

Principles of Formation in Theatre Buildings and Performances Between the Fifteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

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Keywords: Art, Synthesis, Church, Performance, Stage, Theology, Renaissance, Pageants, Platform, Props, Decoration.

Abstract: Performing art, which exists in many forms at the same time, requires a decent and large-scale, stereoscopic scientific vision. On the one hand, performing arts is the diocese of artists, that is, the subject of study of art theorists historians, critics, and philosophers. At the same time, it is known from the historical aspects of performance art and theatre that its synthesis and elevation to the level of art is manifested in unity with its architectural complex. Taking into account these historical aspects requires artistic, creative, cultural, historical, social, and economic study of all aspects of the existence of cultural and educational structures.

1 INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, there is a notable emphasis on preserving and fostering national traditions in cultural and educational performances, as well as in theatre and cinema, not only worldwide but also in Asian countries. This includes the transmission of a rich historical and cultural heritage to present and future generations. In the realm of theatre, the transition from the enclosed space of the church not only altered the conditions of play staging but also gave rise to new genres.

During the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance, the emergence of theatrical societies, such as the Gonfalone in Rome in 1265, marked a significant development. These societies staged plays with theological themes, particularly those based on biblical narratives. The theatre evolved into a three-story structure, representing heaven, earth, and hell. The lower stage, depicting hell, remained unseen by the audience, while the main action unfolded on the second stage, symbolizing heaven. This setup allowed for various technical effects, including the

appearance and disappearance of actors, and the use of puppets.

Throughout the medieval and early Renaissance periods, theatrical scenography and audience spaces were purpose-built and lacked a standardized form. Amphitheatres were constructed in France, England, and other regions, often utilizing Roman circus arenas. The audience transitioned between stages, facilitated by two-level "pageants" carts, which served as both dressing rooms for actors and open platforms for performances.

In England, pageants were predominantly employed, and medieval divine spectacles utilized three scenographic systems: the ring, frontal (gazebo), and moving. The ring system involved a high ring-shaped platform with movement occurring on two levels. The frontal system, characterized by a square shape with a porch, conveyed various settings such as palaces, heaven, and purgatory. The moving system consisted of carts carrying scenery for divine episodes.

The historical evolution outlined above suggests that stage scenography originated from these street performances, laying the groundwork for its

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development. T. Akimova, in her doctoral dissertation on the art history of late medieval times, highlighted the societal significance of performing arts during this era. By the mid-16th century, both the church and royal authorities prohibited theological plays, as they began to overshadow plays featuring comedic and critical elements in theatre art. This shift led to the emergence of Renaissance drama, marking a transition from theological and religious themes to a new genre of spectacle. While iconographic material from medieval ecclesiastical and secular spectacles may not be evident in architectural monuments, their influence remained palpable, nourishing Renaissance theatre and shaping subsequent periods of stage art.

Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of medieval theatre art and stage technique.

Advantages of the medieval theatre art and stage technique	Disadvantages of medieval theatre art and stage technique
1 The theatre went out from the church square to the open space.	1 The scenography of the stage did not have a specially constructed uniform form.
2 Complex techniques were used in the plot of the play.	2 It was inconvenient for the audience to move from one scene to another during the performance.
3 It was the reason for the development of scenography.	3 Only theological plots have increased in the theatre shows.
4 3 types of scenography areas have appeared.	

2 METHODS

Alongside the existence of church theatre, a distinct genre emerges in the form of palace festivals, conducted in both public squares and enclosed spaces. One noteworthy example is the pheasant festival organized by the dukes of Burgundy and Cleves in Lille in 1454, marking the first use of a curtained stage indoors. In contrast to liturgical dramas where curtains covered distinct parts of the stage simultaneously, this performance utilized a single platform. The curtain served to isolate the stage for the preparation of individual pantomime episodes, challenging the exclusive reliance on the simultaneous design principle for stage space. Palace performances and theatre practices developed unique

artistic and technical methods. Advancements were made in the art of crafting stage props and decorations, while the mechanical equipment of stage areas became more intricate. Towards the close of the 16th century, an experimental revolving field stage was introduced. The involvement of artists in performance design contributed to the evolution of scenic scenery.

The origin of the box scene is rooted in this period. Information on the structure of Renaissance and early Baroque theatres is limited and often contradictory, as the buildings were predominantly wooden and susceptible to rapid decay or destruction by fire.

