

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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NATIONAL GALLERY SALUTES KENNEDY CENTER OPENING WITH THEATER ARTS EXHIBITION FROM LA SCALA

WASHINGTON, D.C. August 31, 1971. To salute the opening of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, an exhibition of stage designs from the Museo Teatrale alla Scala, Milan, will go on view September 10 at the National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition, entitled La Scala: 400 Years of Stage Design is being sponsored by the Italian Ambassador to the United States, His Excellency Egidio Ortona. On view at the National Gallery through October 17, the collection is being circulated by the International Exhibitions Foundation.

On exhibit in the United States for the first time will be 125 Italian watercolors and drawings of stage designs by such artists as Ferdinando Galli Bibiena, Filippo Juvarra, the Galli-aris, Quarenghi, Ferrario and others. The designs range from 18th-century fantasies of rococo palaces and gardens through the romantic scenery of the quasi-historical grand operas to the minutely detailed realism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

(more)

There will also be 20 figurini (costume designs), six teatrini (small model stage sets) from the 18th century, and 24 posters announcing opera performances. The examples of theater art have been selected from the rich collection of the Museo Teatrale alla Scala by its director, Maestro Giampiero Tintori.

The toy-like model stage sets were made from hand-colored 18th-century Italian prints which were specially designed to be cut out and assembled as models.

Many of the designs in the exhibition were prepared specifically for the Teatro alla Scala, the world-famous opera house in Milan. Founded in 1778, La Scala became known as the 'pilot theater' of Italy, the country where the art of stage design was most highly developed during the 17th and 18th centuries.

After exhibition at the National Gallery the La Scala collection will travel to the Indianapolis Museum of Art, the Detroit Institute of the Arts, and the University Art Museum at the University of Texas at Austin.

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TITLE PAGE

"STAGE DESIGNS"

From the Museo Teatrale alla Scala, Milan

Catalogue by Maestro Giampiero Tintori

Introduction by Mario Monteverdi

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"STAGE DESIGNS FROM THE
MUSEO TEATRALE ALLA SCALA"

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INTRODUCTION

The history of stage design must be reconstructed from the many documents which have come down to us, from reproductions and models of famous sets and costumes, from sketches and engravings, and especially from the original drawings which were the starting point for many memorable productions.

In the 17th and 18th centuries stage design was above all an Italian art. It had already developed considerably when, towards the end of the 17th century, a family of Bolognese artists called Bibiena began to give a new character and a new purpose to the visual side of the theatre, and of the operatic theatre in particular.

The introduction of the veduta ad angolo, or diagonal view, gave the stage a depth or perspective which lent an appearance of reality to theatrical "fiction", even though this was reality of a particular kind, in that it was real on the stage, as a spectacle, and was not intended to be a direct image of life.

This represented a great step forward in comparison with what had gone before, when fiction in the theatre had been merely a form of escapism into a world of fantasy, with no attempt at putting into practice principles of realism, or even of verisimilitude. Above all, the device gave the spectacle a raison d'etre of its own, an esthetic, if not a moral justification, and a heightened expressiveness.

Many factors had helped over the years to direct this evolution of stage design towards new horizons. Chief among these was the establishment of "public" theatres managed by impresarios, where previously there had been only court theatres. This new era was born with the opening at the San Cassian Theatre in Venice in 1637 of

the first season of opera open to a paying public. Naturally, the scenery conformed to current fashions. Nevertheless, the new type of audience was one which wanted not only to see the performance but to believe in it - even though they too were satisfying a need to escape into an illusionary world - and this fact helped to bring about the fundamental conditions necessary for drastic innovations in the field of stage design.

Ferdinando Galli, called Bibiena (Bologna 1656-1743) was the founder of a prolific family of theatrical architect-designers. He accepted the challenge of the changes which were taking place in the theatre and put them to use, creating a relationship between auditorium and stage by playing on a variety of viewpoints rather than on a fixed and invariable spatial unit. With this technique he broke away from certain concepts belonging to the baroque tradition and opened up the way to new technical solutions of formal and aesthetic problems concerning the use of space. Here we have the first signs of transition from Baroque to Rococo, albeit contained within the boundaries of a rather intellectual and mannerist vision.

With such an abundance of complex structures, and so large a stock of perspective effects, both solid and painted, stage design developed into an art which was more than just a frame for the dramatic action: it was a spectacle in itself, a vision of splendid halls, great courtyards with colonnades, piazzas and streets opening out in different directions and converging on a single vanishing point, sumptuous interiors: these were the surroundings created for heroes who moved in a world entirely outside the reality of human life. The characters in these operas, ballets and dramas had feelings and passions far removed from those of the audience; they existed in a completely different world of their own. Yet the audience could in a sense believe in that world: it gave them the illusion of something apart, something more grandiose and astonishing than everyday reality could offer. This point becomes clear when we look at the engravings and, to an even greater degree, at the valuable drawings which

have come down to us.

