theatre Research and Runciman prizes. He was a contributor to the Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre (1995) and is currently, with Christine Dymkowski, editing The Cambridge Companion to Theatre History. The focus of his teaching and research has always been the relation of theatre to society, particularly in respect of festival, and the present book builds on the breadth of his intellectual interests. Its genesis lies in a keynote lecture which he was invited to give to the International Federation for Theatre Research at the University of Maryland in 2005.
THEATRE AND CITIZENSHIP

The History of a Practice

DAVID WILES

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Contents

List of plates v
Acknowledgements viii

1 Introduction: citizenship and theatre 1

2 Athens 22
   Democracy and chorality 23
   The Frogs 33
   Plato and Aristotle 41

3 Florence, Rome and Machiavelli 48
   Machiavelli’s political works 48
   Cicero 53
   Terence’s Andria 58
   The Mandrake and the Society of the Trowel 63
   The Sunflower in a politician’s garden 70
   Coda: Goldoni, Ayckbourn and the comic genre 74

4 From Coventry to London 78
   Christian fraternity 78
   The Weavers’ pageant in Coventry 83
   Shakespeare, Heywood and London 91
   John Milton and the revolution 103

5 Geneva: Rousseau versus Voltaire 110
   Geneva 110
   Rousseau 113
   The Letter to d’Alembert 122
   The battle for a public theatre 131
   Conclusion: two ideals 136

6 Paris and the French Revolution 148
   Brutus and the active citizen audience 148
   Tragedy as a school for citizens: the career of M.-J. Chénier 158
Contents

vi

The revolutionary festival 171
Diderot and bourgeois realism 180

7 The people, the folk and the modern public sphere 187
Collectivism in pre-war Germany 187
The Indian People’s Theatre Association 196
In search of the public sphere 208

Epilogue: Washington’s monuments to citizenship 224

List of references 228
Index 254
Plates

1 The Death of Lucretia. Engraving by Le Lorrain after Jean-François de Troy. Royal Academy of Arts. page 119
2 Les licteurs rapportent à Brutus les corps de ses fils. Painting by Jacques-Louis David. Louvre. 149
3 The crowning of Voltaire. Engraving from Révolutions de France et de Brabant no. 53. Bodleian Library. 155
4 Le Cardinal de Lorraine, bénissant les assassins de St. Barthélemy. Coloured engraving by Jean-Guillaume Moitte. Comédie Française. 162
5 Le triomphe du peuple français. Detail of a drawing by Jacques-Louis David. Musée Carnavalet. 166
6 Fête de l’Être suprême au Champ de Mars (20 prairial an II – 8 juin 1794). Painting by Pierre-Antoine Demachy. Musée Carnavalet. 175
7 Rehearsal photos of Vom Tauwind und der neuen Freude, choreographed by Rudolf von Laban, in the Dietrich-Eckart theatre, Berlin. Photos from the festival programme in the John Hodgson Archive, Brotherton library, University of Leeds. 195
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