Records about theatre construction and performances date back to the late 15th century. However, theatrical shows during this period lacked systematic organization and were primarily associated with palace festivities. Stage equipment and audience seating were typically arranged in one of the halls of a ducal castle or a lavish palace courtyard.

The architecture of theatres during this era was shaped by a dual influence – the ancient theatre on one hand and the practice of staging religious plays on the other. Subsequently, the amphitheatre's form proved to be a practical solution, with the positioning of noble seats above others around the stage emerging as the primary system. Similar to ancient theatres, the seats for princely members were centrally located at a certain height on the orchestra. The steps of the amphitheatre, where court members and guests sat, surrounded the steps of the princely chairs with distinctive bends.

3 RESULTS

The architect and painter Sebastian Serlio (1457-1552) provided a comprehensive description of the Italian theatre stage, its lighting, and the principles of theatrical perspective in his treatise "On Architecture," published in 1545. In this work, Serlio synthesized the experiences of Renaissance theatre practitioners and established fundamental rules for constructing the stage and shaping the external appearance of the play. According to Serlio's illustrations and descriptions, the amphitheatre had fourteen steps of uniform width, with the fifteenth and final step being larger than the others. The semicircular design of the amphitheatre mirrored the shape of the orchestra in a Roman theatre, forming a circular enclosure around it. The first row of seats, situated at the orchestra level, comprised chairs for

the highest nobility, while above, on the amphitheatre steps, seats were allocated for noble ladies and gentlemen. The highest and widest section was designated for palace servants. Thus, the customary principle of class-based seat distribution in the audience was already evident in Renaissance theatres.

The semicircular platform of the orchestra served not only as a nod to ancient traditions but also as an attempt to separate the stage from the audience to achieve a more profound artistic impact. Sebastian Serlio delineates three types of scenes in his works - tragic, comic, and satirical. Consequently, the embellishment of Renaissance theatrical performances adhered to the principle of decoration immutability, determined solely by the genre of the production.

A noteworthy contribution to the history of Italian Renaissance theatre is the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, often regarded as an academic theatre replicating the model of Roman theatre architecture within a building. The first theatre building, constructed from stone and still extant, stands as an exemplary instance of theatre architecture seamlessly integrating the visual aspects of the hall and stage.

The elliptical amphitheatre, in alignment with the plan, is proximate to the portal wall of the stage, leaving a small space for the orchestra in the middle of the hall. The stage itself is a rectangular open area, bordered on three sides by lavishly adorned palace-type walls. The central wall features three arches, behind which decorations are placed on the curved part of the stage.

The side walls incorporate low entrances connecting the open stage with backstage rooms. In essence, the composition mirrors that of the Roman theatre, maintaining three classical exits in the centre and two side exits corresponding to the Greek theatre structure. This theatre complex marks the conclusion of the Renaissance era, undergoing significant transformations influenced by the evolving Baroque theatre towards the close of the 16th century.

4 DISCUSSION

The evolution of dynamic scenic views in theatre during the 17th century was driven by the changing demands of stage arrangements and the principles governing the external presentation of performances. This transformative period in theatre history witnessed a confluence of innovations in both stage technique and architectural design, setting the stage for the continued evolution of the modern theatrical landscape.

The Shifting Landscape of Stage Décor: The impetus for these changes came from the staging of interludes and the development of opera and ballet. These emerging art forms demanded visually stunning displays rich in various stage effects and frequent changes of scenery. The traditional stage décor, influenced by Renaissance landscapes, underwent a shift in the early 17th century to accommodate these new requirements.

In this period, stage decoration retained some features of Renaissance landscapes, with built houses in the foreground representing permanent decorative portals. A luxurious curtain, resembling a modern harlequin made of precious fabrics or adorned with golden ribbons, concealed the "heavenly vault" behind it. However, these portal settings posed challenges as they occupied a significant portion of the stage, hindering actor exits in the foreground.

To address these challenges and facilitate the necessary changes, Sabbatini suggested elevating portal scenery to a central role, transforming it into an architectural portal that separated the audience from the stage area. This innovation allowed for moving the scene into the depth of the stage, enhancing the illusionary nature of the design, and facilitating the use of moving scenery.

The pursuit of means to change scenery led to a departure from the perspective of relief, focusing instead on beauty. Early experiments in landscape modification identified three main methods. The first involved concealing the set scene with a beautiful backdrop painted with trees, houses, and other elements. The second method employed solid, draw-able landscapes with moving scenic frames placed in front of permanent walls. The third method utilized Telari, or periaets, triangular prisms covered with various images, which, when rotated, facilitated scene changes twice by revealing different faces.