The exhibition contains only one example of 16th century stage design, a rather remarkable engraving showing a fixed set like that of the Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza designed by Palladio and completed by Scamozzi. The rest of the drawings bear witness to the richly ornate style of Ferdinando Galli named Bibiena and of his descendants and followers.

Ferdinando's son Giuseppe (Parma 1696-Berlin 1757) retained the same ideals and to a great extent the same forms as his father, revealing a predilection for the ornate which almost seems to mark a return to the Baroque, but sometimes displaying a virtuosity that anticipates the Rococo style. The other son Antonio (Parma 1700-Milan 1774) and even more so the grandson Carlo (Vienna 1728-Florence 1787), Giuseppe's son, heralded a new concept of stage design, with their hasty sketches, broken lines and novel use of perspective.

This new concept was already evident in the work of an important architect Filippo Juvarra (Messina 1676-Madrid 1736), whose scenic ideas as revealed in his drawings seem to imply that the characters who were to inhabit that artificial world were endowed with feelings transcending humanity. Yet the audience was able to conceive the reality of such abstract passions, and through them experienced emotions which were more than just visual.

Other stage designers of that period have left us interesting examples of designs for sets, or sometimes just capricci inspired by the artists' theatrical ideals. These examples show how the Bibiena tradition led gradually to the fresher and lighter forms of a century which began in Arcadia and ended in Enlightenment. Prospero Zanicelli (Reggio Emilia 1698-1772) and Pietro Righini (Parma 1683 - Naples 1742), the former with his soft, luminous effects, the latter with his use of strong illusions of perspective, were among the most important artists instrumental in paving the way for the age of Rococo.

Rococo, Enlightenment, Romanticism, Neoclassicism -- these are the terms which were soon to be applied one on top of another to a period that was so full of new experiences, so rich in contradictions, so bursting with possibilities that in many cases it is impossible to disentangle the various threads that go to make up a single drawing.

For example, in Giovan Battista Piranesi (Mogliano di Mestre, Venice 1720-Rome 1778) we find traces of all tendencies: the Venetian elegance of some of his lines might derive from a rococo training, but his powerful, massive sense of architecture is potentially neoclassical. It is a Neoclassicism, however, colored by that picturesque taste for ruins which was an ingredient of pure Romanticism, and tempered with the strong critical sense to be found in the rationalism of the Enlightenment.

The gap which we have already mentioned between "invented" images and the reality of life was rapidly growing smaller: fantasy was no longer merely a means of escapism but a characteristic human activity. It is in this kind of unreality that man seeks the roots of what is contained in his innermost self, something which has its own interior truth as real as the truth of the world around him.

While Piranesi and his closest imitators, such as Vincenzo Mazzi (?d. Bologna 1790), envisaged the problem in terms of imaginary theatre rather than designs for real sets, the Galliari family were artists who worked entirely in the theatre itself. Here too we have a veritable line of artists: three brothers, Bernardino (Andorno 1707-1794), Fabrizio (Andorno 1709-Treviglio 1790), Giovanni Antonio (Andorno 1714-Milan 1783), and their sons, respectively Giovannino (? 1746/7-Treviglio 1818), Giuseppino (Andorno 1752-Milan 1817) and Gaspare (Milan 1761-1823). They were born over a period which covers the space of three generations, though there were in fact only two generations of them. While the distance separating the art of Fabrizio, Bernardino and Giovanni Antonio (we list them in order of historical and aesthetic

importance) and Giuseppino, their direct heir in ideals and technique; is the normal distance which separates and at the same time links father and son, the spirit which animates Gaspare's art reaches much farther. His work, in spite of marginal traces of Neoclassicism, already contains the themes which were to characterize the development of stage design during the course of the 19th century.

Giovannino's position is rather special and must be considered in relation to his openly expressed support of the French Revolution. His attitude enabled him to accept the solemn, commemorative style of "official" art which followed that great upheaval.

The Galliari family, then, more than any other artists represent the development of artistic style during the course of an era, illustrating in their work the great transformations which were taking place. Mention must also be made of Bartolomeo Verona (Andorno 1744-Berlin 1813), son of Elisabetta Galliari and nephew of the first three Galliari brothers. He adopted the artistic methods he had learnt from early childhood and later disseminated the same ideas in Germany.

