Theatre of the 19th Century
Romantic drama is the theatre of the "long ago and far away."
Characteristics of a romantic hero

1. The romantic hero makes no comprises
2. He appeases no one
3. Every issue is clear
4. If he goes down in defeat, he goes down fighting knowing that his cause is just
5. The cause will triumph in the end
The Knight-Champion

1. Was **loyal** to his lord

2. Dedicated his life to the **protection of the weak**

3. **Rescued** the innocent

4. Fought the **endless battle** against the forces of **evil**
The Knight-lover

1. Placed the **women** on a pedestal
2. **Worshipped** her from afar
3. Would write her **poems**
4. **Sing** of his undying devotion
5. But would **not** touch her --
England Produces Shakespeare

The “first” romantic playwright

His plays posses many of the elements of romantic drama —

1. A broad sweep of action
2. Many short scenes
3. A dedication to love and adventure
Victor Hugo
1802-1885

French Playwright and novelist remembered for –

1. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831)
2. *Les Misérables* (1862)
Hernani (1830)

- Romantic tragedy by Victor Hugo
- Helped shatter the Neoclassic hold over French drama
- Audience "rioted" through 55 performances
- Was adapted into an opera by Verdi: Ernani (1844)
Many 19th century operas were adapted from 19th century romantic plays. The operas are still performed, the plays are not. "Tosca" (opera) is based on "Tosca" a romantic tragedy written for Sarah Bernhardt, a 19th century star.
Tosca
Opera and Play
Alexandre Dumas', père
1802-1870

French  **Novelist** and  **playwright** remembered for –

1.  *The Three Musketeers* (1844)
2.  *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1845)
The Count of Monte Cristo

- A 1300 page, 117 chapter novel
- 1848- adapted by Dumas into a 20 act, 100 character play which took 2 days to perform
- Was not a success
- 1881- Adapted by Charles Fechter into a 5 act play with prologue
- Performed by James O’Neill (Eugene’s father) for 30 years
James O’Neill as The Count of Monte Cristo
The Count of Monte Cristo
Alexandre Dumas, fils
1824-1895

- Son of Alexandre Dumas, pere
- Playwright and novelist remembered for *La Dame aux camélias* (Camille)
- Novel- 1848
- Play- 1852
- Opera by Verdi- 1853
La Dame aux Camelias
Edmund Rostand
1868-1918

- French Poet and Playwright
- Major work: *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897)
- Considered the best example of 19th century romantic drama
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
1749-1832

- Germany’s greatest literary figure
- Poet and Playwright
- Manager of the state theatre at Weimar
- Masterpiece: *Faust* (1808, 1831)
Geothe’s Faust
Characteristics of Melodrama

- Contained a **spotless hero** who was usually falsely accused
- An **evil black hearted villain** who was often a banker or lawyer
- **Background music** underscored sentimental speeches and action sequences
- The greatest excitement was the **chase**
Melodrama developed the largest popular audience in American theatre history.
Uncle Tom's Cabin

- **Novel** by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852)
- **Dramatized** in 1852
- **Most popular** melodrama of the 19th century
- Seen by 3 million
- Performed into the 1930’s
- **Filmed** by Edwin Porter in 1903
Ben Hur, the play
The Showboat

- A **theatre on a barge**
- An efficient way to **tour major cities** along the Mississippi and Missouri river.
- **Popular** from the 1830s to the 1940s
Gottschalk Opera House

- Aberdeen’s *first* playhouse
- *Opened* in 1887
- **Capacity:** 700
- **Stage:** 24’ proscenium, 21’ deep
- *Burned* in 1902 and was rebuilt the same year
- *Burned* again in 1910 and was replaced with the *New Aberdeen Theatre* which opened in 1913
The Gottschalk Opera House
(1902)
The Gottschalk Fire, 1910
Touring Rep Companies

