Muse Machine 2019 Advanced Teacher Training Seminar-Inspired Lesson Plan

Step into the Set Designer's Role

Developed by Lauren Komorowski

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Lesson Plan Summary:

Professionals make things look easy! This is particularly true in sports and in the arts. It is also easy to underestimate the time and energy it takes to make a piece of art come to life. Lauren Komorowski, instructor at Miamisburg High School, had an opportunity to demonstrate the thought and energy that goes into stage design for her theater students. Traveling to New York City with the Muse Machine on their Advanced Teacher Training Seminar in 2019 provided Lauren with an appreciation of theater staging at an advanced level during the many Broadway plays that she attended there. Lauren used that experience, and her already established background in this art form, to create a lesson plan that involved her students beyond the usual "sit-and-get" kind of instruction. Her students were asked to develop a set, using accepted rules of design and to share it with the class, explaining how and why they designed it as they did. She shares that it caused her class to understand the role that set design plays as a part of the play itself. This is the kind of learning that will stay with them if they become performers, designers or even audience members in the future!

Name: Lauren Komorowski	School: Miamisburg High School	Subject: Theater	Date: September 2019
Inspiration:	The set designs from Broadway productions of *Ink* and *The Ferryman*, viewed as part of Muse Machine's Advanced Teacher Training Seminar in June 2019.		

Title: Step into the Set Designer's Role			

I. <u>OVERVIEW</u>	A. **Summary:** Students will step into the role of set designer as they create their own stages. Their stages will demonstrate an aspect of a production that will be difficult to convey on a stage. This will allow students to consider the complex job of set designer, the role of the stage as a part of the storytelling of the play and the effect a set designer's decisions have on actors and the audience. B. **Standards:** <u>4CE</u> Distinguish between the roles of actor and director and discuss how they relate to each other in a theatrical production. <u>5CE</u> Recognize and identify the standards and different aspects of performance used to critique and assess theatrical works. C. **Objectives/Outcomes:** Students will have a greater understanding of the role of set designer. Students will experience the role of designer, so they are better prepared to understand how the actions of a director affect the jobs of the others involved in a production, by creating a shoebox stage. Students will critique how a set designer sets up a stage, both from the point of view of an actor and an audience member. D. **Teaching Approach:** Model various stage setups, discuss the issues directors may have faced and how they solved them, and student individual or collaborative work. E. **Assessment:** Presentation of shoebox stages & self-critique
II. <u>LESSON PREPARATION</u>	A. **Teacher Needs:** • Set Design Rubric • "A Brief History of Theatre" slideshow • Various art supplies to assist student stage creation (including liquid glue, colorful paper, cardstock or cardboard, scissors) • The following videos: 1. *The Ferryman*: https://youtu.be/U4c2mRSIOb0 2. *Ink*: https://youtu.be/KPkdjVjlDog 3. *Frozen* Movie: https://youtu.be/L0MK7gz13bU

4. *Frozen* Broadway: https://youtu.be/Qofj8MKO6mk
5. *Frozen* Disney: https://youtu.be/NpB741wv4lk?t=1566

Helpful Hints: Do not let students choose their scenes until after you discuss the sets you are analyzing. This allows them to brainstorm as you watch how others selected aspects from their play/musical and staged them, and then they can decide on their scene and stage elements from there.

B. Student Needs:
a. **Prior Knowledge:** This is an introduction to staging a production. However, a general understanding of what is involved in a stage, how stages are used, and the general limitations of stages would be helpful.
b. **Student Voice:** Students can choose their scene, how they will adapt it for the stage and if/who they work with.
c. **Vocabulary:** Stage, fly space, wings, props, audience, visibility, levels

III. <u>EVIDENCE/ ASSESSMENT OF OUTCOMES</u>	Students will present their stages to the class. Through this presentation, they will demonstrate the aspects of their stage design, an explanation of their staging choices and the overall "vision" of their staged production. Students will also provide a written critique of their stage. They will assess the challenges this stage would provide them as an actor as well as a member of the audience.
IV. <u>ENDURING UNDERSTANDING</u>	The students will leave this lesson with information on a career in set design and better understand what a set designer does every day. They will gain knowledge about the challenges and benefits of this career.
V. <u>LEARNING PLAN</u>	A. **Prompt:** Students will watch YouTube videos of two Tony-Nominated set designers discussing the thought behind and process of making their set. (*Links 1 and 2 as described under Teacher Needs*) B. **Hook:** Discussion of how sets affect our experience of a staged performance as actors and as audience members. C. **Essential Question(s):** How does the design of a set change the way the audience perceives the important elements of a play or

musical? How can critical thinking help solve issues that arise when staging a complex scene AND in our lives?

D. **Resources:** *As described under Teacher Needs*

E. **Teacher and Student Performance Tasks:**

Day 1: Students will watch the YouTube interview with the set designers of *The Ferryman* and *Ink*. Teacher will identify the staging elements of these musicals and discuss the various challenges presented to the set designers, as well as the effect of these stages on the audience.

Day 2: Teacher/students will discuss the "Let it Go" scene from the movie Frozen, using appropriate stage terminology from the previous "stage elements" unit (*see slides from the unit "A Brief History of Theatre*).

Discuss these videos in the context of the challenge of presenting this scene from Frozen (*Link 3*) on a stage. Students will brainstorm what the challenges of putting this scene on a stage would be, as well as a plausible solution to these issues.

Teacher will list the challenging aspects of the scene on document camera. Students will view the Broadway and Disney versions of this scene (*Links 4 and 5*) and evaluate how the stage director set up the stage to accommodate these issues, referencing back to the initial list of challenges and identifying how the various stage managers/set designers dealt with these difficulties. Students will break into groups and identify the scene they will be staging.

Day 3-7: Students will work individually or as a group to identify elements of the stage needed to successfully adapt their scene from the screen to the stage.

F. **Final Review:** Day 8: Students will present their scenes, focusing on the challenges they faced and how they used their set to overcome those challenges. Then, students will begin a critique of their stage, focusing on the actors and audience experience of the play because of various choices they made as a stage director.

VI. **LESSON REFLECTION**	My students really enjoyed this project and were engaged. They have mentioned several aspects of their new learning about stage elements as we have evaluated other performances throughout the year. Often, in the past, I have found that students think every single set is perfect and have no idea how they would fix or change sets we see. After doing this lesson, they have a much richer appreciation for the work that is required to design a set.

Scene Design Rubric   Total Points _____

Category	Excellent 10	Proficient 8	Developing 6	Emerging 4
Concept Do the designs for the set(s) have a cohesive, meaningful design concept that is appropriate for the scene?	The design for the set perfectly created a cohesive, meaningful design concept that is appropriate for the scene.	The design for the set(s) almost always created a cohesive, meaningful design concept that is appropriate for the scene.	The design for the set(s) sometimes created a cohesive, meaningful design concept that is appropriate for the scene.	The design for the set(s) rarely created a cohesive, meaningful design concept that is appropriate for the scene.
Color, Texture, Pattern Do the design elements work to establish time, location, and enhance the mood of the scene?	The design elements perfectly worked to establish time, location, and enhance the mood of the scene.	The design elements almost always worked to establish time, location, and enhance the mood of the scene.	The design elements sometimes worked to establish time, location, and enhance the mood of the scene.	The design elements rarely worked to establish time, location, and enhance the mood of the scene.
Research Do the designs of the scenery show an understanding of social class, and historical period?	The designs of the scenery show an excellent understanding of social class, and historical period.	The designs of the scenery show a good understanding of social class, and historical period.	The designs of the scenery show a fair understanding of social class, and historical period.	The designs of the scenery show little or no understanding of social class, and historical period.
Practicality Are all scenic elements practical in regard to visibility to audience and useability by actors?	The elements all work in harmony to demonstrate proper visibility to audience and useability by actors.	Most of the elements work in harmony to demonstrate proper visibility to audience and useability by actors.	Some of the elements work in harmony to demonstrate proper visibility to audience and useability by actors.	Few of the elements work in harmony to demonstrate proper visibility to audience and useability by actors.
Craftsmanship Are the renderings, draftings and artistic elements of the layout of high quality?	The renderings, draftings and artistic elements of the layout all show a level of professionalism and attention to detail to show an exemplary exhibit.	Most of the renderings, draftings and artistic elements of the layout show a level of professionalism and attention to detail to show an exemplary exhibit.	Some of the renderings, draftings and artistic elements of the layout show a level of professionalism and attention to detail to show an exemplary exhibit.	Few of the renderings, draftings and artistic elements of the layout show a level of professionalism and attention to detail to show an exemplary exhibit.