Fabrizio did not change the repertoire much - it still consisted of royal palaces and temples, halls and courtyards, colonnades and piazzas - but he altered the relationship between setting and protagonist. The latter had at last reassumed normal dimensions; he could be magnified to the proportions of a hero, but only if he possessed those qualities which can lead a normal man to heroism. The manner in which the environment is presented in Fabrizio's sets reveals an awareness of the increased sense of human responsibility attributed to the theatrical character; slightly less so in Bernardino whose aesthetic worth is only just inferior to that of Fabrizio, and again to a lesser degree in Giovanni Antonio who in any case was chiefly a practical scene-painter. The sets were still courtly in style, and yet one is aware of a lively sense of human participation in them, and of the desire to single out hidden accords between the architectural rhythms and the vibrations of human emotion. This

desire shows an artistic vision which was capable of selecting the pure essentials of 18th century naturalism, free of all rhetoric.

What was taking place was the passage from the use of illusion which until then had given the theatre its reputation of mere artifice, to the kind of fiction which came steadily closer to the reality of human emotions. The theatre began to represent not "another" reality, but a certain aspect of our own reality, albeit somewhat distorted and modified by a degree of fantasy which was required for the sake of the spectacle.

A direct result of this transition was the appearance of the scena quadro, a set having the minimum amount of built units indispensable to the action, and consisting chiefly of painted flats. Pictorial illusion corresponded to the illusionary nature of the environment, but the action nevertheless took place in an atmosphere of complete verisimilitude. Elaborate devices were abandoned; even the use of painted scenery intended to create illusionary effects no longer seemed artificial, when compared with the complicated machinery which had been used previously.

The drawing acquired increasing importance as a form of expression in its own right. Light and color came to be used in a design to express the atmosphere of the natural and human world in which the dramatic action was to unfold. The designs executed by the Galliari family have a remarkable fascination of their own, and seem to breathe the same air as the paintings of the Venetian vedutisti, in spite of the fact that the Galliari's knowledge of that school was gained not directly, but through contact with Venetian painters working in Piedmont and Lombardy.

It was Giuseppino who retained the main features of his father's work, with due allowance made for the passing of time. Gaspare, while continuing to draw on the traditional repertoire of themes, at the same time managed to discover hidden meanings in them, using them in a far more domestic and intimate light. His drawings

still contain "galleries", "magnificent setting", both Gothic and Classical architecture (illustrating the dual influence of Romanticism and Neoclassicism), but from time to time we find "exterior of farmstead, with figures", the entrance of an inn in a precisely identifiable setting (in this case, the Grand Canal in Venice); then we have those montuose, which are typical Alpine scenes, imaginary perhaps, but inspired by a real feeling for nature.

The reference to Venice brings us automatically to artists from Venetia who, like Giuseppe Bernardino Bison (Palmanova 1762-1844), had no more than irregular contact with stage design as an art but who nevertheless may be numbered among the most important and able personalities in the history of stage design.

Another is Pietro Gonzaga (Belluno 1751-St. Petersburg 1831) who, after a period of intense activity at La Scala in Milan went to Russia where he lived until his death. He and Francesco Fontanesi (Reggio Emilia 1751-1795) may be considered as the artists who marked the transition from 18th century Enlightenment, in which rococo and neoclassical themes are found side by side, to the spirit of Romanticism of the early 19th century. Naturally, the signs of early Romanticism which are very apparent in the work of Gonzaga, exist only in potential in Fontanesi. It must be pointed out that Gonzaga's long stay at the Tsar's court (from 1794 onwards) resulted in the reappearance in his work of certain courtly, neoclassical features. Nevertheless, he retained an exceptional feeling for nature, rooted in the traditions of Venetian painting, together with a sense of the fantastic which brings to mind Piranesi.

When Gonzaga arrived in Russia he found someone who was almost a fellow-countryman - Giacomo Quarenghi (Valle Imagna 1744-St. Petersburg 1817) - who, having been born in Bergamo, was also a subject of the Republic of Venice. Quarenghi, an architect first and foremost, retained in his paintings and perspective drawings, which resemble designs for stage sets, that clear-cut spatial vision derived from the

Enlightenment which he translated into severely neoclassical terms, enlivening it, however, with the residual elegance of the 18th century.

Between the last years of the 18th century and the early part of the 19th, Italian stage design - or rather, that at La Scala, for the Milanese theatre was the guiding light in this field - adhered strictly to neoclassical ideals. The reason for this was not only that Neoclassicism was the generally accepted taste at the time, but more particularly because of the current political and social conditions in Milan resulting from the events of the French Revolution. Milan had become in turn capital of the Cisalpine Republic and of the Kingdom of Italy ruled by Eugene Beauharnais. The innumerable satellite states created by Napoleon when he seated himself on the imperial throne were characterized by neo-aristocratic ambitions. It was the odd situation of a revolution which led to the dispensation of new titles of nobility, to the wearing of uniforms studded with crosses and medals and to the growth of a military caste, bourgeois and lower class in origin but showing a readiness to don indiscriminately the dress of Roman consuls, senators and tribunes; a situation requiring a kind of art which was aristocratic, classical, heroic and courtly, far removed from the dramatic human dignity of David and from the authentic aristocracy and innate refinement one finds in the works of Ingres: an art that relied on facile and suggestive exterior effects.