• Typically one or two companies would play the Gottschalk each month
• Travel by rail, carry their props and costumes with them
• Have a rep of 2 to 5 plays
• Perform 2 days to a week, doing a different show each night
• If successful, the company would return next year with new scripts
“Rhea and Her Grand Company of Players”

- Played the Gottschalk in 1888
- Was in town 2 days
- Performed “Much Ado About Nothing” and “Adrienne Lecouvreur”
- Ticket price: $1.00
Scribe and Sardou

Eugene Scribe
1791-1861

Victorien Sardou
1831-1908
“Well-made-play” Formula

1. Extensive exposition
2. Careful preparation
3. A cause-and-effect arrangement of incidents
4. Each scene builds to a climax
5. A secret known by the audience
6. A "show down" scene between the play's two major characters
7. Careful resolution of the action
The Star System

• Out growth of the actor manager system
• Show is built around the Star
• Who stood at the front edge of the stage and emoted
• Supporting cast was there to assist
• Audience came to see the Star
• Audience applauds when the Star makes his first entrance and after a well done scene
• Star may do an encore
Traveling Star

• Actor plays the **same character**, moving from **theatre to theatre**
• **Arrived** in town the morning of the show
• Did a **“walk through”** with the local rep company (supporting cast) in the afternoon
• **Performed** that night
• On the train the **next morning**
• **Still used in opera**
Edwin Booth
1833-1893

- America's leading 19th century Shakespearean actor
- Used a subtle, psychological approach
- 1863- Performed *Hamlet* for 100 consecutive nights
- Brought Shakespeare to the stage using a full accurate script
Sir Henry Irving
1838-1905

- England's greatest actor
- Performed *Hamlet, Macbeth, Faust* and *Othello* in London
- Manager of the Lyceum Theatre
- 1895– First actor to be Knighted
Sarah Bernhardt
1844-1923

- First international star
- Debuted at the *Comédie Française* in 1862
- Nine American tours between 1880 and 1918
- 1899—Founded the *Theatre Sarah Bernhardt* in Paris
The Divine Sarah

- At the age of 55, she played the title role in *Hamlet*
- 1900-- Took her talent before the camera
- Made 11 films including *Camille* and *Tosca*
- Left leg was amputated at the age of 71 – performed seated
Died in 1923 while making a film

During her 62-year career, she played 70 roles, all in French, in more than 125 productions.
Richard Wagner
1813-1883

• German opera composer and producer
• Believed that all elements should be under the control of one man
• A Gesamtkunstwerk (a master art work)
Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen
1826-1914

- Considered the first director
- Used the ensemble system of production
- Believed in a long rehearsal period
- Used historically accurate sets and costumes
- Toured his company for 16 years: 1874 - 1890
Influenced theatres in Paris and Moscow

William Tell

Cathy from Heilbronn
Stock Scenery

A small local theatre would own at least four basic sets, a...

1. Kitchen set
2. Parlor set
3. Woodland scene
4. City street scene
Kitchen
Fancy Interior
Woodland Scene
City Street
Ad Layout
Advertising Sheet
Box Set

• An **interior set** which uses flats (wood frames covered with canvas) to create the back and side walls of a "real" room
Because of the Box Set…

- The raked stage floor was replaced with a flat stage floor.
- Stage hands discovered it was difficult to handle the side walls of a box set on a slanted floor.
Fourth-Wall Concept

• According to French philosopher Denis Diderot (1713-1784) the scenic artist should create a "real" room (four walls) then remove one of these walls so the audience can watch the action of the play.

• Effect: the focus of the action should remain within the confines of the "room".

• There is no audience.
Wing and Border Set

• The side "walls" in a wing-border-backdrop set are placed parallel to the front edge of the stage
19th Century Lighting

- **1816**– The stage of the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia is lit with gas
- **1837**– English actor-manager Charles Macready uses a limelight at London's Covent Garden
- **1881**– Electric light arrives at the Savoy Theatre in London