Self-Reflection Sheet   Name:

                                                             Scene Chosen:

<u>Concept</u> Do the designs for the set(s) have a cohesive, meaningful design concept that is appropriate for the scene?

<u>Color, Texture, Pattern</u> Do the design elements work to establish time, location, and enhance the mood of the scene?

<u>Research</u> Do the designs of the scenery show an understanding of social class, and historical period?

<u>Practicality</u> Are all scenic elements practical in regard to visibility to audience and useability by actors?

<u>Craftsmanship</u> Are the renderings, draftings and artistic elements of the layout of high quality?

A Brief History of Theatre Architecture and Stage Technology

ROP Stagehand Technician

2/4/10

Lesson Objective

- To learn a concise chronology of the history of theatre architecture in order to understand why and how the functional design of the environment in which the play is produced is a major factor in determining the type, style, and design of technical elements used in a production.

Lesson Objective

- Define key terms and identify key structural elements of theatres.
  - Some of these terms are no longer used, but some are still used today

Modern Theatre Spaces

- Proscenium- A stage configuration in which the spectators watch the action through a rectangular opening (the proscenium arch) that resembles a picture frame
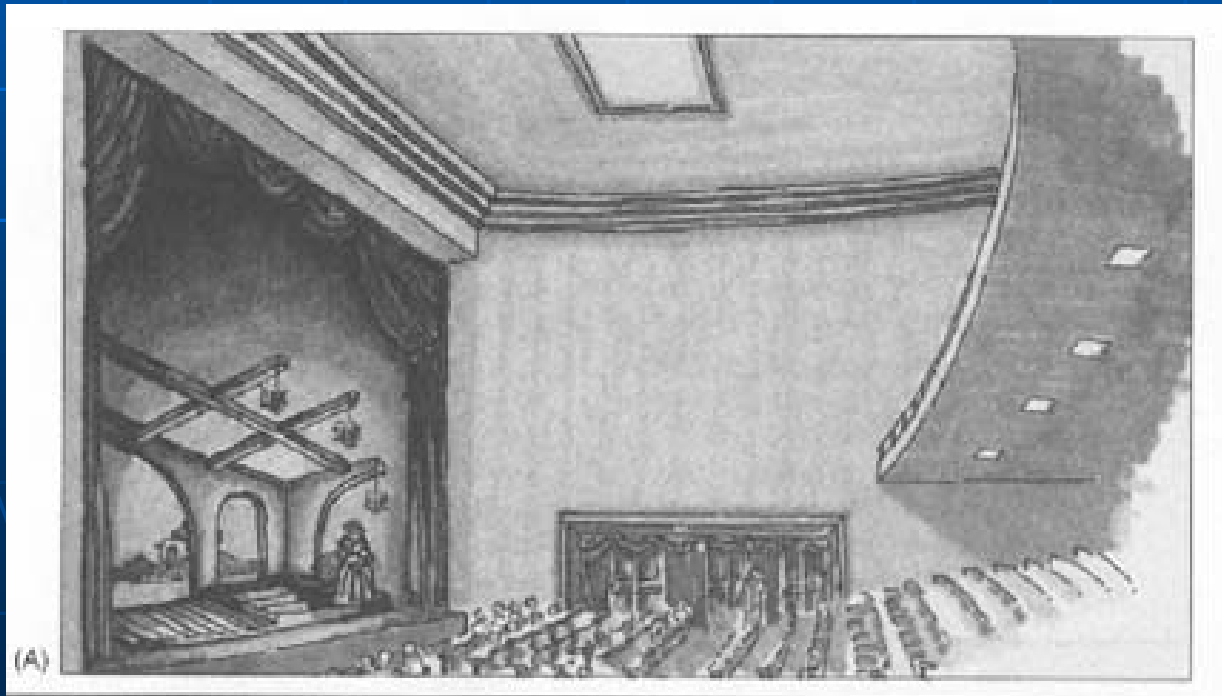
Modern Theatre Spaces

- Thrust stage- a stage projecting into, and surrounded on 3 sides by the audience
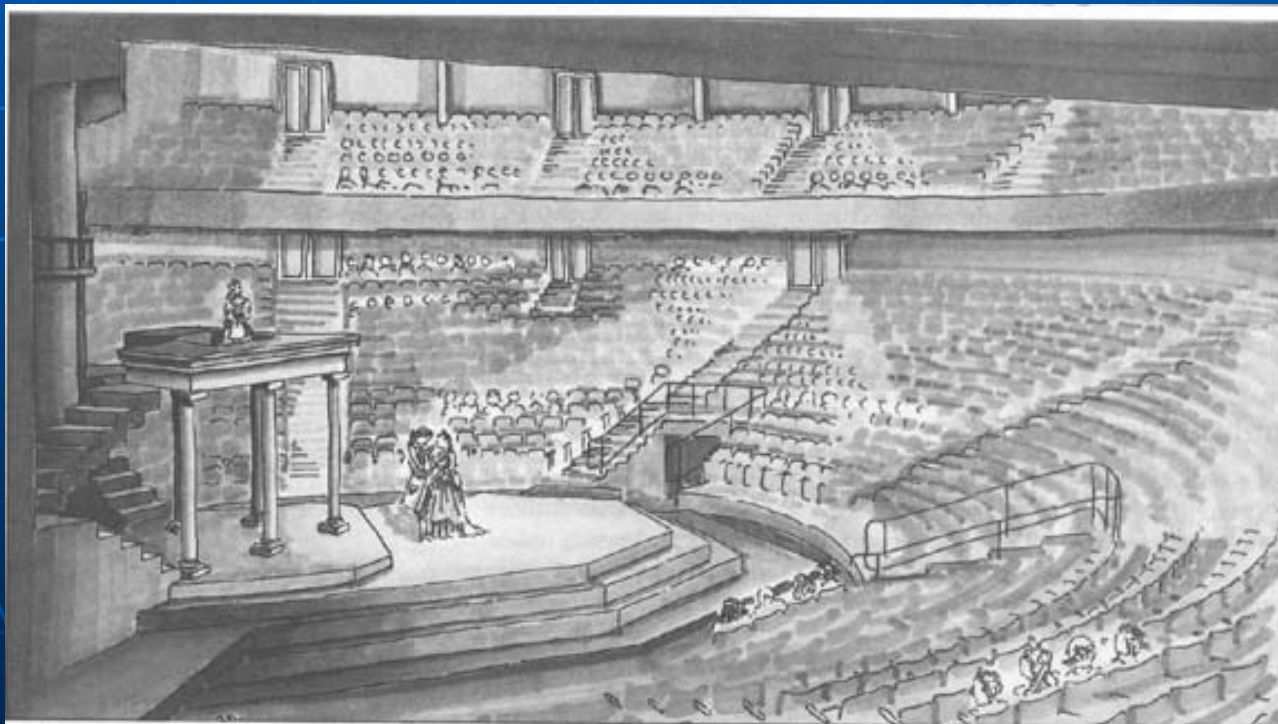
Modern Theatre Spaces

