

Corporate Theatre: Staging Drama on Corporate Platforms

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Abstract

India is a land of spices, sculptures, temples and storytellers. Every woman under its star lit sky and every man under the shade of a tree has a story to narrate. Theatre, as the scenario itself clearly proclaims, is the heartbeat of this glorious land of stories. The advent of films however had at one point of time sucked the breath out of the Indian theatre. Cinema overpowered theatre and sent it whooping into the corners of the rural, uneducated, fast depleting masses. After years of such existence and fight for revival from the Paan-stained platforms of deserting audience, theatre once again seems to come out into broad daylight in a new avatar with a new name and fame to grow with. This new lifeline to theatre is termed the Corporate Theatre. Corporate companies that are fast 'colonizing' cities have taken to theatre to promote harmony and team-spirit among their employees on par with other cultural and sports activities. This paper aims at studying the extent of intrusion of theatre in corporate entities in random cities of South India and the relevance of theatre in the present technologically evolving instant communication age. A random quantitative survey method was used to study the same.

Keywords: Corporate Theatre, Drama Based Training, Trends in Theatre

Introduction

Scene 1

THE EMPLOYEE STANDS OUTSIDE THE CABIN OF HIS BOSS

EMPLOYEE: EXCUSE ME SIR!

BOSS: COME IN YOUNG MAN! WHAT'S BREWING INSIDE?

EMPLOYEE: SIR, I... I NEED A LEAVE

BOSS: LEAVE! HOW COULD YOU ...

THE BOSS TAKES VARIOUS TABLETS FROM HIS DRAWER AND SWALLOWS THEM ONE AFTER ANOTHER.

THE EMPLOYEE HOLDS A SPHYGMOMANOMETER TO HIS WRIST.

THE DEVICE BREAKS OUT OF HEAT.

The audiences laugh until their insides start aching.

The set is remade to suit the office cafeteria.

The chair and table of the boss is left as it is, while the background properties are changed.

It all takes less than five minutes for the next scene to unfold.

Scene 2

EMPLOYEE IS BUSY WITH HIS LAPTOP.

WAITER (CHILD IN SCHOOL UNIFORM): STILL DOING YOUR HOMEWORK?

EMPLOYEE (YELLS): HOW MANY TIMES SHOULD I TELL YOU? THIS IS NOT HOME-WORK. THIS IS WORK FROM HOME!

WAITER: IT'S THE SAME THING. YOU HAVE A UNIFORM, I HAVE A UNIFORM; YOU HAVE NO LEAVES, I HAVE NO LEAVES; YOU HAVE WORK FROM HOME, I HAVE HOME WORK; THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS I GO TO SCHOOL TO JOIN WORK ONE DAY, YOU WORK IN OFFICE AND STILL ARE EQUAL TO A SCHOOL GOING KID.

EMPLOYEE: ALREADY IMMERSSED IN WORK. COULD NOT REPLY

The auditorium echoes with laughter from all corners. The grand annual cultural event of the corporate entity turns out to be a grand success. Theatre has once again restored its lost glory through the corporate auditoriums. Corporate in general terms is any large company or organization. There are public corporations like Life Insurance Corporation of India, private corporations like Tata Consultancy Services and other national and multinational corporations. The multinational corporate entities are the new hubs of workforce in the present times. Most of India's youth join multinational corporate companies as soon as they graduate. There are innumerable campus recruitment drives which recruit graduates straight from their college campuses. Right from the beginning, corporations try to build a pleasant work atmosphere for their employees. Most of them believe in utmost customer satisfaction which doubtlessly is a result of utmost employee satisfaction. In the new age information technology companies where there are no direct customers to deal with; there arose a greater need to maintain a harmonious atmosphere at workplace. Team run projects are the roots of these companies. Team spirit and constructive competence are the most necessary qualities that they expect from their employees. However, the companies are also quite aware that qualities like perseverance and team-spirit are not inherent but induced. Hence, they started planning cultural events and adventurous outings for the employees to build a kind of community feeling among them. The adventurous trips

according to *www.corporatetheatre.in* have somehow failed to build a feeling of commonness among the employees. These trips in turn built egos and competition among them thus ruining the basic purpose of the outing.

