

19th Century Women of Theatre

Throughout the 19th Century, the popularity of actresses in the theatre continued to grow along with controversies. The variety of theatrical endeavors also grew. Along with standard plays, there were operas, ballets and various kinds of dance entertainments, burlesques, circuses, and early vaudevillian style productions.

19th Century women of theatre were involved in every capacity of entertainment both in England and on the continent. In the theatre, new styles appeared such as melodrama, realism, and naturalism. On a not so light note, the popularity of imitating Negro music and dance through blackface would pack the houses. Negro actors and actresses found it difficult to gain respectability in America but found appreciative audiences in Europe.

At the end of the 19th Century, the works of Anton Chekhov and Constantine Stanislavski would transform theatre, creating the popular “method acting” that dominated much of the 20th Century. One of the most popular plays of all time was the adaptation of Uncle Tom’s Cabin in 1853. This play afforded several strong women’s roles for many women of theatre. It would be translated into dozens of languages and be performed all over the world well into the 20th Century. At one time, copies of this play out sold the Bible.

Many of the actresses listed who lived near the end of the 19th Century continued to have careers into the 20th Century but we have only listed their achievements until 1900.