- Arena stage- a stage completely surrounded by the audience (aka theatre in the round)
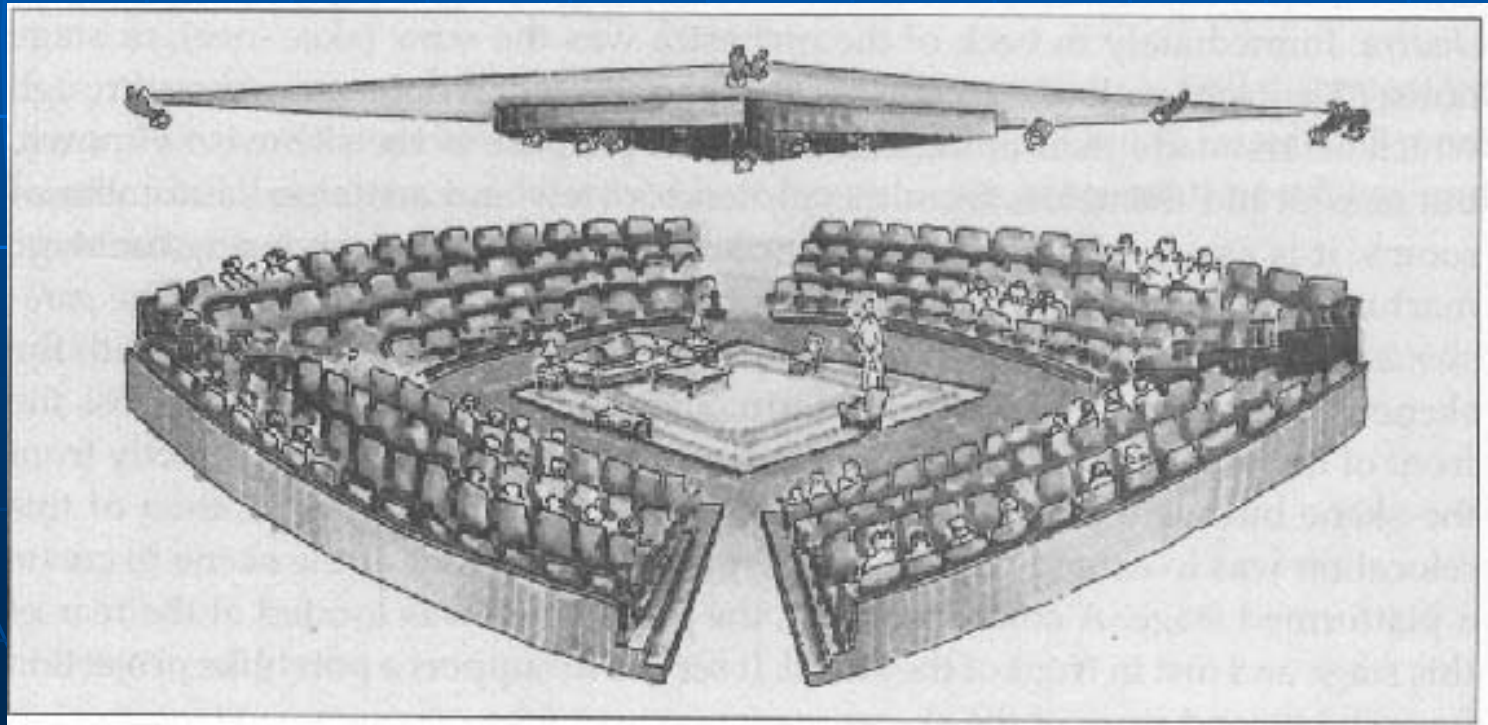
Greek Theatre

- Our knowledge of Greek or Roman Theatres is based on archaeological studies and educated guessing

- No single style or type, but a number of elements seem to be consistent

- Usually built on hillsides

Common Architectural Elements of Greek Theatres

- Theatron= auditorium, where the audience sits
- Orchestra= circular playing area
- Skene= stage house, used for entrances/ exits; dressing rooms, storage, etc.
- Parados= entrance/ exit corridors

Parts of a Greek Theater

Scenic Elements of Greek Theatre

- Eccyclema= wheeled platforms (aka wagons) to roll furniture or "dead" bodies onto stage
- Periaktoi= 3-sided pivoting scenery with a different location painted on each side

Augusta Stylianou
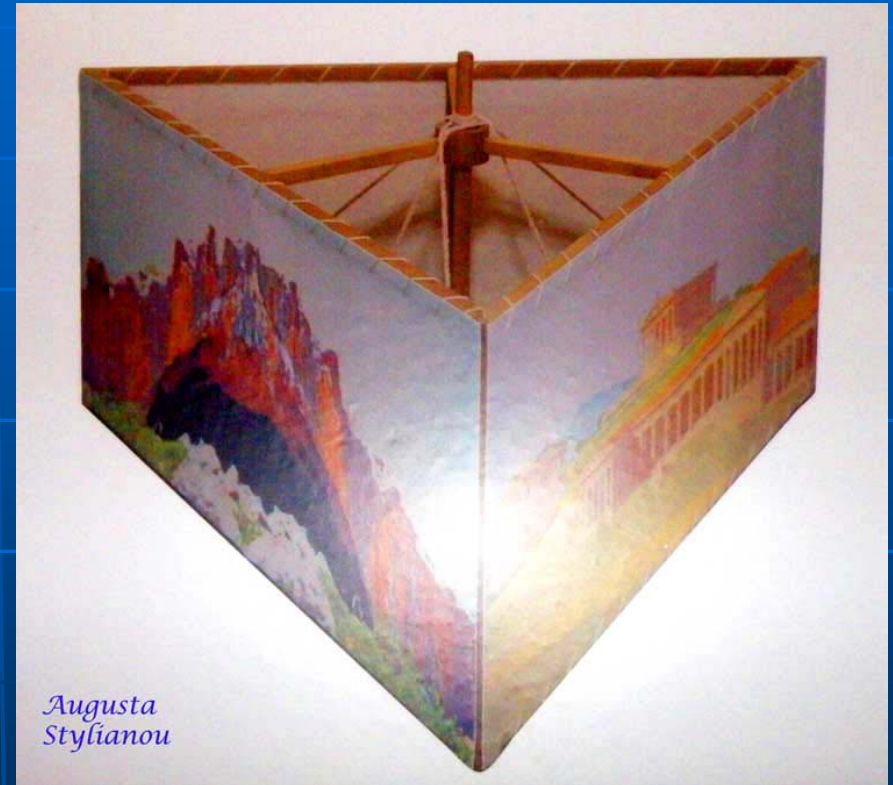
Scenic Elements of Greek Theatre

- Basket or platform that moved up or down levels of the skene (machina)

