

Theatre In Society-An Essay by Mika Gardner

Human beings are storytellers. For our entire existence we have passed down our stories in the form of oral tradition, great stone murals, or epics and poems. We created a language to communicate and tell stories to one another. The art of theatrical expression has existed since humans have existed on this planet. It is intrinsic to our nature to want to socialize and share, and theatre has given us the space in which to relate with one another. To see and participate in live theatre is to be involved in something greater than yourself. The role of theatre should not only be to tell stories but to create a community which transcends the story.

It is fundamental to human nature to want to tell stories. It is what sets us apart from other animals, our ability to spin a tale. Theatre is an extension of that, a living, breathing story that can only be experienced in a single moment of time. When I was in the ninth grade, I went to go see a production of the Diary of Anne Frank. It was performed in this basement room, and throughout the play none of the actors ever left the stage, even during the intermission. The play was so claustrophobic, and it made me feel as though I was really there, trapped in an attic, hiding from those who wanted to systemically exterminate me. That's what theatre has the power to do. Although movies can immerse you in their world, there will always be a screen separating you from the story. With theatre, you are physically present in the room, breathing the same air as the performers and audience. There is no escape in live theatre. It is such an intimate experience, and humans have been using it to tell our stories for thousands of years. There are plays that were written two thousand years ago that are still performed today, whose stories are still being told. With theatre we can connect to our past, be more empathetic and gain a greater understanding of our fellow human beings.

Storytelling is only a fraction of the importance of theatre in our lives. Being involved in a production is one of the most satisfying things a person can do. Putting so much time and effort into something and being able to see it come to fruition live on a stage is an amazing feeling. A theatre production is a living breathing creature that takes a village to shape. All of the long rehearsals, the sweat and tears, all coming together to create something that you can share with other people live. The community you become a part of when you involve yourself in theatre is one of the most open and welcoming groups I have ever met in my life. When I was in eighth grade, I auditioned to be in the school play (mainstage). I was genuinely terrified after callbacks, as seeing all the bigger, older people made me feel as though I would never be good enough to fit in. Alas, I made it into the cast, and on the first day of rehearsals I found the most secluded corner of the room to sit in, terrified to introduce myself to anyone. In spite of that, two ninth grade girls came up to me and asked if I wanted to sit with them. I felt so welcomed, and that warm welcome blossomed into the community I felt in mainstage. I was able to meet so many new people and become friends with people outside of my usual social circles. I have also noticed that a lot of LGBTQ+ teenagers gravitate to theatre. I cannot understate the importance of, as a queer person, having a space where you can feel accepted among your peers. Theatre gave me a space where I felt as though I could be myself, and for that I will forever be grateful. A theatre production weaves together a fabric of people, whether it be tech, actor, director, stage manager, props and set or audience, to create a once in a lifetime experience.

Theatre is one of humanities greatest achievements. To create an artform that exists as a fleeting moment in time yet has managed to have such a lasting impact on civilization is a

testament to the strength of live theatre. As, what is theatre if not a reflection of us, as a human species? Theatre holds up a mirror to our world, is a reflection of humanity. We can see ourselves, can laugh, can cry, can change our very worldview, all by watching a simple play. To ask what role theatre should play in our lives and communities is to question one of humanity's oldest traditions. Theatre is a community, one that begins when the light dims and ends when the curtain falls. It is a true connection between an actor and an audience, and the community behind the scenes leading up to that single moment. And when it ends, all you have left is a beautiful memory that you carry with you as you continue on with the play of your life