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This is the first book in English on Italy's leading director, Giorgio Strehler. For the last half century Strehler has been an influential and integral part of European theatrical life as founder of Italy's leading repertory theatre, the Piccolo Teatro in Milan, director of the Paris-based Théâtre de l'Europe and through his opera and theatre productions.

In this detailed study, David Hirst evaluates the particular qualities which typify Strehler's work: the lyrical realism which has become the hallmark of his mature style, the fusion of naturalism, epic theatre, commedia dell'arte and lyric opera, and his gift of interpretation via production. Hirst traces this unique style through Strehler's development from the foundation of the Piccolo to the present day and analyses his productions of Goldoni, Shakespeare, Brecht and Verdi among others.

The book will be of interest to students and teachers of drama, theatre studies, opera history and Italian and German studies as well as to the general reader. It includes a chronology of Strehler's productions and theatre career and contains photographs from key productions.

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DIRECTORS IN PERSPECTIVE

General editor: Christopher Innes

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DIRECTORS IN PERSPECTIVE

What characterises 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 and so forth – in a way that has made directors the leading figures rather than dramatists. To a greater extent than is perhaps generally realised, 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, revues, scene-designs, photographs, diaries, correspondence and – where these productions are contemporary – documented by first-hand description, interviews with the director and so forth. 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 organisation 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.

Christopher Innes

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