- Painted panels similar to modern flats (pinakes)
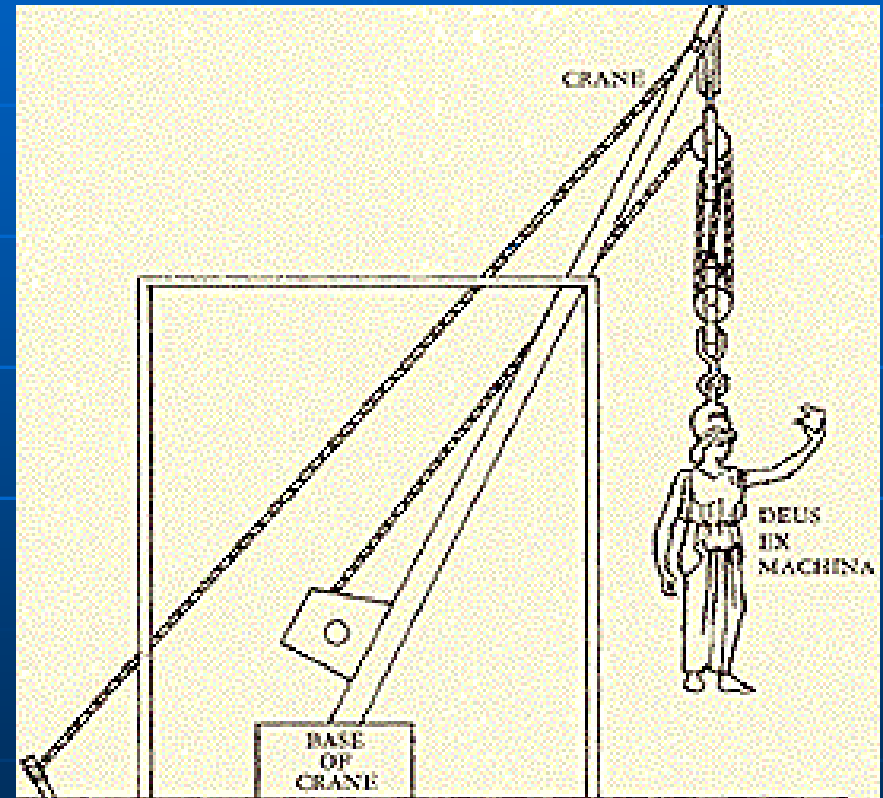
Roman Theatre

- Simple modifications of the basic Greek designs
- Compressed the 3 separate elements (auditorium, stage, stage house) of Greek Theatres into one building
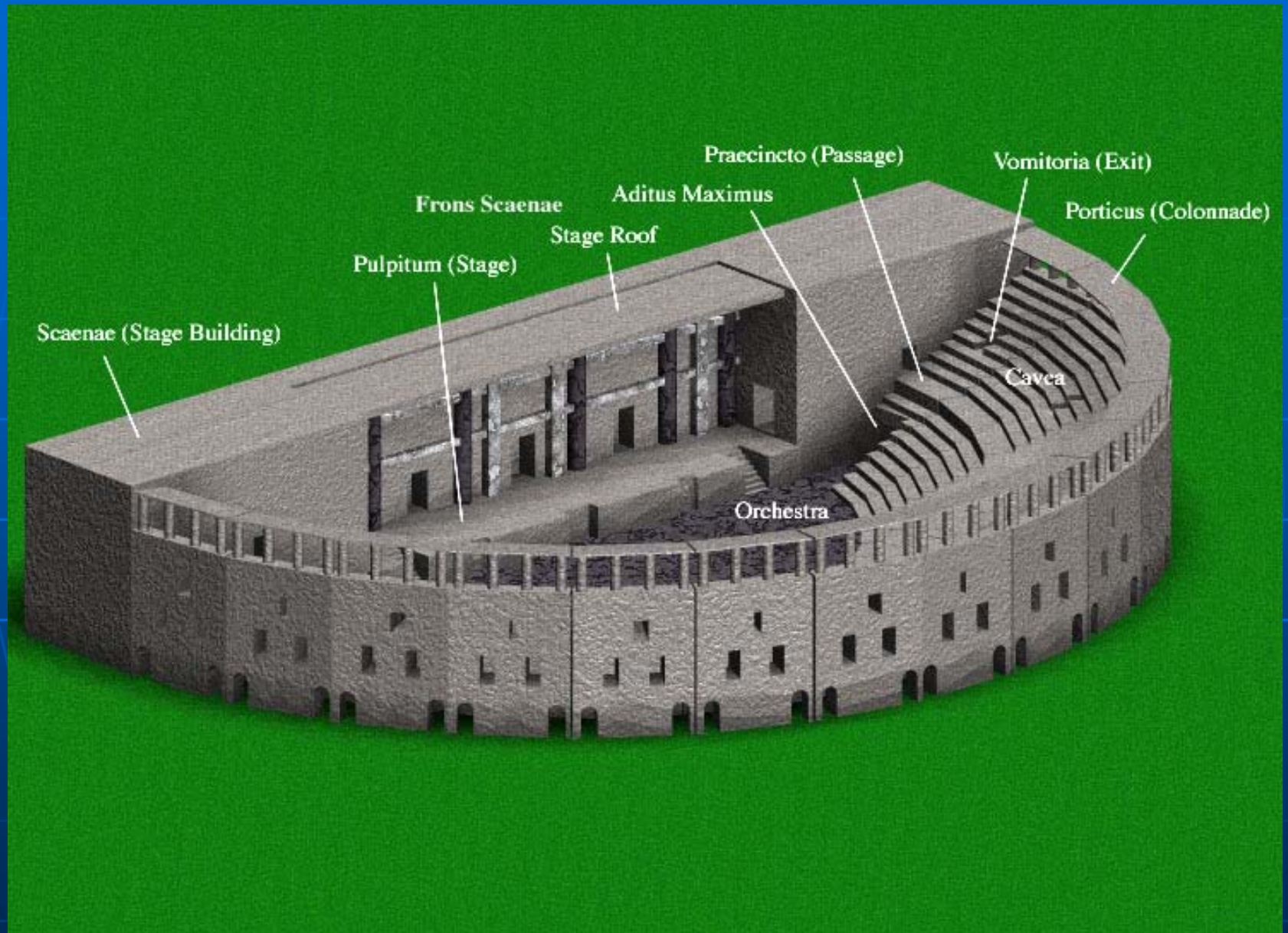- Half-cirlce instead of ¾ circle
- Built on level ground

Common Architectural Elements of Roman Theatre

- <u>Cavea</u>= auditorium, often separated from orchestra by short wall

- <u>Scaenae frons</u>= skene= stage house with an elaborately decorated single facade

ORCHESTRA

STAGE

SCENE BUILDING

GROUND PLAN OF A ROMAN THEATRE
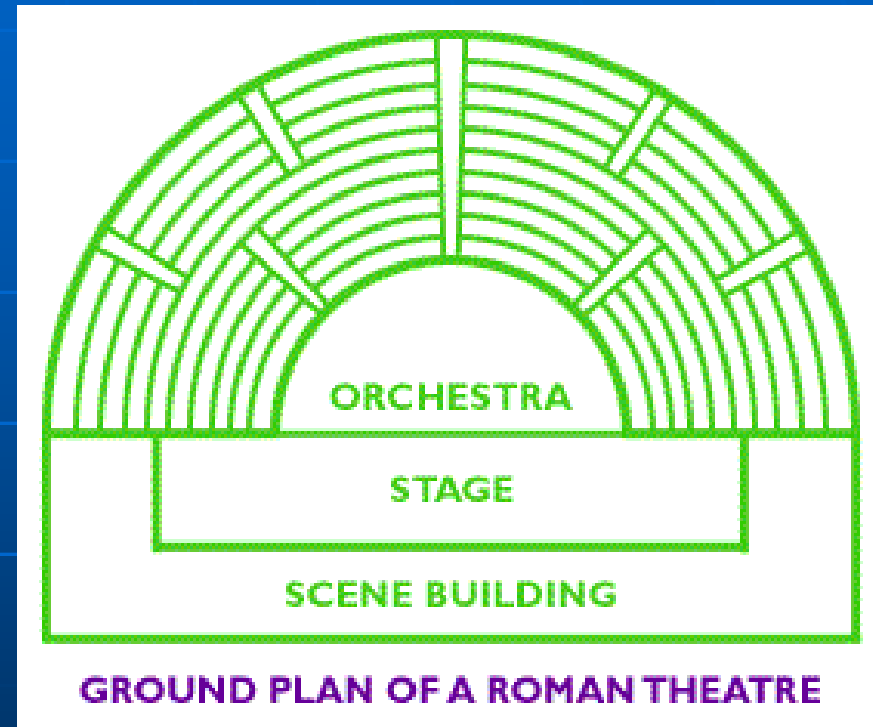
Common Architectural Elements of Roman Theatre

