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Edited by Jane Moody, Daniel O'Quinn  
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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
BRITISH THEATRE, 1730–1830

This *Companion* offers a wide-ranging and innovative guide to one of the most exciting and important periods in British theatrical history. The scope of the volume extends from the age of Garrick to the Romantic transformation of acting inaugurated by Edmund Kean. The book brings together cutting-edge scholarship from leading international scholars in the long eighteenth century, offering lively and original insights into the world of the stage, its most influential playwrights and the professional lives of celebrated performers such as James Quin, George Anne Bellamy, John Philip Kemble, Dora Jordan, Fanny Abington and Sarah Siddons. The volume includes essential chapters about eighteenth-century acting, production and audiences, important surveys of key theatrical forms such as tragedy, comedy, melodrama and pantomime as well as a range of thematic essays on subjects such as private theatricals, 'black' theatre and the representation of empire.

JANE MOODY is a Professor in the Department of English and Related Literature at the University of York.

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JANE MOODY  
*and*  
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## PREFACE

This *Companion* explores one of the most exciting and important periods in British theatre history, from the age of Garrick to the Romantic transformation of acting pioneered by Edmund Kean. Designed for readers wishing to learn more about the players, playwrights and theatre of this period, the volume acts as a bridge between the *Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, edited by Deborah Payne Fisk, and the *Cambridge Companion to Edwardian and Victorian Theatre*, edited by Kerry Powell.

A few plays from the eighteenth-century stage, including Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* and Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, are immediately familiar to the modern playgoer. Names of celebrated performers such as David Garrick, Frances Abington, John Philip Kemble, Dora Jordan and Sarah Siddons may also strike a recognisable chord. In towns and cities, the passer-by glimpses the rich architectural heritage of the period's theatre in the facades and interiors of Britain's metropolitan and provincial playhouses. For many decades, however, these legacies have suffered from critical distortions and relative scholarly neglect. Perhaps because theatre was both insistently topical and deeply connected to the conditions and controversies of eighteenth-century social and political life, the plays of this period have not always fared well among critics focusing solely on dramatic literature. But it was precisely these close relationships between audiences, performances and institutions which helped to make British theatre an important site for political, social and cultural debate.

The period covered by this *Companion* corresponds to the emergence and institutionalization of commercial entertainment across the British Isles as well as important developments in the nature of and audiences for print culture. Indeed, the dynamic interactions between performance and print in eighteenth-century Britain helped to generate many features of what we now recognise as mass culture. Nowhere is this phenomenon more evident than in the complex history of theatrical celebrity charted in many of the essays in this volume. At the same time, the symbiotic relationships between theatre,

## PREFACE

newspapers and the graphic arts helped to broaden the social interactions taking place in and around metropolitan and provincial theatres. In turn, this extension of sociability sparked the emergence of cultural media which commented on and also attempted to regulate the relationship between audiences, plays and theatrical institutions. This is a period characterised by various kinds of theatrical censorship as well as some direct and indirect forms of resistance to censorship. Sometimes, the theatre itself became a site of violence: a telling indication of just how risky the enterprise of performance could be. And the eighteenth century is also the historical moment when British theatre goes global, both in the sense of being exported around the world and in the sense of starting to represent the emerging British empire.

Over the last two decades, a critical transformation has taken place which offers the opportunity to enlarge our knowledge and to provide a richer context for eighteenth-century British theatre. Moreover, the issues arising from these performances have become important beyond the immediate fields of theatre history and theatrical criticism, for they now speak to some of the most pressing concerns of historical and cultural studies. Significantly, this transformation has shaped the contemporary theatrical repertoire as well as the terms of academic debate. Dramatists have even made eighteenth-century theatre the subject of new plays: April de Angelis's comedy, *A Laughing Matter*, revisits the witty and scandalous world of the London stage; Timberlake Wertenbaker's haunting drama, *Our Country's Good*, explores the politics of colonialism through the lens of George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* as the play is rehearsed by convicts in eighteenth-century Australia. Over the last few years, many performances of eighteenth-century plays by amateurs and by professionals have also taken place in the UK, in Italy and in North America.

