Theatre History

Origins of theatre…

* African Tribal Dances
  + movements/motions tell a story
  + started off as a part of religious ceremonies
  + part of ritual to drive off spirits
* Storytelling
  + oral tradition – passed down by word of mouth

Greek Theatre

* Thespis
  + First Greek actor to step forward from the chorus
  + The word “thespian” meaning “actor” is derived from his name
  + During his time, masks were introduced as part of costuming
* Tragedy
  + Aeschylus – “Father of Tragedy”
    - Two actors were introduced with a smaller chorus
    - \*Write the *Oresteia* Trilogy
  + Sophocles – his works are considered the essence of Greek drama
    - \*Electra \*Oedipus Rex \*Antigone
  + Euripides
    - \*Medea \*Alcestis
* Comedy
  + Aristophanes - incorporated SATIRE and wrote about aspects of public life
    - \*The Birds, The Frogs, and The Clouds
  + Menander – incorporated physical/slapstick comedy and wrote about domestic/private life
    - \*The Curmudgeon

Roman Theatre

* Translations of Greek plays
* For the lower classes – frowned upon by the higher ups
  + Stage: wooden platforms around which the audience stood
* Theatre became more respected and the stage got bigger
  + Stage: 2 wooden frames that faced each other
  + 1st to use a front curtain
* \*Cloque – got the audience to shout and cheer (like a modern day opening act gets the crowd excited at a concert for the headlining performer)
* The Writers
  + Seneca – dramatist – wrote gory stories that were more effective as closet dramas
    - Closet drama – read rather than performed
  + Plautus – comedic – writings served as a pattern for later writers
    - Shakespeare based his *Comedy of Errors* on one of Plautus’ works
* Theatre became overshadowed by the gladiator games
* When Rome fell, the church banned all theatrical activity
  + Theatre was dormant for hundreds of years on that continent