

Shakespeare's Theatre



There has been a lot of research into who visited the Globe Theatre and other theatres in London. Theatre-going was a popular activity in this period of history with at least 20 performance spaces in London in Shakespeare's lifetime (outdoor ones like the Globe, indoor spaces like the Blackfriars Theatre, and a number of inns which specialised in performances). On the whole the social spectrum of attendance was wider than it is today although, unlike in the film *Shakespeare In Love*, the Queen never visited the public playhouses herself. She didn't need to as the actors performed for her in court.

In 1599 Swiss traveller Thomas Platter visited the Globe and made a note about the entry prices in his diary:

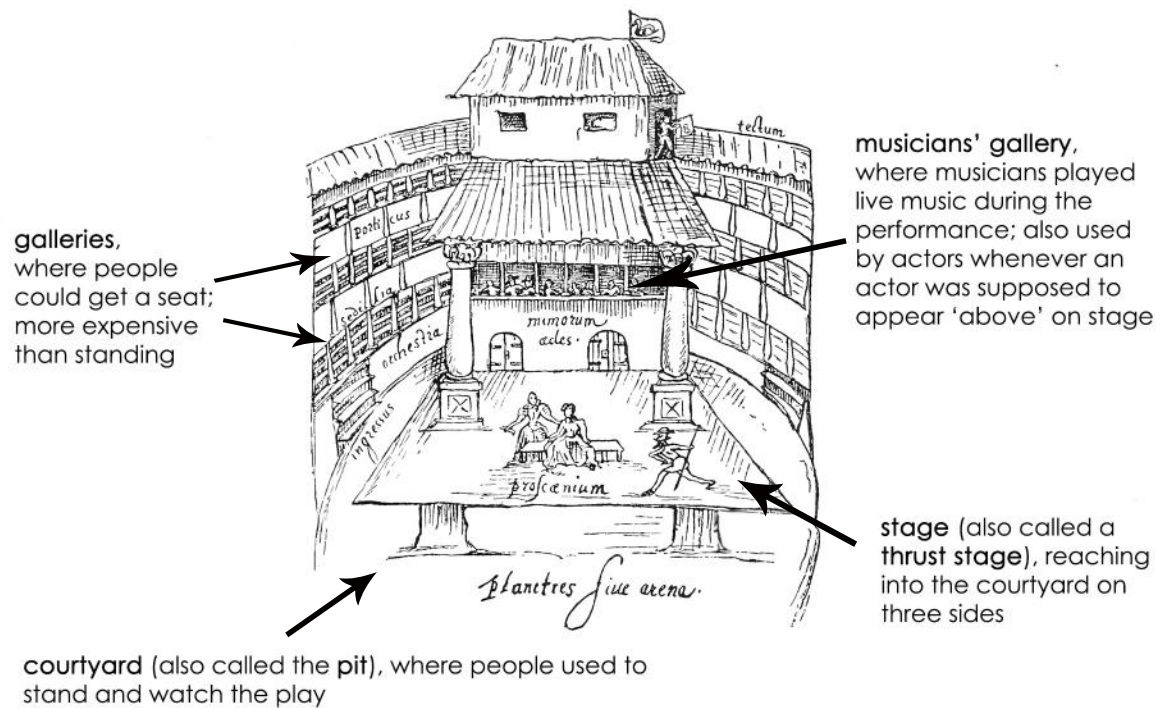
"Whoever cares to stand below pays only one English penny, but if he wishes to sit he enters by another door and pays another penny, while if he desires to sit in the most comfortable seats which are cushioned, where he not only sees everything well but can also be seen then he pays yet another English penny at another door".

So admission varied from 1 penny to 3 pennies. The 1 penny entry to the Globe Theatre put it on a par with the bear-baiting pit next door which also cost a single penny for standing room close to the action. Bear-baiting was a blood sport in which you placed bets on bears fighting dogs. It was one of the main competitors for the theatre and it was located just opposite the Globe. Both were situated on the south bank of the river, away from the more respectable areas of London.

There is no historical drawing of the interior of the Globe, but the basic set up was thought to be similar to that of the Swan Theatre which you can

History

see in the drawing. The Swan Theatre would have been a little old-fashioned compared to the Globe Theatre, which had more sophisticated stage mechanisms including a trap door, a hoist and the 'discovery space' (a large alcove which could be screened off between the entrance and exit doors).



courtyard (also called the pit), where people used to stand and watch the play

The best seats were the so-called 'Lords Boxes' above and almost behind the stage – these were the best seats because acoustically you would hear well from there, but also because you could be seen by the other audience members.

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