

# Origins of Theatre

## Study Guide

Source: *Living Theatre*, Edwin Wilson & Alvin Goldfarb

### **Exact Dates & Location:**

Because there is no written record of exactly when and where theatrical tradition began, we can only speculate based on evidence we see today and by examining its close relatives.

### **Egyptian Abydos Passion Play:**

This annual ceremony was enacted for 2000 years in Egypt (Approximately 2500-550 BCE) Ritual drama of death and rebirth of Egyptian god Osiris in the context of festival. Perhaps not scripted but certainly theatrical; people played roles of characters and acted out episodes from the life of osiris, and thousands of spectators viewed the ceremony (an audience).

### **Oral Tradition:**

Pre-literate societies (no written record) engaged in storytelling and passed down their cultural narratives through the spoken word.

### **Ritual:**

The acting out of a prescribed specific procedure.

### **Ceremony:**

Formal religious or social occasion, usually led by an authority figure (wedding, funeral, baptism, graduation, etc.).

### **Memisis:**

Imitation or representation of an action. Stresses the importance of individual creativity of performers, playwrights, and others and a set text from which little variation is permitted. European influence. Audience members are spectators rather than participants.

### **Methexis:**

African tradition of group sharing that emphasizes audience participation, group creativity and improvisation.

### **Efficaciousness:**

One difference of religious ritual and theatre is that religious ritual is efficacious, or it is intended to achieve results. Desired results are different depending on the ritual and depending on the belief system. People may have tried to bring better rain to their lands or end a long period of drought, or ask for forgiveness for wrongdoing. Religious ritual focuses on worship of a deity.

Theatre acts as a mirror or a celebration of life here on earth. Its focus is on human beings—their suffering, pain, frustrations, hopes, joys, and laughter.