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978-0-521-39867-1 - A History of Scandinavian Theatre
Frederick J. Marker and Lise-Lone Marker
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The theatrical heritage from which both Ibsen and Strindberg sprang is rich in tradition and achievement. This study of the history and development of theatre in Scandinavia examines dominant styles and trends in various periods, from the earliest performances in the Middle Ages to the provocative productions and experiments of the present day. The closely interrelated theatrical cultures of Denmark, Sweden and Norway have flourished for far longer than many outside observers realize. Moreover, as this book also demonstrates, the manifest vitality of theatrical activity in the three Nordic countries has depended on a vigorous interaction (not a one-way traffic) with European theatre at large. By the second half of the nineteenth century, as Ibsen and Strindberg began their rise to international prominence, Scandinavian theatre came to occupy a more dominant position in the wider European framework. In our own day, more forcefully than ever before, major Scandinavian stage directors and designers have continued to influence the shape and outlook of contemporary theatre as a whole.

This book, the only work of its kind in English, provides a balanced and authoritative account of the theatrical history of all three Scandinavian countries. It is generously illustrated and comprehensively documented, with an extensive bibliography.

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Preface

The study of the history and development of theatre in Scandinavia is intended not as an all-inclusive survey or a calendar of events, but as a critical analysis of dominant styles and trends in a variety of historical periods, from the Middle Ages to the present day. In the context, the term “Scandinavian” is meant to embrace the three closely interrelated theatrical cultures of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. One general conclusion that our study will reach is that theatrical developments occurring in one of these Nordic countries will very often have parallels or repercussions in another. As such, as intrinsically interesting as they are, the theatres of Finland and Iceland must of necessity fall outside the scope of the present inquiry.

The theatrical heritage from which both Ibsen and Strindberg sprang is rich in tradition and achievement. For one thing, theatre in Scandinavia has flourished for far longer than many outside observers tend to recognize. Its earliest extant liturgical play, an Easter sequence from Linköping, dates from the thirteenth century. The oldest of its three national theatres, the Danish Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, was founded in 1748; the youngest, Nationaltheatret in Oslo, will have celebrated its first centennial before the end of this century. Moreover, as this study will also endeavour to demonstrate, the manifest vitality of Scandinavian theatre has depended on a vigorous interaction (not a one-way traffic) with European theatre at large. During the first centuries of its history, the early stage forms of the medieval and humanist periods, the courtly festivals of the Renaissance, the influx of itinerant foreign troupes, and the impact of nationalist sentiment on eighteenth-century theatre were all phenomena that had direct parallels elsewhere on the Continent. By the second half of the nineteenth century, as Ibsen and Strindberg began their rise to international prominence, Scandinavian theatre came to occupy a more dominant position in the wider European framework. In the present century, more

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forcefully than ever, major Scandinavian directors and designers have continued to influence the shape and direction of contemporary theatre as a whole.

As this study of the principal forces and interconnected lines of development at work in Nordic theatre is both broadly based and comparative in outlook, it is also necessarily selective in its choice of examples discussed. In this context, an attempt to mention every theatre company, city, or production that appears relevant to a particular historical development would serve no useful purpose. This book had its origins in an invitation to revise and reissue *The Scandinavian Theatre: a Short History*, a volume that we brought out more than twenty years ago. It quickly became apparent, however, that the end result would be an entirely new book, one that is substantively different from the earlier study in many respects. Its first five chapters, which follow changing styles and forms of theatre from the Middle Ages to that part of the nineteenth century known as Denmark's Golden Age, have been carefully revised to take advantage of the wealth of new research that has been published in the Scandinavian languages since the early 1970s. A subsequent, much longer section of the book, consisting of six chapters gathered together under the rubric *Pioneers of Modern Theatre*, seeks to address the need for a much fuller and more detailed account of the evolution of modernism and postmodernism in the theatre of the past century and a quarter. To the greatest extent possible, information about the major productions singled out for closer consideration here – from William Bloch's naturalistic interpretations of Ibsen in the 1880s to the imaginative stage experiments of Alf Sjöberg, Ingmar Bergman, and others in our own time – is based on the primary documentation provided by such sources as promptbooks, annotated texts, rehearsal records, stage designs, floor plans, photographs, reviews, and whatever else has survived in a given instance.

Generally speaking, the history of the theatre of any country, region, or period is a matter of many histories, so to speak – social, political, economic, ethnic, demographic, literary. While political, social, and economic factors often come into the picture in the present study, however, we are primarily concerned here with the art of the theatre, rather than with its sociology. As we know, theatre research involves the rather paradoxical study of an art form in which the work of art – the theatrical performance itself – has vanished. Yet the detailed reconstruction and analysis of stage productions remain, it seems to us, absolutely indispensable if the aims,

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methods, and styles of a theatrical past are to become living and meaningful for the reader or student of the present day. It is important to give the reader the opportunity to become a king of spectator, an active witness to the theatrical spectacle. This is why, in some cases, we have decided to furnish a more complete account of one production, rather than less complete accounts of many different ones.

Except in a few instances, all translations in this volume are by its authors. The book is intended for the general reader with no knowledge of the Scandinavian languages, but it is also meant to serve the needs of theatre and drama specialist more familiar with the field. Hence, although the bibliography provided is a select list of secondary works, the 300 titles it includes should afford ample opportunity for additional reading and research into a particular topic. Also in an effort to make the work as useful as possible to others, sources for all quotations are given in the notes for each chapter. One further opportunity for supplementary reading in English has become available in the new Cambridge sourcebook series, *Theatre in Europe: A Documentary History*, in which the Scandinavian chapters in *National Theatre in Northern and Eastern Europe, 1746–1900* (1991) print a useful selection of primary source documents in translation that can be consulted in conjunction with the present study.

Our research for this book has been greatly aided by the cooperation of the various institutions and archives mentioned in the list of illustrations and the notes. On the editorial side, we offer our thanks to Victoria L. Cooper and Sarah Stanton of Cambridge University Press for their able assistance and continued encouragement. Not least, we are profoundly grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for research grants in support of this study.

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