This conception of art lent itself readily to expression in theatrical terms and it was during this period that the Teatro alla Scala became the "pilot theatre" of Italy, not only because of the quality of its singers and actors, but also because of the care with which its productions were staged - from an aesthetic and dramatic point of view. The political changes brought about by the Congress of Vienna did not greatly alter conditions in the theatre, since "official" taste was neoclassical, and remained so. However, perhaps some change was slowly taking place in people's feelings and, side by side with Classicism, certain features of Romanticism began to

make their presence felt, with ever increasing force.

It was this atmosphere which prevailed during the lifetime of Paolo Landriani (Milan 1757-1839) and Giovanni Perego (Milan 1783-1817). They were typical exponents of neoclassical art at La Scala, where stage design had been born with the Galliari family and flourished with Gonzaga. Let us leave aside for the moment Alessandro Sanquirico and the lesser artist Antonio Basoli, since their work contains new elements destined to be developed into a style; this style was a determining factor in the 19th century in the synthesis of Neoclassicism and Romanticism, which foreshadowed what we might call the "Verdian" designers. Landriani and Perego, however, are really representative of neoclassical stage design.

Undoubtedly Landriani was an important artist; basing his ideas firmly on a theory which scrupulously respected the principles of Neoclassicism, he became the most typical exponent of a trend, marked though that trend may have been by a degree of inflexibility and an innate inability to overcome certain academic limitations. Perego was able to raise these tendencies to a plane of greater poetic intensity and, in fact, reveals in his drawings certain instinctive qualities which theoretical principles could not altogether suffocate. Nevertheless, Perego was, and still is, invariably placed in the mainstream of Neoclassicism by those who insist on pigeonholing every artist.

In fact, only official Neoclassicism continued along these rigid lines, because certain deeper, more durable values overstepped the boundaries of school, managing to co-exist with other and sometimes very different artistic trends.

This was the case with the work of Alessandro Sanquirico (Milan 1777-1849), designer at La Scala from 1806-1832, and from 1817 the "resident stage designer" at that theatre, the most important in Milan. His work represents a synthesis of all features of stage design between the last years of the 18th century and the first part-

in fact, the first half - of the 19th century. Early on in his career he managed to reconcile the academic manner with that fresh, lively spirit which he had inherited from the Galliari family. Later he infused into classical forms a sense of monumental grandeur, at the same time tempering them with an exceptional feeling of space and light. His flexibility allowed him to assimilate the romantic trends which were opposing with increasing vigor what had become the crystalline rigidity of classical design.

Sanquirico, then, was able to combine the solemn and stately harmony inspired by Graeco-Roman art (and sometimes by Renaissance art) with a taste for mystery and the picturesque derived from reminiscences of the Middle Ages, or from the pathos which was beginning to pervade some of the more sublime creations of Italian opera (notably the works of Bellini, Rossini and Donizetti). Far from resting content with a merely facile eclecticism, he achieved a unity of style comparable with that of Gonzaga. During his long career at La Scala he helped to establish a trend which was followed in many respects by Antonio Basoli (Castelguelfo 1744-Bologna 1848), although this artist's work also retained the last echoes of the Bibiena tradition.

The only period in the history of 19th century Italian stage design which showed signs of undergoing something of a crisis was that which immediately followed Sanquirico's time. But it was no more than a limited and transitory recession, and in any case there were still some designers of undeniable quality working in particular theatrical genres. Many of the craftsmen whose task it was to provide preliminary sketches for scenes were in fact set-painters themselves, so that once again art was combined with craftsmanship.

Some of the artists whose work has come down to us - for example, Francesco Cocchi (Budrio 1788-Bologna 1865), a follower of Basoli, or Romolo Liverani (Faenza 1801-1862), late exponent of traditions from the Emilia and Romagna regions - belonged to an increasingly romantic stream, without however contributing much of importance

to the movement, apart from quantity of work and mastery of technique. Others, such as Sormanni the Younger, Ippolito Stefanini, Moja and Roberto Fontana, were honest representatives of the school of La Scala as it was during this somewhat dull, transitional period of its history. These exponents of straightforward, unexciting stage design based on sound technical skill and conforming to current romantic conventions, were soon to be joined by the notable figure of Carlo Ferrario (Milan 1833-1907).