1. Drama Based Training (DBT) outlets

Mr. Paul Mathew, the founder and facilitator of Corporate Theatre, an Indian institution aimed at training young corporate professionals in theatre, observes that theatre is a theatre group instinctively manifests all the positive dynamics of a happy, powerful team that enjoys change and challenge. A former employee at Godrej, he experimented with theatre to promote harmony among the employees. A successful result from the experiments made him give up his career in the corporate world and become a full time theatre trainer. Corporate Theatre gives workshops, training and also performs at various corporate entities. They have notable clients like Ford, Godrej and Tata group of companies. According to Paul Mathew, theatre promotes the following among its artists.

- Bonding and Integration
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Trust and Delegation
- Time Management
- Creativity and Innovation
- Dealing with Risk and Failure
- Celebrating Star Performances
- Handling Pressure
- Situational Leadership
- Alignment
- Customer Orientation

Apart from Corporate Theatre, there are many other theatre groups that cater to the corporate sectors like STEPS Drama and Yours Truly Theatre. Shreya Rao of Economic Times writes 'how theatre –based corporate training in India is evolving as a serious tool for leadership' all the

way back in 2013. Corporate entities like ITC and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited have taken up to theatre to train their employees in fields like influencing, negotiation, conflict resolution and assertive communication. Corporate training in India has evolved from role-plays, ice-breakers and team building activities into a serious tool. (Rao, 2013)

STEPS Drama

STEPS Drama, a London based organisation involved in providing theatre based learning to corporates has started working in India in the new millennium. They engage in a different approach to train corporate employees in skills like team management and conflict resolution by providing a mirror to the behavioural tactics of each and every individual based on a detailed study of their behavioural traits. They specialise in diversity, inclusion and unconscious bias resolution, performance management, leadership and managements, customer service traits and values and ethics. STEPS use drama to bring about a behavioural change in its audience. They believe in mirroring once behaviour before expecting the other to change. Drama, according to them is the most feasible means to reflect this.

Yours Truly Theatre

Yours Truly Theatre is another Bangalore based theatre group that provides corporate theatre performances on par with other regular performances, workshops and training to varied audience and diverse groups. Yours Truly provides an experience of drama where the audience are not mere spectators but also get to participate in the performance. Corporate entities are hiring Yours Truly to perform on their platforms to entertain as well as educate their employees in terms of team management and dedication in work.

They 'believe in taking theatre to the people, right from the auditoriums to offices to campuses to apartment terraces to resorts to old age homes to hospices with an aim to reach out to not only the common man but also to people who don't have opportunity to watch plays'.

Training Sideways

Training Sideways (Evam Corporate Training Pvt Ltd) is India's foremost art based soft skills behavioral training company. Co- founded in 2011 by Karthik Kumar and Sunil Vishnu K, Sideways is a dynamic team of training professionals with diverse skill sets, educational

backgrounds and corporate experience drawn together by an abiding interest in people. *Training Sideways* has clients like *Google, CISCO, HUL, Mahindra, Accenture, Vodafone, Citibank, Genpact, HP, KPMG, Shell, Tafe, Matrimony.com and Star TV.*

Actcelerate

Actcelerate believes that as children, we always seek new experiences. As we grow, we drop the sense of adventure and wear new masks. This is when a little drama, acting and theatre can revive the childlike nature that lies latent in us. Actcelerate is a unique concept that injects creativity, innovation and joy at work by tapping our adventurous side.

Actcelerate conducts experiential corporate and employee training programs which include sessions based on theatre, improvisation techniques, simple meditations and cinema. Along with employee coaching sessions, it has unique workshops designed for women employees, people in leadership roles, and senior and middle management.

There are other outstanding theatre groups like WeMove Theatre, Stay Factory, Crea-Shakthi, Lokadharmi Theatre, Theatre Professionals and Samahaara that are doing wonders in the field. They provide performances that pump in life into the choking theatre of India.

2. Impact of Theatre on Corporate World

T T Srinath, a renowned entrepreneur and sensitivity trainer published a work in 2016 aptly entitled, “All the world is a stage”, emphasising Drama and its evidence in the corporate world. The author promotes the relevance between drama and corporate life and strikes a chord with the corporates on the fact that life is all but a stage play. According to him the importance of each actor on stage is unique irrespective of the length of the dialogues assigned and the time one stays on-stage. Similarly, each member in the team has an importance of his own irrespective of the experience and workload one takes. Only few tend to be on-stage. He emphasises on the role of the crew off-stage that work day-in and day-out to make the theatre a success. Similarly not everyone in the corporate world gets an entry into limelight. Few act as the face of the project

while the rest anchor it to the shores. Each and every member is equally important to the organization and there is nothing wrong in staying off-stage for the overall success of the team.

