

Words, words, words ... [Hamlet II,ii] reviews books on theatre that have a connection to the Southeast or may be of special interest to SETC members. Scott Phillips, an associate professor at Auburn University, edits this regular column. If you have a book for review, please send to: SETC, Book Editor, 1175 Revolution Mill Drive, Studio 14, Greensboro, NC 27405.

## **Outdoor Theatre Facilities: A Guide to Planning and Building Outdoor Theatres**

by Michael Hardy, Christopher Hardy, Robert Long, Barry Moore, Scott Parker and David Weiss

2014; Institute of Outdoor Theatre; [www.outdoor-theatre.org](http://www.outdoor-theatre.org)

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by Frank Mohler

The changing world of outdoor theatre is examined in a new book published by the Institute of Outdoor Theatre (formerly the Institute of Outdoor Drama), the member organization for Shakespeare festivals, historical dramas, religious dramas, renaissance festivals, dramatic and musical theatre and other theatrical organizations that perform in outdoor settings.

*Outdoor Theatre Facilities: A Guide to Planning and Building Outdoor Theatres* is written by a team of architects, theatre consultants and theatre managers with many years of experience in the planning or operation of outdoor theatre venues: Michael Hardy (executive director of the Institute of Outdoor Theatre), Christopher Hardy (landscape architect, SWA Group, San Francisco), Robert Long (theatre consultant, Theatre Consultants Collaborative), Barry Moore (architect and senior associate, Gensler, Houston), Scott Parker (director emeritus of the Institute of Outdoor Theatre) and David Weiss (theatre consultant, director and designer of many outdoor productions and theatres). They acknowledge that their advice on design of outdoor theatres has changed in recent years due to a variety of factors, including changing audience expectations, increased entertainment competition, the rise of digital content and weather concerns.

The authors begin with chapters discussing the physical site, front-of-house and backstage support areas and equipment necessary in an outdoor venue. The most valuable portion of the book is an in-depth look at three models of outdoor theatres: those with an open stage and an open amphitheatre, those with a roofed stage and an open amphitheatre, and those with a roofed stage and a partially or fully roofed amphitheatre. Each model is illustrated with a conceptual plan and section for a 1,000-seat amphitheatre and color illustrations of existing examples. The advantages and disadvantages of each model are discussed in relation to the type of productions to be presented.

The most important recommendation made in the book is that those considering the construction or renovation of amphitheatres should consider a roofed stage and a fully or partially roofed seating area because the day of the completely open outdoor venue is ending. The authors note that the open stage and amphitheatre, typical of the historical outdoor dramas of the mid-20th century, has problems surviving in today's entertainment environment. These theatres were often designed for specific productions, are not easily adapted to other entertainment forms, and are subject to the uncertainty of the weather, which can cause cancellation of performances and



*The authors recommend covering the stage and all or part of the seating. Iroquois Amphitheater (above) in Louisville, KY, has a partial roof.*

loss of income. The authors note that covering all or part of the amphitheatre protects the audience (and box office income). In addition, the covered stage models provide protection for the performers and allow for higher production values with offstage space and greater lighting and sound possibilities.

The book also takes the reader through the design and construction process for an outdoor theatre, from evaluation of the needs of the productions that are to be presented in each model through the opening of the new or renovated facility.

Although *Outdoor Theatre Facilities* does not eliminate the eventual need for an architect and theatre consultants, it offers valuable advice to theatre companies, community organizations, city planners or anyone interested in planning a new or renovated outdoor theatre. The sections of the book dealing with the design and construction process would be of value to those planning any type of theatre. ■



Frank Mohler is a past President of SETC and a professor emeritus at Appalachian State University, where he taught scenic and lighting design and theatre history. He is currently involved in the renovation of a 1938 movie theatre into a live performance venue in downtown Boone, NC.

## **Outdoor Theatre Facilities, a book review**

A unique new book, *Outdoor Theatre Facilities*, is an invaluable guide for any theatre student, educator, or practitioner and should be especially treasured by those who plan, build, create and manage outdoor theatres. Published by the Institute of Outdoor Theatre and authored by Michael Hardy, David Weiss, Robert Long, Barry Moore, Christopher Hardy and Scott Parker, this savvy manuscript offers the collective wisdom of longtime theatre consultants who have labored on-site, in Board rooms, and through each and every step of the creative process.

With sections on performance planning, site design principles, facility management requirements, performance equipment, and designing and building outdoor theatres, the book comes complete with five models of outdoor theatres, photographs, diagrams and special planning tools for consideration.

The authors include theatre consultants, design specialists, landscape and building architects and two Shakespeare Theatre Association members, Scott J. Parker, Director Emeritus of the Institute of Outdoor Theatre and Michael Hardy, Director, Institute of Outdoor Theatre.                      --Jim Volz

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