- Roof covering the stage from the scaenae frons to the edge of the proscenium
- Some had an awning that covered the entire seating area= Velum

Pulpitum (Stage)

Scaenae (Stage Building)

Frons Scaenae

Stage Roof

Aditus Maximus

Praecincto (Passage)

Vomitoria (Exit)

Porticus (Colonnade)

Cavea

Orchestra

Scenic Elements of Roman Theatre

- Periaktoi were painted thematically to represent tragic, comic, and satiric scenes instead of locations

- Curtains were introduced by Romans
  - Auleum=Front curtain
    - lowered into a trough or slot in the floor or raised above the stage with ropes
  - Siparium= Back curtain
    - backdrop and a masking curtain

Stage Technology of Roman Theatres

- Roman Amphitheatres, such as the Colosseum, used elevators, moving platforms, and trapdoors

- Complex moving scenery for dancing trees, rocks and other devices

The Roman Theatre at Aspendos, Turkey - Photo: T. Hines 6/15/2003
(At the time of this photograph, the lower scaenae frons was blocked by scenery for the Aspendos Internatioal Opera Festival production of *Aida*)
The skene, which is as high as the cavea, is made of regular blocks of conglomerate, except for window and door frames in limestone.
The scaenae frons has two levels, each with twenty free-standing columns arranged in squares of four around niches for statuary. The columns
of the lower level are Ionic, while those of the upper level are Corinthian.

The Fall of Rome

- AD 476- Theatres were abandoned
- For 500 years formal theatre was virtually dead
- Theatrical tradition was kept alive by bands of traveling entertainers, primarily actors and jugglers
- Performed secretly in courtyards, village squares, and temporary stage locations

Medieval Theatre

- Church opposed secular drama
- *Yet*, Church was responsible for revival of theatre through dramatized biblical scenes used to better convey their lessons and doctrines
- When they became too complex they moved them outdoors

Medieval Theatre

- ## Platform Stage-
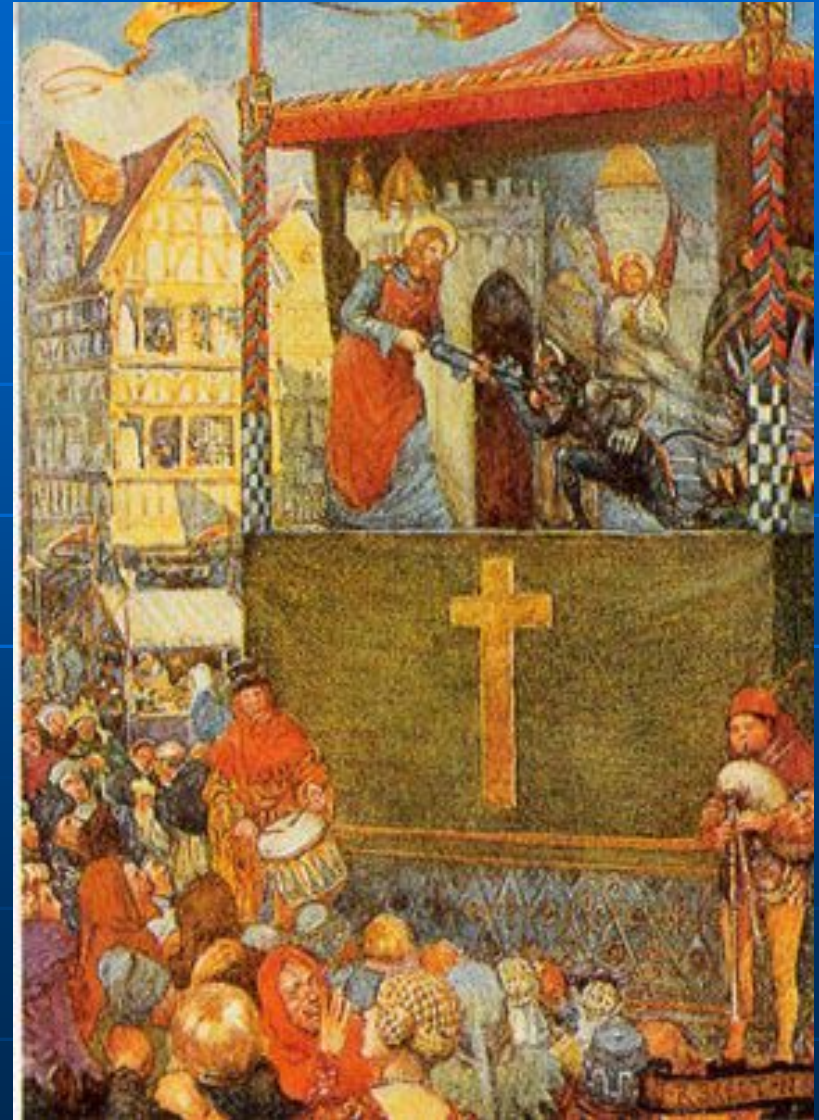 - built adjacent to the church and the audience stood in town square
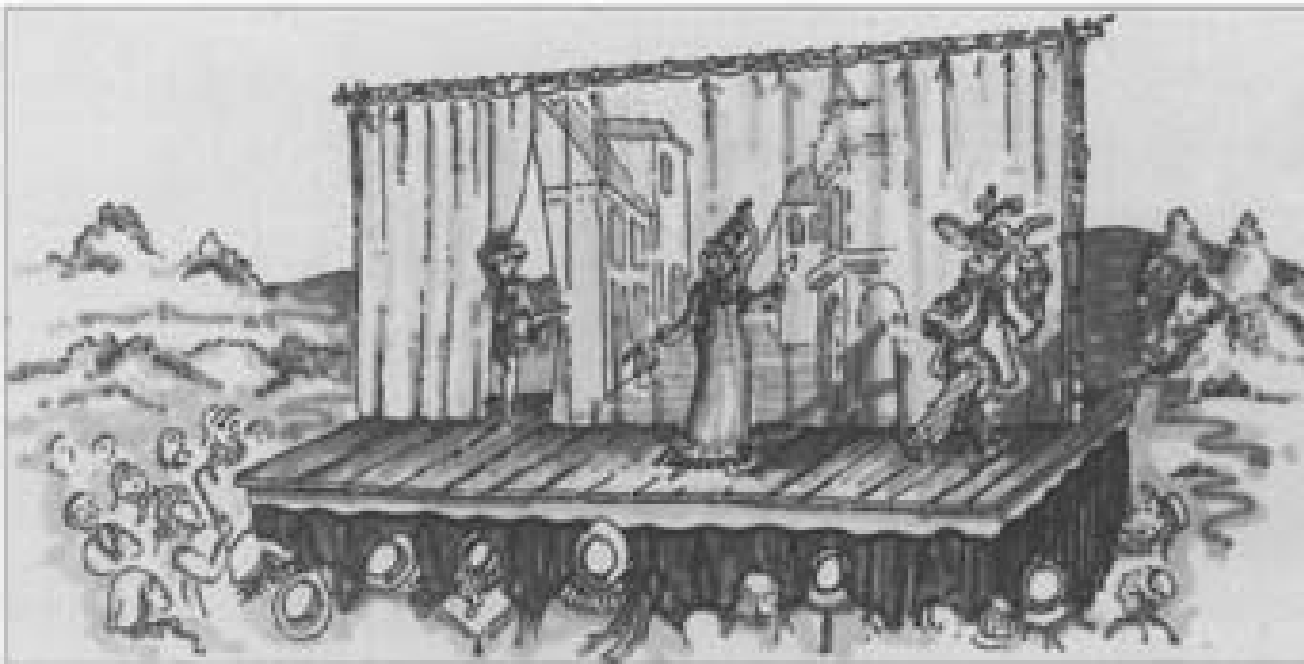

FIGURE 3.6
A platform stage.