Ferrario, active at La Scala from 1853 onwards, became assistant to Peroni in 1860 and kept this position until 1867 when he became stage manager at La Scala. He is famous above all as designer of the operas of Giuseppe Verdi, but it should be remembered that he dedicated himself with equal energy to all kinds of opera. He used his technical experience to put into practice the kind of romantic ideals, vigorous yet subtle at the same time, which had their parallel in the Lombard avant-garde movement in painting called Scapigliatura, a movement akin to others which were current all over Europe during the late romantic period, just prior to the revolutionary changes which were to lead to modern art.

Ferrario tended towards the picturesque and the narrative; he delighted in the kind of descriptive art which foreshadowed Realism. These characteristics would seem to justify the reserve with which later critics have judged him, yet the themes he chose were far from alien to the spirit of the operas for which he designed the sets, and moreover he so perfectly harmonized his sets with the atmosphere created by the music, that even his themes, conventional and rhetorical though they may have been, were genuine in their emotional expression. Ferrario was therefore a stage designer of great importance, capable as he was of achieving dramatic, lyrical, pathetic or sentimental effects when these were required, and he had the ability to evoke Nature in her more smiling moods. In short, he was a typical man of the theatre who understood perfectly its visual requirements, and satisfied them in accordance with precise technical criteria.

Among the accomplished artists of this kind who were working during the transitional period between Romanticism and Realism was Carlo Songa (Milan 1856-1911). He shows Ferrario's influence, especially in his skilfully proportioned interiors, but the imaginative exuberance of the earlier artist is modified into a language nearer to that of everyday reality.

The anonymous author of the bozzetti for the ballet Amor (produced at La Scala during the 1901/2 season) and Giuseppe Palanti (Milan 1881-1946) already belong - especially the former - to the climate of Art Nouveau or rather of the Liberty style, to use the name which the Italians applied to their interpretation of the fashion. This tendency was marginal, however, since tradition continued to dictate the rules at La Scala, as can clearly be seen in the very copious works of Antonio Rovescalli (Crema 1864-Milan 1936). Rovescalli must certainly be considered as Ferrario's heir, although his Realism, avoiding superficial imitation, tried to re-create an environment through a fresh and spontaneous interpretation of the libretto. A kind of impressionism in his work is produced by reminiscences of 18th century Venetian painting, but in the complex architecture of a set, which must always be functional, it is an impressionism continually controlled by his sound architectural skill and mastery of perspective.

Designers of this kind might appear to have followed tradition too blindly, yet really they were faithfully interpreting, perhaps unconsciously, a particular moment in the history of opera, and were evolving with it. Certainly Rovescalli and his followers never took into account the ideas of Adolphe Appia and of Gordon Craig, just as they paid little heed to producers' ideas, since they believed first and foremost in the music and in the libretto, and the latter furnished them with all the directives they considered necessary for carrying out their task. They tried to keep alive the idea of opera as theatre for the masses rather than something reserved for a select cultural elite trained to grasp the subtler symbolic and literary meanings in an opera. The Verdi-Wagner controversy - in other words instinct versus culture -

was finally resolve in Italy with the acceptance of many Wagnerian musical elements, but these were employed in the service of a concept which was precisely the anti-thesis of the great German composer's - that of Realism. Naturally, the stage designers who translated operas of this kind into visual terms did theirbest to make their interpretations coincide fully with the author's intentions.

Two other skillful artists of a similar vein bring us to the threshold of contemporary stage design: Edoardo Marchioro (Schio 1882-Brescia 1935) and Giovan Battista Santoni (Casteldario 1881-Milan 1966).

Edoardo Marchioro combined an unusual pictorial sensitivity with the proverbial skill which had always distinguished stage design at La Scala. Some of his back-cloths inspried by nature were real landscapes, to be appreciated as paintings in their own right. Nevertheless he was always fully aware of the functional purpose of theatrical scenery and his ideas were of the same order - apart from the difference of period and environment - as those which led the Galliari family to create the scena quadro.

Finally, Giovan Battista Santoni, while keeping within the bounds of Realism, introduced into his designs something of that sense of synthesis which the artists of this century have cultivated more and more, once over the crisis caused by the revolutionary movements in art at the beginning of the century and immediately after the First World War.

In a short account of Italian stage design from the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century it is impossible to consider more than one or two narrow aspects of the subject. We have stopped short of a number of new and very important questions arising from the natural evolution of forms according to various aesthetic theories, and from changing methods due to the influence of cinema and all its new visual techniques.

Moreover, in the period covered, the producer's influence on the stage was very limited, whereas today a producer often chooses a designer on whom he can rely to follow his ideas of production. The resident designers working for a particular theatre were, of course, in a fairly similar position. On the other hand, there is a vast difference when one considers that producers were once entirely committed, so to speak, to the spirit of the opera as it appeared through the libretto and the music, while today the producer sometimes superimposes his own personal interpretation on that which the author apparently intended.

