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978-0-521-79320-9 - Performing the American Frontier, 1870–1906

Roger A. Hall

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## *Performing the American Frontier, 1870–1906*

*Performing the American Frontier, 1870–1906* examines how the American frontier was presented in theatrical productions during the critical period from the end of the Civil War to the beginning of cinema. In chronological fashion, the book explores the post-Civil War resurgence of interest in drama about the frontier, which led to a host of action-packed melodramas. From famous personages such as Mark Twain and “Buffalo Bill” Cody to lesser-known individuals such as Native American playwright and actress Gowongo Mohawk, Hall examines the plays, the players, and the playwrights who helped to define the American westward migration in theatrical terms and covers the complete dramatic experience including scenery, performance, and staging. The book demonstrates the extraordinary variety of subject matter and theatrical styles used to dramatize the frontier, and places frontier drama within the context of its society by framing the productions with the contemporary debates on national policies.

ROGER A. HALL is Professor of Theatre at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia. He has written extensively in the field of American theatre and has published in a number of journals including *Theatre Journal*, *Journal of American Culture*, *Theatre Survey*, *Nineteenth-Century Theatre*, and *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre*. He contributed to the *Cambridge Guide to American Theatre* (1993) and the *American National Biography* (1999).

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The American theatre and its literature are attracting, after long neglect, the crucial attention of historians, theoreticians and critics of the arts. Long a field for isolated research yet too frequently marginalized in the academy, the American theatre has always been a sensitive gauge of social pressures and public issues. Investigations into its myriad of shapes and manifestations are relevant to students of drama, theatre, literature, cultural experience and political development.

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*For Lynn, Cassie, Bryce, and Morgan*

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## *Acknowledgments*

One name appears as the author of a book, but I have long believed that books, like productions of plays, should have a program to identify all the backstage personnel who have contributed to the work. Lacking that, I would like to steal this opportunity to repay with these acknowledgments the help so many people have graciously given me in preparing this book.

I especially want to convey my thanks to Debra Ryman, Anna Lee Newman, and Susan Huffman of the Interlibrary Loan Department at the Carrier Library at James Madison University. Many were the times I asked them if they could find a dusty, nineteenth-century script, an out-of-print book, or a microfilm of a newspaper that had long since ceased publication, and usually, often to my surprise, they were able to come up with the goods. In that same vein, I want to thank those many institutions who participated in the Interlibrary Loan process by lending materials without which I could not have undertaken this project.

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Several scholars read earlier versions of this manuscript. One of them was Douglas McDermott, Professor of Drama at California State University, Stanislaus, and his insights were invaluable. Because of the strictures of the review process I do not know the names of other readers, but I am deeply appreciative of their detailed comments and suggestions. Their praise was encouraging and their criticisms just. This is a better book for their anonymous input.

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Along with the thanks, I want to make an appeal for the conservation of America's theatrical history. While I have been working on this project I have seen theatre collections close for lack of funds, and I have seen materials deteriorate virtually before my eyes. My plea goes out for redoubled efforts to preserve and document America's theatrical heritage, and my appreciation goes out to those who are laboring to bring that about.

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