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978-0-521-19327-6 - Theatre and Citizenship: The History of a Practice

David Wiles

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## THEATRE AND CITIZENSHIP

*The History of a Practice*

'Citizenship' is a contested term which today inspires both policy-makers 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.

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*Royal Holloway University of London*



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