However, it is not our intention here to probe deeper into these matters since our analysis goes only as far as the end of the realist movement, when the theatre still observed certain rules of verisimilitude thus encouraging large popular audiences to share fully in the dramatic emotion.

"FIGURINI"

(Original drawings of costumes, models and head-dress)

The collection of designs for costumes taken from the Museo Teatrale alla Scala clearly does not reveal the same historical significance that characterizes the sketches for individual scenes. The collection is nevertheless a rich one, shedding significant light on the history of costume in lyric theatre.

It dates from the 18th Century until recent times and includes some drawings with rather prestigious signatures, as well as anonymous ones. It is true that costumes were often fashioned by tailors who employed their own designers; as a rule the latter held to more conventional guidelines, although they consistently demonstrated impeccable craftsmanship and taste.

The most interesting designs are those which identify certain well-known personalities. If unessential as a record of the times, they do represent typical examples of the taste and trends of that era and are largely picturesque or exotic in style (concepts which first emerged during the romantic era).

As to the origins of the material exhibited, the present collection includes models executed in the latter half of the 17th Century by Giovanni Antonio Braganza. Arcadia and Rococo inspire the style of the artist and he succeeds in combining a rich exuberance inherited from the Baroque era with greater fluency and ease of expression.

The most thoroughly documented period begins at the second half of the 19th Century. To maintain some form of chronological order it should be noted that following the series of anonymous sketches, or in conjunction with them, we include the designs conceived in 1876 by Alfred Albert for the ballet "Coppelia". These drawings adhere closely to the theme. Of even greater significance is the work of Alfredo Edel. This designer completed his sketches in Paris in 1905 for the opera "Cherubin" by Massenet. He combines strong and skillful characterization with minute costume detail. In addition to pure and simple sketches for exclusive use of the tailors, we find a frank and accurate portrayal of physical traits of character in these designs which is admirable. It is interesting to note that the artist was occasionally inspired by the physical attributes of the actors themselves, with the result that the costumes are perfectly suited to the requirements of the character and even better, of the actor. The most prolific designer of the Scaligero era in the first half of this century was Luigi Sapelli, better known as "Caramba." He was for many years director of stage design at La Scala, and when he turned to costume design he endowed his work with great humor. The results were excellent. He was undoubtedly influenced by the times in which he lived and indulged in a taste for folkloric art. His profession as a whimsical designer brought him out of the provincial culture which was the mark of Italian artistic circles at that time. Caramba, moreover, possessed a marvelous grasp of the theatre which enabled him to adhere rigidly to the requirements of the stage and at the same time to bring warmth and color to the set with emphasis on direct communion with the audience.

He gave very precise instructions to his tailors, and was particularly gifted in this sense. His adherence to historical fact was sometime's subject to debate, but the plays of the time were not especially accurate themselves on historical and cultural levels.

A similar evaluation may be made of Giuseppe Palanti, although his drawings show a greater propensity for realism and the after-effects of Art Nouveau. His designs were fresh and his colors lively. Attilo Comelli exercised the same talents to a lesser extent (he designed a complete series of costumes for Parsifal by Wagner).

The collection of the Museo Teatrale alla Scala presents a vast panorama of the artistic medium described above. Its significance lies in the visual elements of a stage performance and the direct rapport of those elements with the audience.

MODEL STAGE SETS

The model theatres (teatrini) of the 18th century are another source of information on the history of stage design. It is widely believed that the examples in the Scala Museum came from the town of Augsburg in Bavaria, and were based on prints published mainly by Engelbrecht and Hertel. The prints were colored by hand, cut out and made into model sets. They were imported into Italy above all by the Remondini family from Bassano del Grappa, who were responsible for distributing them throughout the neighboring region.

These models provide us with an idea - perhaps somewhat deformed and grotesque - of sets which had actually been seen and remembered. Obviously, from the period and the place where these teatrini were made, we can deduce that most of the sets represented were those designed by the Bibiena family. In fact one can easily distinguish in them a marked interest in perspective, as well as a taste for the marvellous and the supernatural, which causes every kind of event, whether drawn from the Bible or a newspaper, to be seen through a kind of ideal distorting lens.

The mention of optical effects brings us to a fashion which was very widespread in the 18th century, at the time when the camera ottica (forerunner of the camera obscura in the modern photographic camera) was elaborated for the use of prints pierced to allow a play of light coming from a source placed behind the print. Also very popular was the magic lantern (ombre cinesi), invented the previous century by Kircher.

The model theatres are of purely documentary value and they cannot provide us with more than a reflection of current taste; nevertheless from this point of view they are undoubtedly of great assistance in helping us to understand the customs of an age so absorbed in the visual and illusionistic possibilities of the theatre.