New approaches have provided the critical foundation for these performances. In a variety of ways, the 'new' theatre history highlights the importance of institutions, lives and careers which earlier scholarship tended to ignore or marginalise: the wide-ranging contribution of women, as playwrights, as actresses and as spectators, is one telling example. Studies of the 'minor' playhouses have altered our understanding of theatrical institutions in this period; discussions about the export of British plays to the colonies have encouraged scholars to think in new ways about performance as a colonial enterprise. Critical interest in the geographies of theatrical production complements a growing fascination with the dramaturgy and significance of illegitimate theatrical forms such as melodrama and pantomime. What links this burgeoning interdisciplinary field is a preoccupation with the power of the British stage as a political, social and cultural institution at the heart of the nation.

## PREFACE

By reflecting and extending these interests, this *Companion* aims to change the historiographic lens through which we look at performers, playwrights and theatres in eighteenth-century Britain. Given the century of theatrical history under discussion here, coverage is necessarily selective: authors have been chosen for their expertise in a particular area and encouraged to tease out relationships between the performance of specific plays and broader social and political concerns. Throughout, our aim has been to strike a balance between providing fresh perspectives on well-known plays and introducing less familiar writers and performances alongside critical questions which will stimulate future research and debate.

The Chronology at the front of the book provides a historical framework for individual chapters and draws attention to the various contexts which shaped theatrical production. The opening section of the volume contains essays which introduce the period’s performances and celebrated players as well as highlighting the circulation of plays and players around the nation. Part II, ‘Genres’ focuses on the major genres of comedy, tragedy, melodrama and pantomime, offering broad insights into the operation of dramatic conventions and presenting a wide range of plays from the period. The third section, entitled ‘Identities’, contains a group of case studies which investigate the operation of class, gender and race on the eighteenth-century stage. Part IV, ‘Places of Performance’ extends the introductory discussion of theatrical geography to particular sites and arenas of dramatic production. This section includes a chapter on the position of Dublin in the circulation of British and Irish drama and an essay exploring dramatisations of colony and empire. The final part of the book contains a bibliographic essay together with a bibliography for the volume.

This book is the fruit of a transatlantic editorial collaboration between the UK and Canada and we are glad to acknowledge help and encouragement from friends and family on both sides of the Atlantic. The contributors to this volume are scattered all over the English-speaking world and approach the period’s theatre from a wide range of critical positions. They have been an inspiration and we offer warm thanks for their patience, efficiency and good humour. Our editor at Cambridge, Vicki Cooper, has supported the project from the beginning: we have greatly appreciated her advice and expertise. We have been fortunate, too, in our two editorial assistants, Vike Plock (at the University of York) and Heather Davis (at the University of Guelph). Their precision and attention to detail has helped in many ways to smooth the progress of this book: in particular we would like to thank Vike for her meticulous work in preparing the volume for publication and Heather for the valuable research she did in drafting the Chronology. The F. R. Leavis Fund in the Department of English and Related Literature at the University of

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York kindly provided financial support for this editorial assistance. The project has also benefited from support given by the School of English and Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The experience of producing this volume has reminded us of the intellectual debts we owe to scholars of earlier generations and to colleagues and students across the world who share a fascination with the world of eighteenth-century and Romantic theatre. We are grateful for their knowledge and insight and hope that this *Companion* will mark a new stage in our collaborative conversations.

ABBREVIATIONS

A	Adelphi
C	Coburg
CG	Covent Garden
DL	Drury Lane
EOH	English Opera House (later Lyceum)
GF	Goodman's Fields
HM	Little Theatre in the Haymarket
LIF	Lincoln's Inn Fields
O	Olympic
OP	Old Price riots
P	Pavilion
RC	Royal Circus (later Surrey)
S	Surrey
SA	Smock Alley Dublin
SP	Sans Pareil
SW	Sadler's Wells

Please note that the date given alongside the abbreviation corresponds to the first performance of the play, unless otherwise stated in the text.