

The *Tulane Drama Review* was buried, resurrected as *The Drama Review* and, in a following avatar, became *TDR*. But Schechner—and the journal that is his extraordinary accomplishment—continued to play an important role in my life. He not only defended my mentor, Jerzy Grotowski, who had difficulties in his own country, but he also published my essay on kathakali theatre, which unveiled itself to me during my journey to India in 1963. *TDR* regularly introduced to its readers Odin Teatret's fundamental experiences: the practice of barter, the Third Theatre, and the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA).

In spite of the distance and our profound differences, a strong affective bond has grown between Richard Schechner and me. This has been nourished by the awareness of having shared a theatre mutation in which we have actively participated. Above all, something unique binds us: the memory of our meetings with two people who meant a great deal to us: Jerzy Grotowski and the Indian dancer Sanjukta Panigrahi.

When I think about *TDR*, something stirs in my head: the thousand birds that flutter when I read the articles in each new issue. I may not remember where they came from or where they were heading, but they are always with me. In other words: bury the past, and experience it returning to life as fruit and trees.

Dear Richard, deeply felt thanks to you and to all the others who have infused life into *TDR*. And, like a blood transfusion, you have offered it to me and to Odin Teatret in all its 50 years.

—Holstebro, Denmark, June 2014

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## Who Has Seen the Most?

*Joseph Roach*

In the history of theatre-going, someone somewhere has set the record for seeing more plays over the course of a lifetime than anyone else. Who is it?

There's no way to say with absolute certainty, but it's highly probable that Marvin Carlson, Sidney E. Cohn Distinguished Professor of Theatre, Comparative Literature, and Middle Eastern Studies at the Graduate Center of City University of New York, holds the all-time record. While he is at home in NYC, Marvin routinely attends the theatre at least five nights a week, and he schedules his frequent travels to follow the global repertoire. He regularly revisits theatre capitals, including London, Paris, and Vienna, and major festivals, such as the Berlin Theatertreffen. Having added Arabic to his fluency in several European languages, he now includes Cairo on his annual itinerary. He has seen on average 250–260 plays a year for the past 30 years for a total somewhere near 8,000 productions.

Marvin's theatrical diary records his attendance at performances of all kinds, including opera, dance, and performance art. There's no typical week, but there's never one without theatre-going nearly every night, a routine varied only by matinees. A random sampling from the diary, which notes the dates and includes cast lists of the productions he has attended, conveys something of the flavor though nothing like the full extent of this uninterrupted theatrical feast. In the last week of October 1988, for instance, Marvin took in *Anything Goes* with Patti LuPone; *Rachel's Brain* with Rachel Rosenthal; *King Lear* with Ruth Maleczech; *Waiting for Godot* with Steve Martin, Bill Irwin, Robin Williams, and F. Murray Abraham; and topped it off with *On Tina Tuna Walk* by John Glines. The final week of October in 1989 found him in New York for

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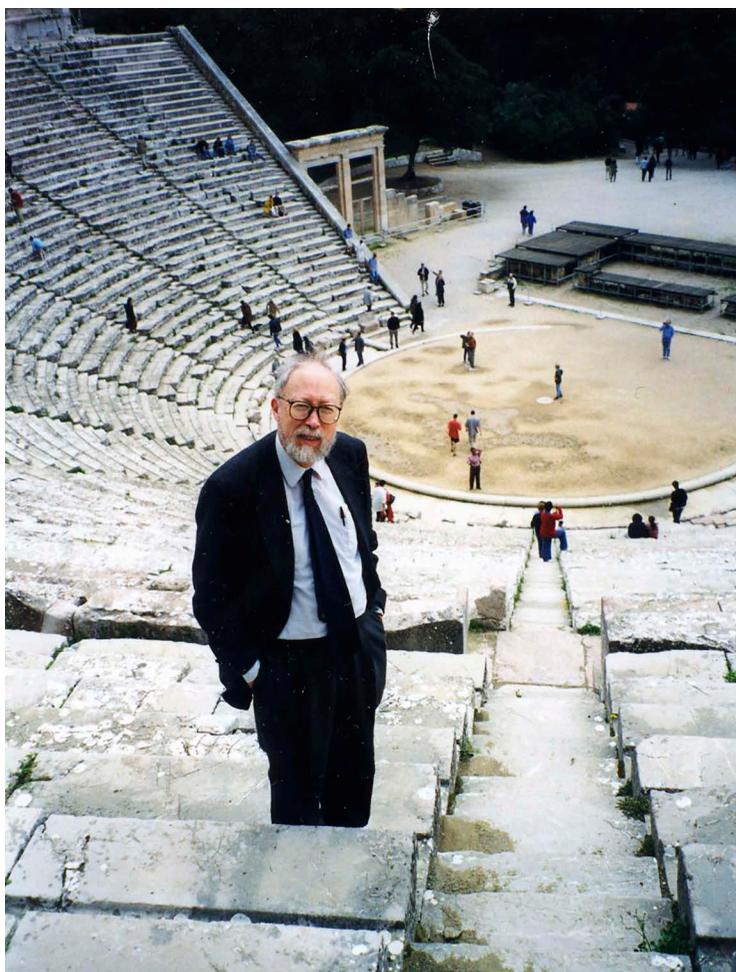