In the 1980s a new phenomenon called ‘Death by PPT’ is discovered among the corporates. Ill PowerPoint presentations tend to bore the audience to death. In order to fight this phenomenon corporates started searching for an alternative training method to engage the employees well. Terry Mc Graw, former chairman and CEO of Mc Graw Hill companies asserts the importance of drama based behavioural training as an alternative to PowerPoint based training. Drama Based Training (DBT) is an evolving training methodology in corporate entities in the new millennium. Cisco uses theatre for induction, Reckitt Benckiser for diversity and inclusion, Accenture for team building, Viacom18 for organisation values, Bharat Matrimony for customer service, Plasma Gen for sales, Vodafone for performance appraisal, and so on. (K, 2018)

Many white collared corporate employees might seem to be satisfied and well-maintained. However deep inside once in a while they feel stressed out and fall into bits of depression. “Why am I doing this?” “Is this all I wanted?” were some of the questions they tend to ask themselves and as a result fall prey to depression. Corporates have been using various training techniques to bring their employees out of these stress filled days. *Companies have now realized the power of theatre and meditation in everyday life to maintain a positive atmosphere at workplace* (Mukherjee, 2017). They have realised that organisational growth and happiness of employees are directly proportional to each other.

3. Characteristics of Corporate Theatre

Theatre is mostly used in corporate entities because of the following characteristics that it owns:

Closed Group

Theatre, unlike other adventurous or sports events, can take place in a closed group. It may be top fifty managing directors of the organisation or the fifty thousand employees of the organization, theatre can adapt to either groups easily. It has a similar message appropriate to the closed group. It has an audience of its own, a message of its own and

participants of its own. Theatre need not have a universal theme like films that cater to all kinds of audience and hence one need to watch what a majority fell like watching. Films on corporate lifestyle are rare when compared to family dramas. Theatre however is concise and speaks the language of the closed group maintaining the atmosphere of the closed group.

Interactive

Theatre is interactive. The concept called dialogue has probably first taken birth in theatre. It is interaction which breathes life to theatre. Unlike other recreational events where an individual can possible enjoy without the need to interact with the one sitting beside him, theatre definitely requires one to interact. Theatre mostly involves responses from participants, their jeers, their nods and becks, their acceptance and their criticism. Artists tend to talk to their audience directly unlike films where communication is totally one sided. Theatre also involves various off-stage activities and can be considered one of the rare sources of entertainment that involve the participation of the one sitting in the gallery as much as the one playing on stage.

On-Campus

Theatre is portable. One can converts one's own playground or a parking lot into a theatre stage within no time. Canteens, cellars, assembly halls are some of the many places that theatre loves to show up. The corporate theatre groups come to the campus of the organisation and perform on their own ground unlike other cultural activities that need huge setups or involve the movement of the entire crew on an outing. On-campus theatre experience is an everyday reminder to the employees of the fun they had together unlike the extravaganza outings that stay etched as a memory and cannot be carried into the office on a routine 'Monday morning'.

Own Message

Theatre speaks the language of the office in the settings that best suit them. One can crack jokes on one's own behavioural traits only through theatre. STEPS, for that instance works on this factor. They first study the behavioural traits of various employees and then try to reproduce them through theatre. One can easily attach one's own self to the play and thus learn better through the play. The message that theatre in corporate circles gives can be something about inferiority complex or too much introversion. One can identify oneself with characters played on stage so as to think about change and little push up.

Participation from all

Theatre can engage every human and animal present in the room and still be active and engaging. Theatre could be disciplined and centred even when hundreds were playing role on stage. Cultural events generally involve a band and the rest listen to all that they sing or a group of dancers performing on stage while the rest just get to wave at them. Technical training workshops are much difficult with one person talking and the rest sleeping through the seminar. Theatre provides an ever engaging yet all engaging alternative to these approaches.

