

THE OPEN-AIR THEATRE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649211791

The open-air theatre by Sheldon Cheney

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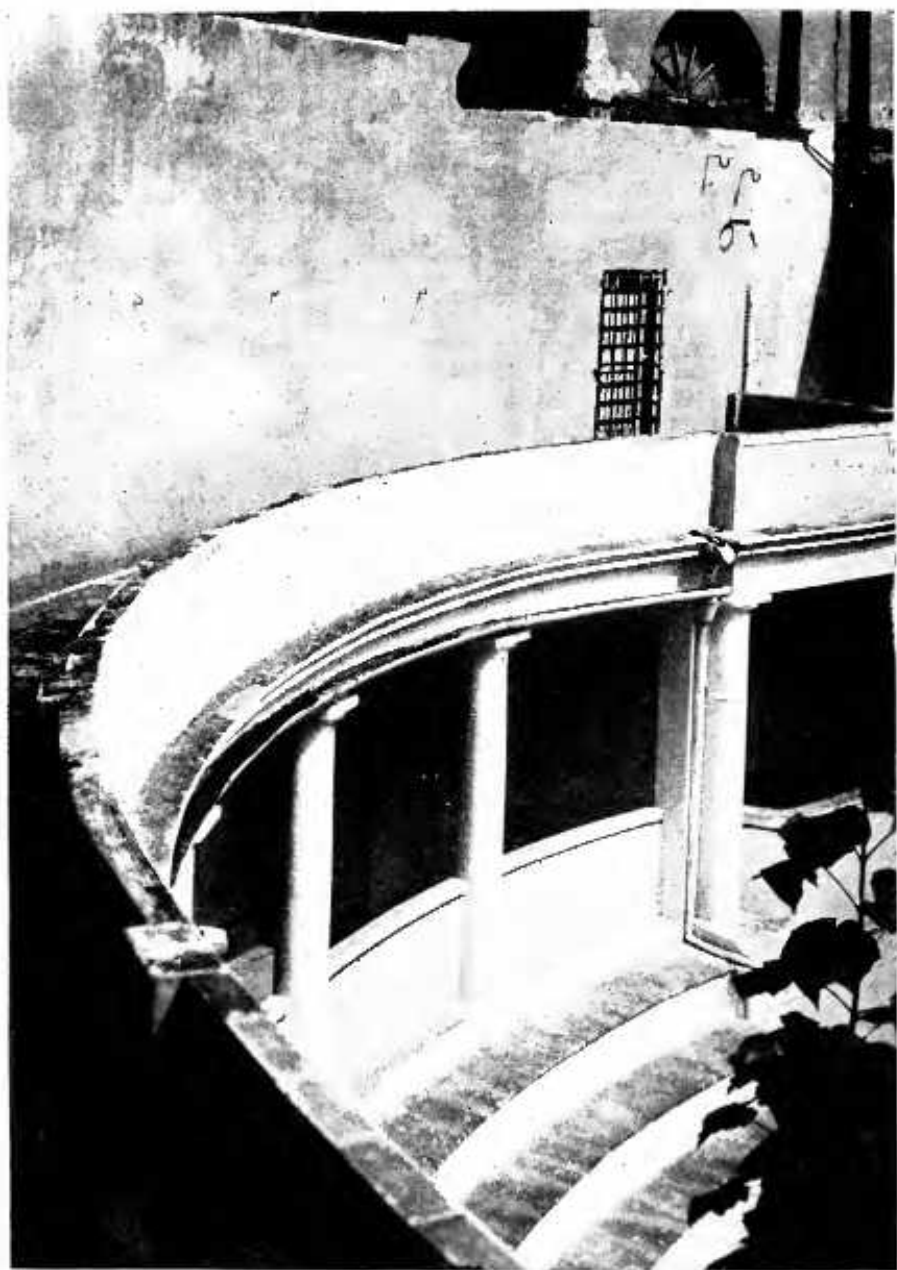
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SHELDON CHENEY

**THE OPEN-AIR
THEATRE**



A CORNER OF THE ARENA GOLDONI, AT FLORENCE, ITALY.

THE
OPEN-AIR THEATRE

BY
SHELDON CHENEY



NEW YORK
MITCHELL KENNERLEY
MCMXVIII

PREFACE

MY object in writing this volume has been three-fold: first, to offer, for that increasingly large public which is interested in every significant development of the drama, a comprehensive view of the open-air theatre movement with relation to both the historical background and the remarkable current revival; second, to provide the architect with a first-aid compendium of information about old and modern open-air theatres, bringing together material which, if it has existed at all in print, has been scattered through a hundred books and magazine articles; and third, to give those concerned with open-air production a birdseye view of the drama of the open in all ages and all lands, and by comparison, to help them to an understanding of the peculiar characteristics and particular problems of production out-of-doors.

The scope of the volume is limited. No attempt is made to treat of theatres of the half-enclosed type, which are in effect the ordinary architectural theatre with the auditorium roof lifted. There is no intention, moreover, to put forth the volume as

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an exhaustive treatise. Doubtless there are many open-air theatres that have not come to the writer's notice, and certain others offer so little of interest that descriptions would merely be tedious. But it is thought that every playhouse which is really important, either for its productions or for its unique structural form, has been described. I have worked with full realization that this first book on the subject must be hardly more than a sketch. It is offered as a preliminary essay in a field which I hope will attract new students, and which doubtless will find its exhaustive historian in due time.

If I continually refer to the artificialities of the indoor stage, it is not because I disbelieve in the indoor theatre. Indeed, my faith in the ultimate regeneration of that over-commercialized institution is very strong. But I believe that there has been much following of false gods among the so-called "artists" of the regular playhouse; and in the open-air theatre I see one of the finest correctives for its oversophistication and artificiality.

So many people have given generous aid in the compilation of this book, that it is impossible to make detailed acknowledgment. To the many who have provided information about their private theatres, or about the theatres of institutions with which they are affiliated, I extend again my cordial thanks.

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A special debt is owing to Professor Thomas H. Dickinson of the University of Wisconsin, not only for information about the playhouse at Madison but for material gleaned from his admirable essay on open-air theatres in *The Playbook* of June, 1913. To Mr. Leroy Truman Goble and to Mr. Sam Hume I am grateful for material about open-air production in Europe, which otherwise would have escaped me. To Miss Mabel Lincoln Edwards I owe thanks for similar aid in connection with certain American theatres. The chapters on historic theatres are based on material drawn from a multitude of sources; but special acknowledgment must be made to A. E. Haigh's exhaustive volume, *The Attic Theatre*. For information about the Italian villa theatres I am especially indebted to Professor Henry Vincent Hubbard, whose descriptions and plans in the January, 1914, number of *Landscape Architecture* have been freely drawn upon. For photographs of the Italian theatres special thanks are due to H. Inigo Triggs and to Mrs. Aubrey LeBlond; and for pictures of the classic theatres, to Professor Allen Marquand. The introductory chapter was published in part in *Craftsman Magazine*, and the chapter on garden theatres originally appeared in *Country Life in America*. The editors have kindly given permission to reprint.

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The book was written almost entirely during the year 1915, and was announced for publication in the following year. But difficulties in the way of obtaining photographs, and other delays, have prevented earlier appearance. I have taken advantage of this circumstance to add descriptions of several theatres which were completed after the main portion of the text had been written.

S. C.

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