Medievel Theatre

- **<u>Pageant Wagons</u>**
  - A platform stage on wheels
  - pulled from town to town

Scenic Elements of Medieval Theatre

- Mansions (or stations)
  - Small buildings that depicted locations appropriate to the biblical stories dramatized in the productions
  - Heaven and hell were on opposite ends of the stage
- Platea
  - common playing area in front of mansions
- Secrets
  - stage machinery, trap doors, etc.

Scenic Elements of Medieval Theatre
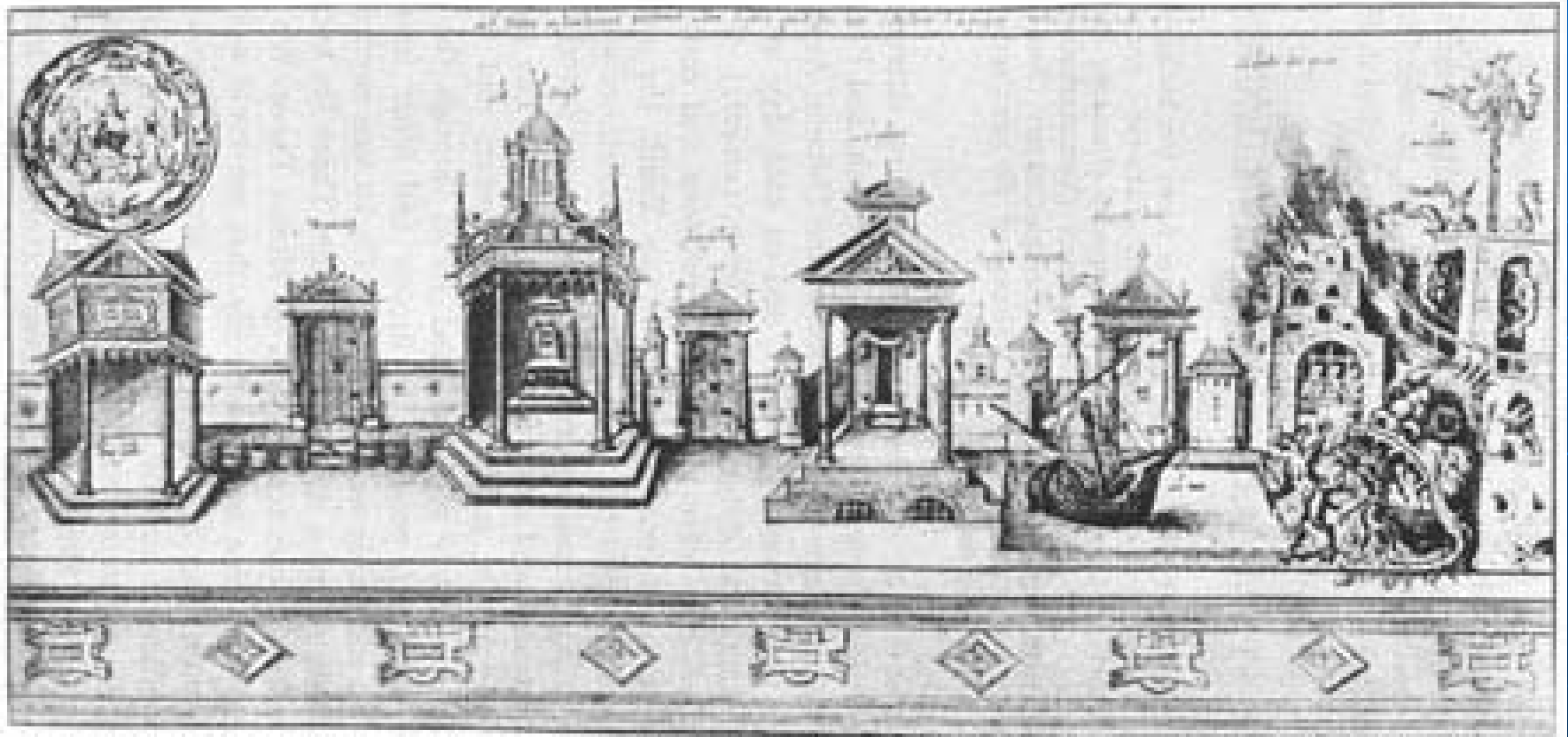
A 1547 Valenciennes set design showing Heaven (left), a Hell Mouth (right), and various places there between.

1500-1650

- Renaissance- cultural reawakening
- Theatres sprang up all over Europe
- Strong interest in classical forms and structures
  - Adopted basic shape of Greek and Roman theatres
  - Based on architectural writings of Vitruvius
 - With interesting and clever adaptations

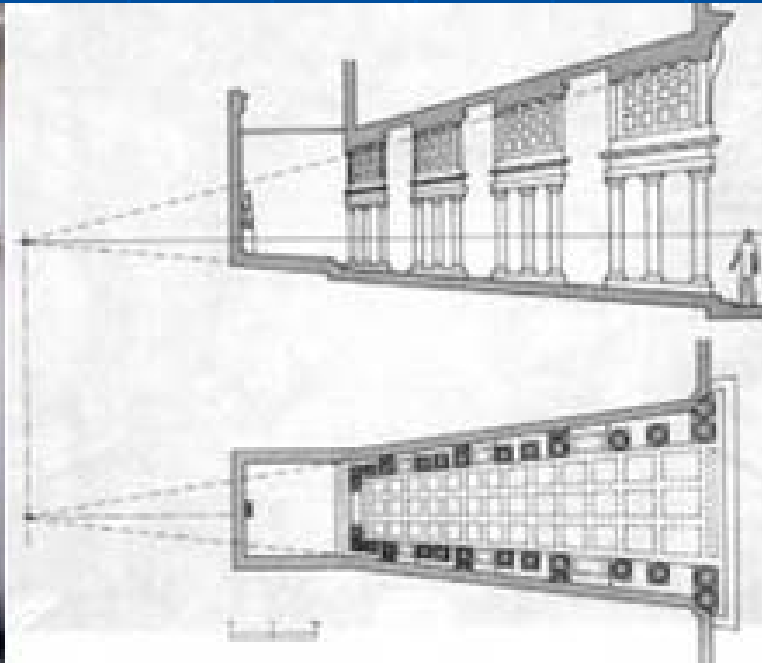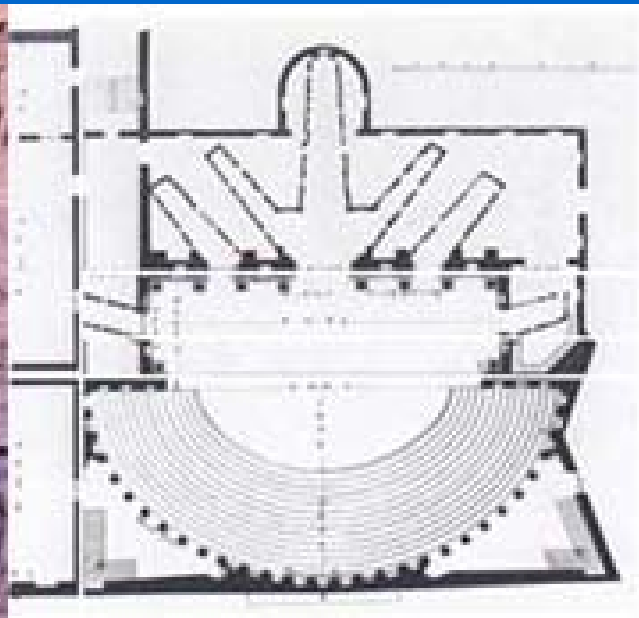# Architectural Elements of Renaissance Theatres

