

EPIC THEATRE

Bertolt Brecht



PERFORMANCE STYLES

Just as there have been changes in fashion, literature, food, transport and social and religious customs over the centuries, so too have there been changes in the theatre and in the way an actor performs on stage.

Q. what are some of the different performance styles

THEATRE STYLES

- Greek Tragedies and Comedies (540 BC)
- Roman Theatre (540BC)
- Commedia dell'Arte (17th c)
- Shakespeare (17th C)
- Melodrama (18th C)
- Realism (19th C)

20TH CENTURY THEATRE

- Cabaret
- Expressionism: Strindberg
- Political Theatre: Piscator
- Epic Theatre: Bertolt Brecht
- Poor Theatre: Grotowski
- Theatre Of Cruelty: Artaud

EPIC THEATRE

- the name was given by Bertolt Brecht to describe a style of theatre that sought to **educate** the audience about **social conditions** and inspire them to **social action**
- Q: *what does it mean by 'social conditions' and 'social action'?*
- Q: *what are some important social issues that could be presented in the theatre today?*

SOCIAL ISSUES

?

name some of these

INTERESTING, BUT BACK TO EPIC THEATRE

- questions for us:
 - when was Epic Theatre developed?
 - who developed Epic Theatre?
 - why was it developed?
 - how is Epic Theatre different from other forms of Theatre?

WHEN WAS EPIC THEATRE DEVELOPED?

Epic Theatre was developed in **Germany** in the 1920s.

This was a depressing period of time as it was just after World War 1. Germany was suffering the ramifications of loosing a war and in 1929, the Wall Street Stock Exchange crashed (the beginning of the Great Depression)

WHO DEVELOPED EPIC THEATRE?

?

- Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) developed Epic Theatre. He was a director, a playwright and theorist.

WHY WAS IT DEVELOPED?

- During our early parts of the 20th century, **realism** was the dominant form of theatre. Brecht noted that this style of drama aimed to “cast a spell” over the audience, transporting them away from their every day normality to the ‘higher realms’ where one’s dream could become a reality

Q: Why would this style of theatre frustrate Brecht?

WHY WAS IT DEVELOPED?

- This frustrated Brecht as he was living in Germany during the social and economic turmoil of the 1920s.
- Why should the audience be escaping to another world when there are so many important issues that need to be addressed and acted upon?



WHY WAS IT DEVELOPED?

- Brecht wanted, instead, stage productions to address these social conditions, forcing the audience into action.
- Brecht evolved a new and radical theory of drama. He was the first playwright who ruthlessly made **political messages** a priority in his plays. He saw the theatre as a means of **education** and **political change**.

HOW IS EPIC THEATRE DIFFERENT FROM OTHER FORMS OF THEATRE?

- To achieve his goals, Brecht formulated several acting techniques that made Epic Theatre quite distinctive from other forms of theatre

Q: What acting techniques do you think would help an actor achieve their goal of educating their audience?

ACTING TECHNIQUES

- To ensure his audience members were aware that they were watching a play and **not** escaping into another realm. Brecht used the following techniques when devising a performance... just to name a few though
 - use of narrator
 - actors playing multiple characters
 - actors addressing the audience directly
 - use of song
 - non-linear plot development
 - fragmentary costumes
 - transformation of props

ACTING TECHNIQUES

- *Q. what do you think 'non-linear plot development' means?*
- *Q. How do each of these techniques help the actor achieve their goal of educating the audience?*

LASTLY

- Although there are flaws in Brecht's ideas. His theories revolutionised theatre
- Many of his techniques are used in Contemporary Theatre today