Figure 1. Marvin Carlson at Epidaurus, Greece, 1999. (© photo by P.M. Carlson)

*Can We Dance a Landscape?* by Karel Appel and Min Tanaka but then in Paris for *Operetta* by Witold Grombrowicz, *Danton's Death* by Georg Büchner, *Titus Andronicus* by Shakespeare, and *Oedipus at Colonus* by Sophocles. That same week in 1995 featured *Acker versus Acker* by Kathy Acker, *Molly's Dream* by Maria Irene Fornes, *Endgame* by Samuel Beckett, *Sin* by Wendy MacLeod, *The Model Apartment* by Donald Margulies, and, winding up in Toronto for the occasion, the Berlin Schaubühne's touring production of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. As an Ibsen specialist fluent in Norwegian, Marvin never willingly passes up a chance to see a production by the master: in Oslo from 30 August to 3 September 1990, for instance, he saw *Peer Gynt*, *Brand*, *When We Dead Awaken*, *Hedda Gabler*, and *A Doll House*, relieved only by Heiner Müller's *Medea*, and then, back in New York and apparently recovered from jet lag by 6 September, Charles Ludlam's *Camille*. This was just one of the many weeks in which Marvin got lucky, theatrically speaking, spending succes-

sive nights entertained by four of the most fascinating women ever imagined—*Medea*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Nora Helmer*, and *Marguerite Gautier*. But, like the theatre itself, which emulates Shakespeare's *Cleopatra*, they seem to make him hungry where they most satisfy.

When in theatrical history has there been such an indefatigable lover? The most famous theatre-going diarist of all time is Samuel Pepys (1633–1703); but he reproached himself for idleness and sloth at the Navy office where he worked when the number of plays he saw exceeded two or three a week. In the nine years and five months in which he kept his diary, 1660–1669, he attended the theatre a total of 351 times. In fact, with the production of legitimate plays limited to the two London patent houses (and from 1682 to 1695 there was only one), Pepys could not possibly have approached Marvin Carlson's record, even if he had wanted to see more. Different limitations apply to other famous theatre-goers, including the professional ones such as drama critics. Francisque Sarcey (1827–1899) did not issue his feuillets frequently enough to match Marvin's diary entries. The remarkable Burns Mantle (1873–1948), who saw every Broadway opening for 37 years, limited himself to Broadway. Asked about these and other potential rivals for the record of greatest all-time playgoer, Marvin replied, "Of course the ease of travel today gives me a geographical as well as a numerical advantage. I have seen productions wherever I have traveled, so we are talking about almost every coun-

try in Europe (Ireland, UK, Spain, Portugal, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Switzerland, Lichtenstein, San Marino, Italy, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece), the Middle East and North Africa (Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco), South Africa, Japan, China, India, Thailand, Cambodia, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, and of course the US, Canada, and Mexico.” The ongoing source of reporting on what he has seen locally and globally is “Marvin’s Tip Sheet,” which is available on the CUNY Graduate Center website. With each entry, using just a few verbal semaphores, he signals the genre, character, quality, location, and duration of the plays of a living repertoire, speaking in the present tense. Paradoxically, in our time and for such a task, who better than an historian?

Challenged to come up with a top-10 list of lifetime favorites out of the thousands of productions he has seen, Marvin named these: Giorgio Strehler’s *Tempest*, Daniel Meguisch’s *Titus Andronicus*, Andreas Kriegenberg’s *The Trial*, Peter Stein’s *Peer Gynt*, Yuri Lyubimov’s *Three Sisters*, Luca Ronconi’s *Orlando Furioso*, Jerzy Grotowski’s *The Constant Prince*, Ariane Mnouchkine’s *1789*, Peter Brook’s *Marat/Sade*, and Gustav Gründgens’s *Faust*. All are by great European auteur directors, and with one exception, Mnouchkine’s *1789*, they feature directorial reinterpretations of classical plays or other literary texts. Whether they are as massive as Strehler’s *Tempest* or as intimate as Grotowski’s *Constant Prince*, they reflect the revolutionary emergence of theatrical modernism, from the Independent Theatre Movement (the subject of Marvin’s earliest writings) to the heavily state-subsidized postmodern (but not yet post-dramatic) institutional stage. None go primarily for nuanced effects of individual psychology—even Lyubimov’s *Three Sisters* ended with the brutal revelation of contemporary Moscow as its apocalyptic setting—nor will they be especially remembered for their striking language in any literary sense. They are not poetry *in* the theatre, recalling Michel Saint-Denis’s ever-useful distinction, but poetry *of* the theatre. They must be seen live to be seen whole. Like the life of the scholar who saw them over 60 years of theatre-going, and like the lives of the actors, directors, and designers who brought them into sensational fullness of being, their evanescent but palpable genius proves that the question “who has seen the most?” cannot be answered satisfactorily by numbers alone.

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