PLAYBILLS AND THEATRICAL POSTERS

Another remarkable branch of theatrical art may be studied in some of its publicity material. The simplest and most widely diffused form of publicity, intended for the general public, is conveyed in the poster and the playbill, or, to use the French term (which has become international) the affiche.

It cannot be claimed that this type of applied art reached a very high standard in Italy, in spite of the fact that some of the best poster designers were Italian (we only need mention Leonetto Cappiello). In other countries poster design reached a technical and artistic level far superior to that of the largely descriptive style which Italian public and designers alike seemed to prefer.

However, there was one sector in which, for reasons which are easy to understand, Italy remained pre-eminent, if not in quality, certainly in quantity; and even from an aesthetic point of view many posters displayed an artistic decorum unknown to other branches of publicity. It was in the field of theatrical advertising and, more precisely, of opera bills, that Italian specialists reached a high standard which could easily stand comparison with the best foreign work.

Here too one may attempt a rough outline history of the illustrated poster. No more than an outline, for obviously the material we possess is fragmentary and very limited, but at least it gives an idea of one of the commonest forms of applied art, and one which introduces the general public to current fashions in the figurative arts.

A few years ago the illustrated poster celebrated its centenary: in fact, the first example known to us is a colored lithograph advertising a performance in 1863 of Gounod's opera Faust, which had its first performance in Paris in 1859, and was first performed at La Scala on 11th November 1862. The lithograph, signed by the

Milanese Rossetti, bears the date 18th November 1863 and is noteworthy for the effectiveness with which the artist has displayed the essential elements of the opera - or rather, its characters, Faust and Mephistopheles on either side of Marguerite at the spinning wheel, raising the latter on a sort of pedestal, so as to allow the words "FAUST / Opera in 5 atti / musica di / C. GOUNOD" to be inserted in the center of the poster. This is such a rare document that we must consider it as the prototype of illustrated opera posters.

Previously there had been "opera announcements" comparable with playbills, although larger in size. They were entirely typographic and announced in great detail the name of the theatre, date of performance, name of conductor, title of the opera, usually preceded by the titles of the ballets which were a regular accompanying feature, names of singers, prices, and any other information about the performance itself. A typographical border usually surrounded the text; the bill measure 70-80 cm. or a little more in height, and about 50 cm. in width.

The playbill belongs to the pre-history of the subject, but the illustrated poster, which for a long time and in all the examples discussed here was produced by lithography is a vivid illustration of changing tastes, and can suggest to us, in particular, how a whole spectacle was interpreted, produced on the stage and translated into visual terms.

As the 19th century drew to an end, romantic accents and attitudes continued to prevail, as we may easily see in the exaggerated gestures of the characters chosen for illustration, who were generally taken from one of the most dramatic or pathetic scenes. The gradual movement towards the fin de siecle and then the "Liberty" style became apparent initially through the type of lettering used for the captions.

The leading publisher of posters of this kind was the Milanese firm "R. Stabilimento Ricordi", who commissioned many well known poster designers, among them Adolfo Hohenstein, Giuseppe Palanti and Leopoldo Metlicovitz.

A new note was struck by Marcello Dudovich, whose work already showed a hint of a simpler and more sober style, although he was still under the influence of Art Nouveau. In other posters Realism definitely prevails in the illustration, while the lettering is still carried out with "Liberty" flourishes.

It is very interesting to compare these posters with similar Austrian and French examples published in Munich (a flourishing center for this type of publicity material). One of these advertises Massenet's Therese, and is a rare document in itself, since it was based on a photograph by Paul Nadar, son of the photographer in whose atelier the first exhibition of Impressionists was held.

The important part which painters came to play in the design of posters becomes apparent when it is considered that well known artists - well known, at any rate, in their own country, as in the case of the Tuscan Plinio Nomellini - turned to poster design, producing pictorial effects which gradually took precedence over any considerations of publicity.

Here was yet another point of contact between the theatre and the figurative arts, which were again employed in the service of opera and ballet, offering the public a kind of preview of what they could see at the theatre.

THE MUSEO TEATRALE ALLA SCALA

This remarkable collection of material which has enabled us to trace in outline the history of certain visual aspects of opera in Italy is housed, fittingly, in a cultural institute in Milan: the Museo Teatrale alla Scala.

The originality of this museum derives from the fact that it is not merely a collection of historical souvenirs of La Scala and its activities; it is in fact an institution which embraces a great variety of material, all connected with the theatre but gathered from various sources and places.

The inception and establishment of the Museum are of great interest and deserve a few words.

