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Theatre of the People: Donald Wolfit's Shakespearean Productions 1937-1953

Laurence Raw

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Theatre of the People: Donald Wolfit's Shakespearean Productions 1937-1953 Laurence Raw Throughout World War II, audiences in the United Kingdom craved entertainment, even during the country's darkest days. During this period, actor-manager Donald Wolfit and his theatre troupe toured Great Britain and Europe—often at great risk. After the war, Wolfit broadened his tour, bringing his brand of Shakespearean theatre to North American audiences. Wolfit believed that theatre should be accessible to everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic origins. It was this quality above all that accounted for his huge popularity throughout the fifteen years of his operation.

In *Theatre of the People: Donald Wolfit's Shakespearean Productions 1937–1953*, Laurence Raw looks at this tenacious personality whose determination to serve the nation by performing Shakespeare inspired audiences and fellow actors. Drawing on a series of hitherto unpublished materials—including letters and interviews—this part biography and part social history creates a vivid picture of what life was like for the touring actor during WWII and beyond. Recreating twelve of Wolfit's touring dates throughout Great Britain and North America, this volume also demonstrates theatre's importance as a source of mass entertainment and education, as well as a propaganda tool.

Despite Wolfit's popular appeal at the time, he was doomed to remain on the periphery of the theatrical establishment. This book contends that Wolfit deserves to be recognized for his efforts in maintaining public morale during times of stress. *Theatre of the People* will appeal not only to those interested in drama but also to students and scholars of history and popular entertainment in the 1940s and 1950s.

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