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**DIRECTORS IN PERSPECTIVE**

General editor: C. D. Innes

**Peter Stein**

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## DIRECTORS IN PERSPECTIVE

What characterizes modern theatre above all is continual stylistic innovation, in which theory and presentation have combined to create a wealth of new forms – naturalism, expressionism, epic theatre, etc. – in a way that has made directors the leading figures rather than dramatists. To a greater extent than is perhaps generally realized, it has been directors who have provided dramatic models for playwrights, though of course there are many different variations in this relationship. In some cases a dramatist's themes challenge a director to create new performance conditions (Stanislavski and Chekhov), or a dramatist turns director to formulate an appropriate style for his work (Brecht); alternatively a director writes plays to correspond with his theory (Artaud), or creates communal scripts out of exploratory work with actors (Chaikin, Grotowski). Some directors are identified with a single theory (Craig), others gave definitive shape to a range of styles (Reinhardt); the work of some has an ideological basis (Stein), while others work more pragmatically (Bergman).

Generally speaking, those directors who have contributed to what is distinctly "modern" in today's theatre stand in much the same relationship to the dramatic texts they work with, as composers do to librettists in opera. However, since theatrical performance is the most ephemeral of the arts and the only easily reproducible element is the text, critical attention has tended to focus on the playwright. This series is designed to redress the balance by providing an overview of selected directors' stage work: those who helped to formulate modern theories of drama. Their key productions have been reconstructed from promptbooks, reviews, scene-designs, photographs, diaries, correspondence and – where these productions are contemporary – documented by first-hand description, interviews with the director, etc. Apart from its intrinsic interest, this record allows a critical perspective, testing ideas against practical problems and achievements. In each case, too, the director's work is set in context by indicating the source of his ideas and their influence, the organization of his acting company and his relationship to the theatrical or political establishment, so as to bring out wider issues: the way theatre both reflects and influences assumptions about the nature of man and his social role.

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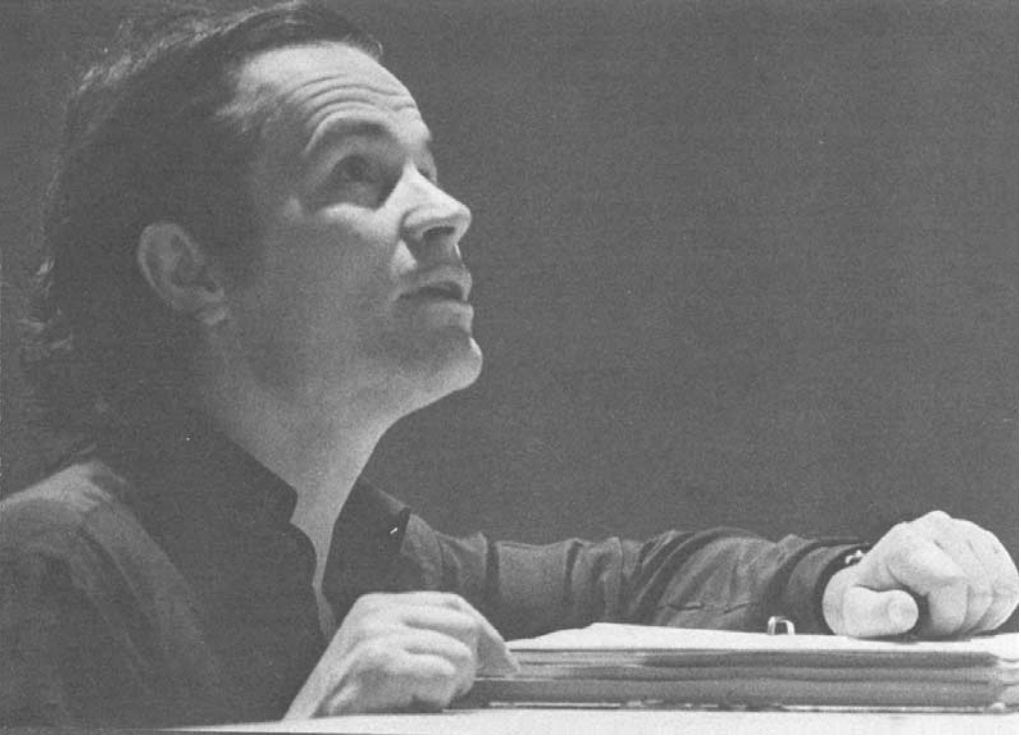
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Peter Stein at rehearsal.

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# Peter Stein

Germany's leading theatre director

MICHAEL PATTERSON

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*To Ellinor, Michaela and Yvonne*

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## Preface

The greatest hope for the German theatre is Peter Stein. – Fritz Kortner

This volume will examine three aspects of “the greatest hope for the German theatre”: the plays that Peter Stein has produced, the structure within which he works and the man himself.

First, Stein has worked on a large variety of plays, from the work of Shakespeare to that of Handke, from German classics to French farce, and to each he has brought originality, intelligence and contemporary perspective. The insights he has discovered in directing these are often more startling and fresh than those derived from traditional modes of drama study which frequently ignore the fact that plays are written for performance. The special advantage that a director like Stein has over the scholar is that he not only proposes a new reading of the text but can also test it in a public situation. It is important to place this research on record.

Secondly, the theatre in which Stein has done most of his work, and which he has contributed most to shaping, is a model of democratic organization. The Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer (now so famous that it is simply known as the Schaubühne) in West Berlin was reconstituted on participatory lines in 1970. Since then it has explored the advantages and drawbacks of a wholly democratic operation on socialist lines, and has by means of enlightened pragmatism evolved structures that are both efficient and yet give ample scope for critical expression. It is also worth recording this process, since anyone engaged in the debate about the role of political theatre in society or the democratic organization of theatre will find much to reflect on in the experience of the Schaubühne.

Finally, it is important to record the achievements of Peter Stein as a director. Most of the significant innovations in the theatre of this century have come not so much from playwrights as from theatre practitioners. Stanislavsky, Artaud and Brecht (the latter two as directors and theoreticians rather than as writers) have shaped the character of modern theatre more decisively than any dramatist with the possible exception of Beckett. This continues to be the case, but one will have to look far before finding the merest mention in English publications of contemporary German directors like Peter

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Stein, Peter Zadek or Claus Peymann, whereas Frisch, Dürrenmatt, Hochhuth, Handke and Weiss have been the subject of numerous books, dissertations and articles. Theatre is the most ephemeral of the arts and, while it is not yet technically possible to preserve a wholly adequate record of the work of a theatre director, this book will try to hold fast something of the genius of Germany's greatest living director, Peter Stein.

MICHAEL PATTERSON

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