On the 1st May 1911 in the Hotel Drouot in Paris a public auction was to take place of an important collection of items relating to the theatre: the collection was offered for sale by the antique dealer Giulio Sambon, who was born in Naples of French parents, lived for many years in Milan and finally crossed the Alps to return to his family's homeland. Over a long period he had built up a very rich collection of material concerning the theatre in all its branches, and he took this vast collection with him to Paris where his children were living. As a result of his long stay in Milan a large part of the collection concerned La Scala, and therefore a group of "Friends of La Scala" decided to try and acquire the collection to form the nucleus of a future theatrical museum.

Unfortunately, they heard of the sale only on the 23rd April, eight days before the auction was to take place. Duke Uberto Visconti di Modrone, Professor Lodovico Pogliaghi (well known sculptor and stage designer), Arrigo Boito (the composer and author of brilliant libretti), Dr. Modigliani (Director of the Brera Gallery in Milan), the journalist Borsa, Senator Mangili, Count Pulle and Signor Vimercati - found they had quickly to collect a large sum - 450,000 old lire, which today would correspond to over \$ 360,000. Sambon was apparently willing to let the complete collection go for that amount.

An urgent fund-raising campaign began and already by the 27th April it was showing good results: with the aid of the Italian Government, which guaranteed an immediate sum of 150,000 lire and an annual subsidy of 3,000 lire for the upkeep of the Museum, and with subscriptions of 5,000 lire from each of the promoters of the scheme, a fund was established which would allow immediate negotiations to be opened with Sambon. But in the meantime, Sambon had contacted the American millionaire Pierpont Morgan, who had secured first option on the collection. However, Dr.

Modigliani, through the good offices of the Italian Ambassador to the United States, Signor Tittoni, managed to persuade the financier to withdraw his offer.

Once the many difficulties, including the bureaucratic ones, had been overcome, the Museum was established as an Ente Morale or public institution and it was decided to house it in the Casino Ricordi, next to La Scala Theatre, and then the lengthy negotiations with Sambon were brought to a conclusion. On the 28th December 1912, Duke Uberto Visconti di Modrone was appointed first President of the Museo Teatrale alla Scala, which then officially came into being, while a hanging committee, chaired by Arrigo Boito, had already begun the work of arranging the collection of Sambon, who had agreed to a discount of 3,000 lire on condition that a bronze plaque bearing his portrait should be displayed in the Museum.

Other material was gradually added to the original nucleus, and several people interested in or connected with the theatre bequeathed items or whole collections to the Museum, which was officially inaugurated on the 8th March 1913.

The Director of the Museum for twenty years was Giuseppe Morazzoni; the position of President, after it had been provisionally filled from 1918-1924 by the well known musicologist Gaetano Cesari, passed successively to Professor Vittorio Ferrari, Duke Marcello Visconti di Modrone and Count Giovanni Treccani degli Alfieri. It was during the presidency of the latter (and under the directorship of Dr. Stefano Vittadini) that the Second World War created grave problems for the protection of the Museum's contents which by now were considerably augmented.

Many of the more fragile and precious works were evacuated. This proved fortunate, since in August 1943 the Museum was very badly damaged by a bomb; many of the exhibits were still in the building and most of them were recovered, but only after the War had ended was it possible to repair and re-organize the rooms of the Museum. During a period of provisional administration from 1946-52, rebuilding and

restoration work was carried out, partly at the instigation of the Head of the Department of Fine Arts, Ettore Modigliani. After his death the work was continued with great enthusiasm by his successor, Fernanda Wittgens. On the 8th June 1948 the Museum re-opened its rooms, re-organized and modernized. Various important exhibitions, commemorations and other events have been held there.

Presidents who followed were Professor Ersilio Confalonieri, and Avvocato Gian Battista Migliori. 1954 saw the donation to the city of Milan of the Livia Simoni library, bequeathed by the renowned theatre critic Renato Simoni, and named after his mother. It was annexed to the Museo Teatrale as the institution most suitable to become a theatrical center. The Simoni volumes in their turn constituted the nucleus of a collection which was gradually added to, so that the Livia Simoni library is today of fundamental importance to all scholars of theatrical and musical subjects.

At present the Museo Teatrale has Commendatore Gian Filippo Fontana as its President and Maestro Giampiero Tintori as Director. Under their direction the Museum is pursuing a vigorous and energetic policy as a cultural center. It has attracted a steady stream of visitors, by organizing a series of excellent exhibitions which offer to an increasingly wide public unique collections of valuable prints and drawings, and of documents relating to many aspects of the theatre. It has also promoted exchanges of exhibitions with similar organizations and parts of its own collection, illustrating the history of the theatre, have been exhibited all over Europe and are to be taken to other parts of the world.

So, from being a static and inactive institution, the Museum has been transformed into what every "living" museum should be - a meeting point for various cultural interests, helping to preserve the humanistic ideals which alone today can guarantee the survival of spiritual values.