Creative

Theatre is creative and hence needs some usage of the other side of the brain that usually stays unused in the work atmosphere. Theatre is thus a relaxation to the mind and helps in rejuvenating ones highly stressed heart and soul. Theatre is entertaining yet without the need for rush or sweat. One can be oneself and take time on stage. It's not a roller coaster ride that tries to sweep away the work stress from the mind with one jump from the sky into the sea.

Combination of all art forms

Theatre is one such art that involves all arts on earth. Theatre on a base level needs a singer, a writer, a dancer, a painter and an actor. There are scores of unseen arts involved in the

one art called theatre. Theatre thus provides a platform from people of different passionate backgrounds to showcase their talents. It has a role for everyone in sight. There are presenters, critics, designers, every known new artist in the field in theatre.

Entertaining yet educating

Theatre, unlike other entertaining sources is educating to the mind while providing enough entertainment to the heart. One can learn of team management, to send one's fears away from superiors, to become an extrovert without causing harm to self while entertaining in the whole process. Theatre is not a personality development class that tries to make one laugh while one is already strained out of one's work. Theatre rebuilds the lost energy and binds bonds between classes without any preaching or seminars.

Novel and live

Theatre has a new story every day. It is not recorded. Not replayed for the audience. It is live and novel. It has a story of its audience. It is flexible and adapts to the mood of the audience. It doesn't play a song on a stressed out audience. It instead talks, understands and reproduces one's reality with little jest and humour. Theatre has no huge sets or artificiality. It has no retakes, no editing, no lip syncs done in closed studios. It is live and challenging and hence impacting.

Personalised

Theatre is personalised. One can get a show performed on one's own people. No accidental or coincidental disclaimers are needed for theatre. One can incidentally make a play on live characters and reproduce reality without much strain. Personalised stories and plays help in easing out tensions among the employees and making fun out of their own people without any adverse effects.

Persuasion instead of diversion

Drama based training helps in making the employees open up on their stress instead of diverting them from the same. It helps them talk and act the stress out unlike other event that try to divert the employees from daily routine for a while. Diversion has temporary effects on the mind while persuasion has long-lasting impact. Drama thus is proving to be the first choice of corporates in training their employees in stress management, team building and conflict resolution of late.

4. Methodology

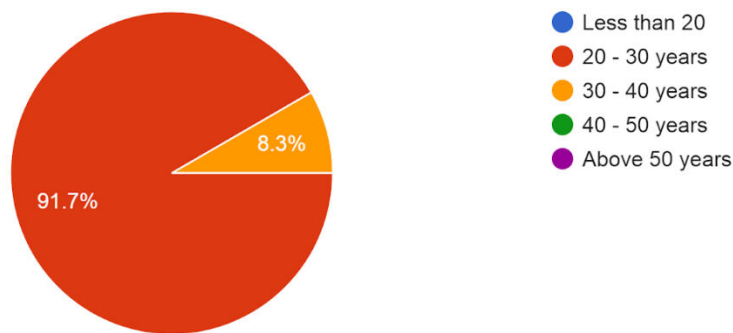
A survey was conducted among random individuals in varied southern cities like Visakhapatnam, Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad. Snowball sampling method was used to collect the data. 60 responses were randomly picked to evaluate the same.

5. Findings

- (i) **191.6% of the respondents were among 20-30 years age group while the rest were among 30-40 age group.**

Age

60 responses

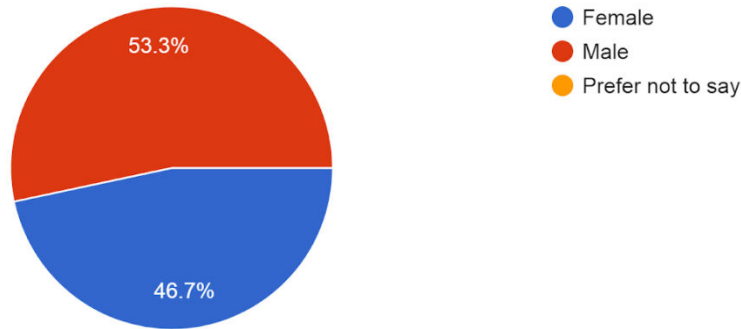


Respondents from around 13 companies from the four cities were involved.

(ii) There was 53.3% to 46.7% male to female output.

