

## ANCIENT GREEK ART & CULTURE

### THEATRES & DRAMA

Theatre has been a central part of Greek culture since the 6th century BCE. Most Greek cities had an open-air theatre where people would gather to watch plays put on during religious festivals. The earliest plays were tragedies, followed later by comedies. These two types of Greek drama became hugely popular all though the Mediterranean world, and formed the foundation on which all modern theatre is based.

The ancient theatre was designed to take advantage of natural acoustics which allowed sound to travel up to the top seats without amplification. The theatre was made up of the main stage (orchestra), two side entrances to the stage (parodos) and scene building (skene). The skene walls would form part of the scenery of the play. In some plays the ancient Greeks used a type of crane which allowed actors posing as gods to float down from above.



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One of the earliest and best preserved open air ancient Greek theatres is the Theatre of Dionysus. It was dedicated to Dionysus, the patron of the arts and god of wine. It could seat 17,000 people.

Men and boys played all the roles in an ancient Greek play because women were not allowed to take part in public events. The actors wore costumes and masks to enable the audience to tell who was whom in the play.

The masks were made from stiffened linen, with holes for the actors eyes and mouth. Actors also wore wigs. They wore thick-soled shoes too, to make them look taller, and padded costumes to make them look fatter, stronger or more feminine. The masks showed the audience what kind of character an actor was playing (sad, angry or funny). Some masks had two sides, so the actor could turn them round to suit the mood for each scene.

