



Peter Brook: A Biography

Michael Kustow

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Peter Brook is one of the world's legendary theater directors. His productions are a byword for imagination, energy, and innovation. From his ground-breaking production of *Marat/Sade*, to his "white box" *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to his monumental staging of *The Mahabharata* and beyond, Brook has always been the pioneer of what a director and a company of actors can conjure out of an empty stage. In this first authoritative biography, arising out of an association and friendship with Brook over forty years, Michael Kustow tells the fascinating and revealing story of a man whose life has been a never-ending quest.

Born into a Russian émigré family in London, Brook has been fascinated by theater and film since childhood. He studied at Oxford, where he made a film of Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* and was almost sent down during his turbulent undergraduate years. As a brilliant young man influenced by the theatrical visionary Gordon Craig, he turned his hand to Shakespeare, opera, new French drama, and mainstream comedy. Following Craig's philosophy, Brook began to search for a simplicity, harmony, and beauty that would incorporate all aspects of the stage production under the control of one person. He also began the lifelong search for authenticity on the stage, a search that led him around the world from London to New York, to his legendary Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris, to Broadway and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. It was in Paris, in the 1970s, that he attempted to discover a universal language of theater with an international group of actors. This collaboration resulted in a series of visually spectacular and innovative shows including *The Ik*, *The Conference of the Birds*, and *The Mahabharata*.

In his long and influential career, he worked with some of the world's greatest actors and writers including Glenda Jackson, Paul Scofield, John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier, Irene Worth, Jeanne Moreau, Peter Weiss, and Truman Capote. His films, such as *Lord of the Flies*, *Moderato Cantabile*, *King Lear* (with Paul Scofield), *The Beggar's Opera*, and the film of *Marat/Sade* moved the camera and the screen to borders they had not reached before. His book *The Empty Space* continues to be one of the classic works on theater and drama in the Western canon and his memoir, *Threads of Time*, gave us a glimpse into his personal development. In this biography, based on extensive interviews with Peter Brook and many of the actors, writers, producers, and directors he's worked with throughout his life, Michael Kustow goes to the heart of Brook's theater, his self-searching and his unceasing desire to produce work that redefines theater and life.

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