Gender

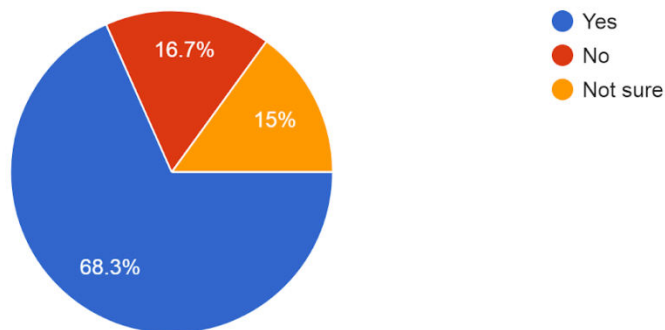
60 responses



(iii) 68.3% of the respondents worked with corporate entities while the rest worked at other public service corporations or companies.

Do you work in a Corporate Entity

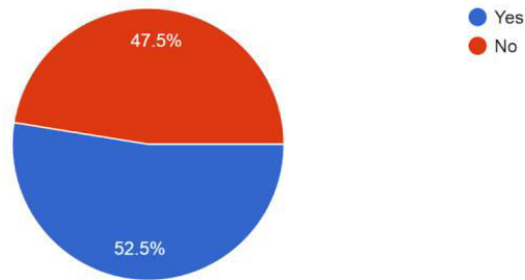
60 responses



(iv) 52.5% of the respondents said they have taken part in a stage play at least once in their lifetime, 79.4% of them stating that they have enacted in a stage play at school. A meagre 17.4% of them have enacted in a stage play at workplace.

Have you ever taken part in a Stage play?

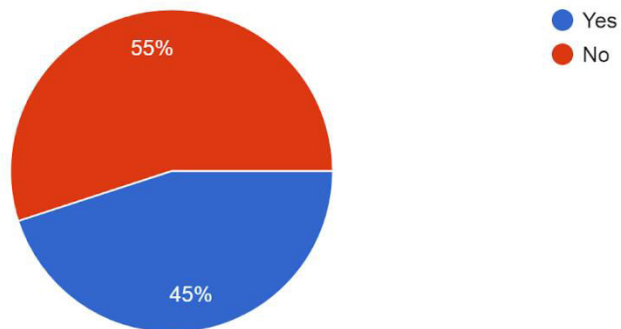
59 responses



(v) **45% of the respondents said they have seen a stage play at their workplace.**

Have you seen a stage play at your work place?

60 responses

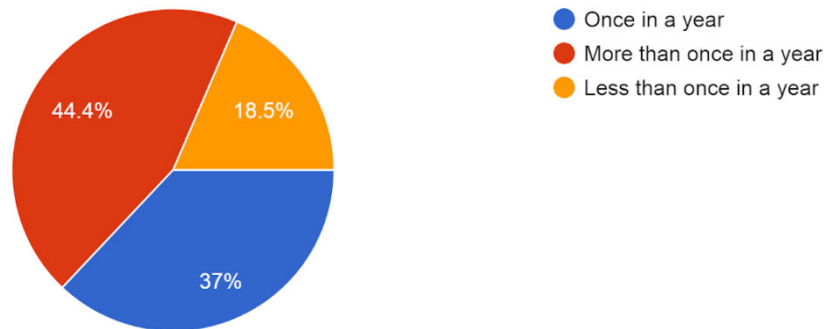


- (vi) **44% of the respondents who watch a stage play at their work place said they watch one more than once in an year while 37% of the respondents said once.**

v

How frequently do you watch stage plays in your workplace?

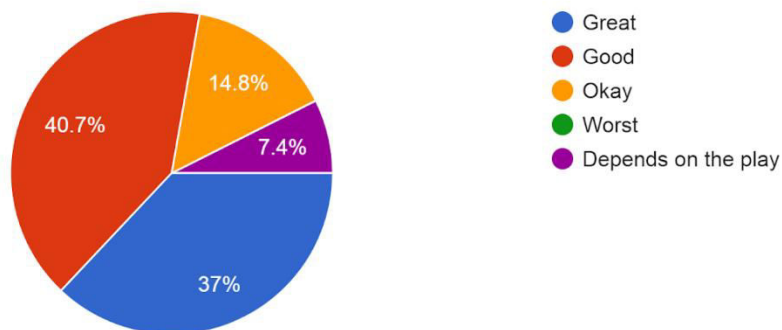
27 responses



- (vii) **An incredible 37% of the respondents said it feels great to watch as stage play while 40.7% of them said it feels good. There's a meagre 7.4% that said it depends on the play while 14.8% of them felt it's okay to watch a stage play.**

How does it feel to watch a stage play?