- Main difference=Indoor theatres
  - entire structure enclosed in one building
- Cavea was an ellipse instead of semi-circle
- Scanae frons was broken up by several arches instead being of a single wall
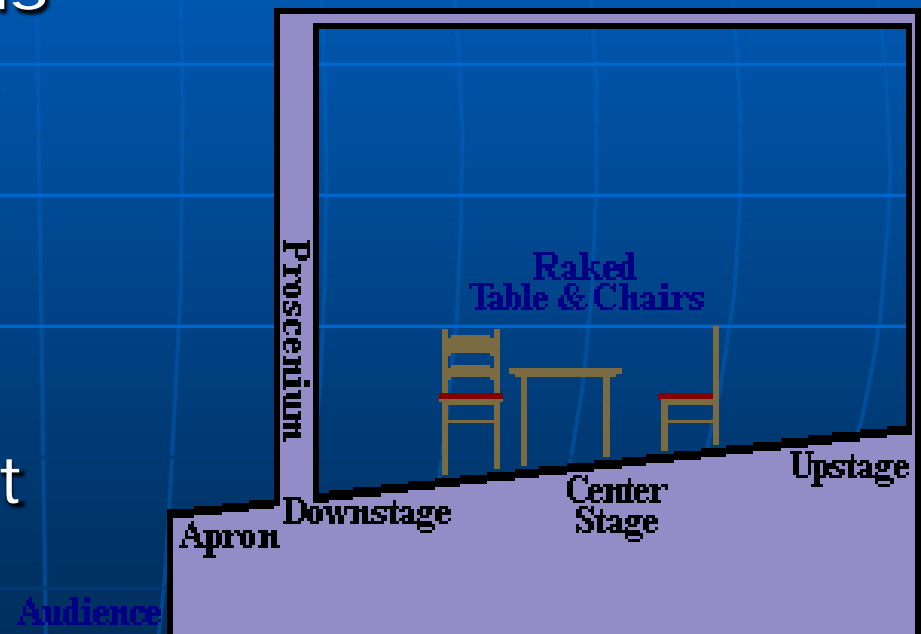
Scenic Elements of Renaissance Theatres

- Elaborate permanent sets of street scenes were built in **<u>forced perspective</u>**
  - A visual distortion technique that increases the apparent depth of an object
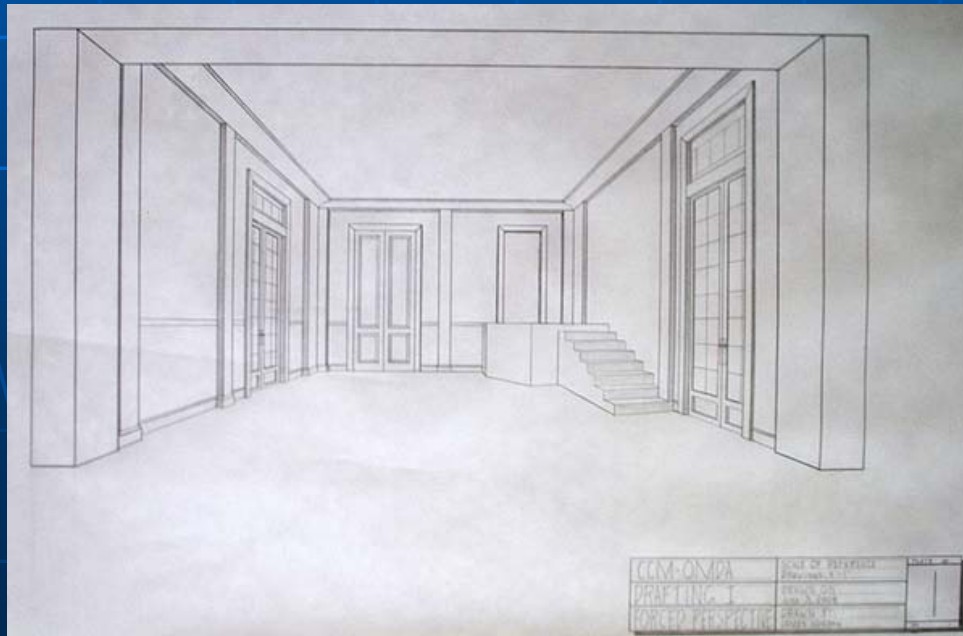
Scenic Elements of Renaissance Theatres

- **<u>Raked stage</u>** behind the arches of the scaenae frons
  - a stage floor that is higher at the back than at the front
  - The actors performed on a flat playing area in front of the raked stage

Scenic Elements of Renaissance Theatres

- Stock set
  - scenery designed to visually support a generalized location (garden, city street, palace, interior) rather than a specific one; commonly used from the Renaissance thru the early 20th century and still in use today in some theatres

- Drop
  - A large expanse of cloth, usually muslin or canvas, on which something (a landscape, sky, street, room) is painted

© Backdrops Beautiful

Scenic Elements of Renaissance Theatres

- First recorded stage lighting
- 1545, Sebastian Serlio recommended "placing candles and torches behind flasks with amber- and blue-colored water"

Elizabethan Theatre

- A different type of structure
- A number of theatres had been built just outside London by 1600
- Including Shakespeare's Globe Theatre (1599-1632)
- Basic shape was similar, differed in details
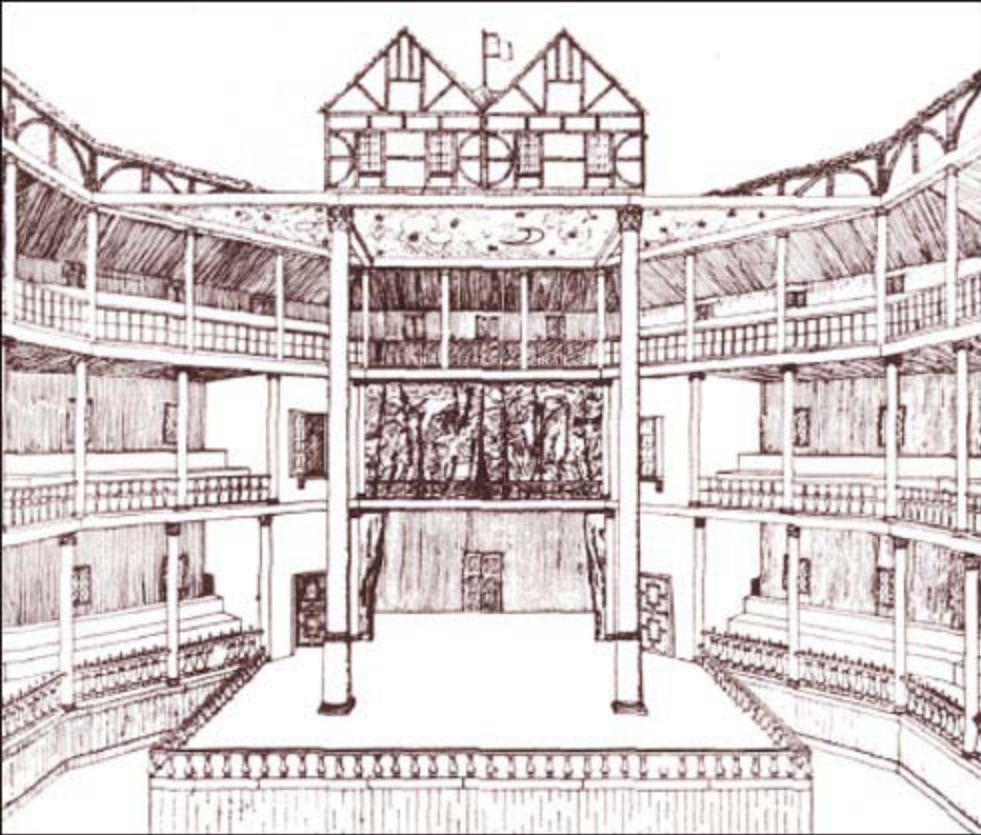
Architectural Elements of Elizabethan Theatres