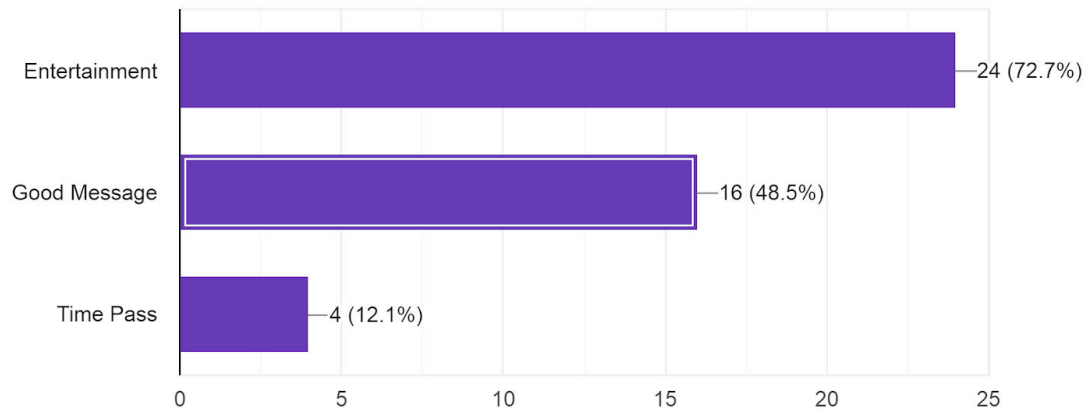
27 responses



(viii) When asked what they watch a stage play for, 72.7% of the respondents said entertainment while 48.5% opted for a good message which reveals that an approximate 25% of the respondents opted for both.

What do you expect from a stage play?

33 responses



6. Summary of the Findings

According to the survey it can be noted that theatre has to some extent entered the corporate fields in south India as well. Theatre still lives to be a child's play in the society. However, change is fast taking place with the theatre slowly stepping foot into the corporate world.

Theatre is still considered to be a source of entertainment while it is not just that. In the non-corporate sectors too, interest in theatre is taking air. While 48.3% of the respondents have voted to have watched a stage play out of their workplace, 78.8% of the respondents who do not have Drama Based Training in their organisations voted an interest in watching a stage play soon.

The corporate that involve in stage plays however tend to do great by playing one at least once in an year or more. Not one of the respondents found stage play as boring or a worst experience. Theatre thus exists in the good books of the society though it hasn't yet reached the limits that it actually deserves to have long ago.

To quote a respondent from the survey, *"Theatre/Stage play is toughest among all kinds of acts. Actors will not get a chance to redo the scene. They may do mistakes, but the spontaneous*

corrections and coordination with in the team will be the key skill that brings in the beauty. The corrections should not be noticed by the audience. I feel this format should be encouraged enough by Governments, sponsors and audience”.

In an out of the box question 56.7% respondents said they watch stage plays on television which is a great start in itself. Interestingly 41.7% of them find the stage plays on television good to watch.

Conclusion

According to the findings, it can be safely assumed that theatre is fast intruding the corporate houses and other closed elitist groups. Theatre, which is mostly attached to folks and masses, is now turning to be a high-class tool for infotainment.

In the recent years theatre groups have also become popular on other mass mediated channels of communication like television and other web-platforms like *Youtube*. Stand up comedies today have stars unknown out of the field or sometimes to the field few years ago. Shadow arts and other traditional art forms are also receiving accolades from esteemed national and international institutions. While theatre artists have once shifted to cinema to gain big decades ago, the cinema stars shall soon move to theatre to make big in their lifetime.

To remember Shaeksphere once again,

*All the world's a stage,
And all men and women merely players;
They have their exits and entrances;*

Theatre also has its exits and entrances. The new millennium is once again joining hands for a massive re-entry of theatre on stage. Not soon shall theatre be a household name as it was years ago when there was nothing but theatre to entertain , educate, order, threaten or write a glorious history of a not so glorious war.

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