- Large, open-air platform, generally raised 4-6 feet off the ground
- Surrounded by yard or pit where the lower class audience (aka groundlings) stand

Architectural Elements of Elizabethan Theatres

- Stage House structure
  - Inner below- upstage of the platform- disputed structure- curtained alcove or roofed building
  - Inner above- would be a story above the inner below
- Surrounded by the outside of the building, a 3-story structure that housed galleries and private boxes for wealthier patrons and nobles
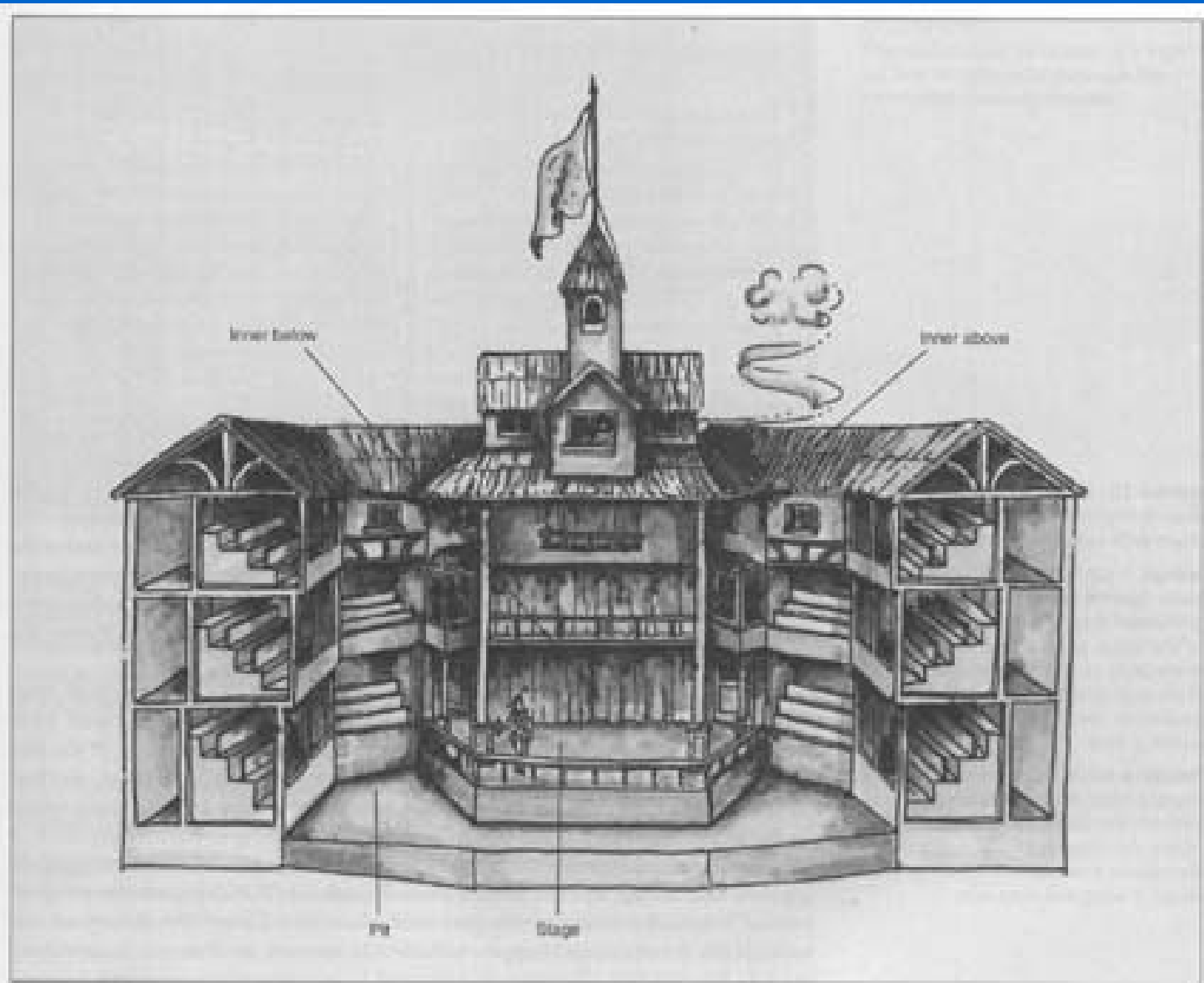
Inner below

Inner above

Pit

Stage

FIGURE 3.9
The stage of the Globe Theatre.

theory to which you subscribe, the *inner above* was an area above the *inner below*.

Scenic Elements of Elizabethan Theatres

- Little scenery was used besides the stage house

- Records indicate a number of props, rocks, trees, etc.

- Stage machinery did not evolve
  - Still used effects for flying gods, boats moving across stage, smoke, fire, clouds, and sound

- Candles and reflectors were used to light the stage so the audience could see the actors

1650-1900

- Theatres were primarily rectangular
- Stage set at one end of building
- Raked stage framed by proscenium arch and the apron thrust toward the auditorium
- Apron- the flat extension of the stage floor that projects from the proscenium arch towards the audience
  - Majority of action takes place

FIGURE 3.10
A typical Restoration theatre.

Scenic Elements of Theatres 1650-1900

- Continued as visual background for the play to take place in front of
- Painted in perspective on moveable drops, wings, and borders
- Raked stage added sense of depth

Scenic Elements of Theatres 1650-1900

- Wings- (1) tall cloth covered frames or narrow, unframed drops placed on either side of the stage, parallel with the proscenium arch, to prevent the audience from seeing backstage; were usually painted to match the scene on the upstage drop. (2) The off-stage space adjacent to the stage in a proscenium arch theatre.

Scenic Elements of Theatres 1650-1900

- Borders- Wide, short, framed or unframed cloth drops suspended to prevent the audience from seeing above the stage; normally match the decorative treatment of wings and drops in wing and drop sets

Scenic Elements of Kabuki Theatres

- Japanese Kabuki Theatre
- 1763-Elevator trap
  - A small elevator used to shift small pieces of scenery, or an actor, from the basement underneath the stage to the stage or vice versa. Usually no larger than 4x4 or 4x6 feet. Also known as a disappearance trap.
- 1753-Elevator stage
  - A large elevator used to shift large scenic elements or whole sets between the area beneath the stage and the stage

Scenic Elements of Kabuki Theatres

- 1758-Revolving stages
  - A large, circular disk that pivots on its central axis. Built into the stage floor as part of the theatre's permanent equipment.
- 1827-Concentric revolving stages
  - A revolving stage with, usually, 2 sections, one rotating inside the other

Lighting in Theatres 1650-1900

- Gas Lighting- 1792
  - Brighter and cleaner burning than candles, easier to control intensity
- Limelight- 1816
  - A sharp jet of flame focused against a block of limestone, limestone incandesces, add mirrored reflector
- First electric light was the carbon arc
  - Produced when electricity arcs between 2 electrodes
- By 1860- Paris Opera
  - Projector, followspot and several effects using carbon arc
- Edison's incandescent lamp- 1879
  - By 1900 almost all theatres used electricity

Twentieth Century

- More realistic and naturalistic type of drama
- As productions became more realistic, the shape of theatres changed to support this form
- Settings became environments for the plays rather than backgrounds
- Action of play moved from the apron to the stage, apron depth became shorter

Twentieth Century

- The Little Theatre movement in the US, 1920-30s
  - Move away from Broadway for artists to hone their craft out of the critics' eye
- "Found" Spaces- intimacy with the audience
  - Existing barns, churches, feed stores, libraries, grocery stores
  - No proscenium arches- led to thrust and arena stages