The Emergence of the Classic Stage-Box Type: By the end of the first quarter of the 17th century, the Italian stage had adopted the classic stage-box type, characterized by a portal arch sharply defining the stage and audience areas. A curtain behind the portal would only appear at the beginning and end of the performance. In front of the stage, separated by an empty barrier, a pit in the first row, akin to the prototype of the orchestra pit, provided depth to enhance the illusion.

To meet the increasing demands of opera performances, which required a higher number of instantaneous scene changes and vibrant scenic sets, the backstage decoration technique was introduced in the 1620s. This innovation marked a new stage design

system in the backstage scene and led to the development of a specialized stage technique.

Attributed to the Italian artist Buonaldi, the backstage system was first implemented in the Farnese Theatre in Parma, becoming the first theatre equipped with stationary backstage equipment. The horseshoe-shaped amphitheatre within this theatre had an elliptical plan, creating an enclosed area in the middle of the hall for water extravaganza.

In the 17th century, theatrical advancements focused on opera, leading to the development of a tiered theatre system. English theatres, such as the Swan Theatre, served as prototypes for tiered theatres in the 18th and 19th centuries. The tiered system, featuring open balconies on multiple floors, aimed to accommodate different social classes and families in separate boxes-lodges.

The Teatro San Cassiano - Pioneering Public Opera: The Teatro San Cassiano in Venice, erected in 1639, stands as a pivotal milestone in the evolution of theatre architecture, being hailed as the first public opera house. This marked a profound shift in the accessibility of theatrical performances, reflecting the burgeoning significance of theatre in public life during the 17th century. The innovative tiered theatre system implemented in venues like San Cassiano, featuring separate lodges for families, addressed logistical challenges by obviating the need for expansive foyers and cloisters, streamlining the audience experience.

The transformative impact of the 17th century on theatre extended beyond architectural considerations to encompass fundamental changes in stage technique. The emergence of public theatres from the late 16th century introduced new imperatives for audience placement and spatial dynamics within performance venues. Folk theatres, exemplified by London's iconic Swan Theatre, laid the groundwork for the subsequent evolution of tiered theatre structures that would characterize the centuries to come.

A Fusion of Classical Elements: Central to this evolution was the development of classical multi-level theatres, amalgamating elements from ancient Greek orchestras, medieval storied halls, and the distinctive baroque-style stage boxes. This tiered system sought to achieve a dual purpose – ensuring a clear hierarchy in audience distribution based on social class while maximizing seating capacity within confined spatial constraints. The tiered configuration became a defining feature of theatre architecture, shaping the immersive experience for spectators and influencing the design of theatres for generations.

The Teatro San Cassiano - Aesthetic and Acoustic Excellence: The Teatro San Cassiano, a noteworthy

exemplar of this trend, manifested the Italian curve in its auditorium design. Constructed in 1776, this theatre prioritized impeccable acoustics, particularly tailored for the performance of operas. The expansive opening of the portal, coupled with integrated lodges within the walls, contributed to the exceptional acoustic qualities of the space. Italian architects, in their pursuit of a harmonious blend of acoustics and practicality, left an indelible mark on theatre interiors.

In contrast, French architects of the period pursued a different aesthetic agenda, emphasizing grandeur and opulence in front rooms designated for the masses. This divergence in stylistic preferences underscored the diverse approaches taken by architects across Europe in response to the evolving needs and expectations of theatre-goers.

The 17th century thus emerged as a transformative era in theatre history, witnessing a confluence of innovations in both stage technique and architectural design. The tiered theatre system, born out of a necessity to efficiently accommodate audiences of varying social strata, became a hallmark of subsequent theatre structures. The Teatro San Cassiano and its counterparts across Europe embodied a fusion of functionality and artistic vision, setting the stage for the continued evolution of the modern theatrical landscape.

Table 2: Architects who contributed to the development of Renaissance theatre architecture and stage scenography.

SEBASTYAN SERLIO	Architect and painter	A pamphlet "About Architecture". 1545 year	The most complete description of the scene of the Italian theatre, its lighting and the principles of the theatre.
LORENZO SABATINI	Italian mannerist painter of the 16th century.	He lived and created in the years 1530-1576	An architectural portal that separates the audience from the stage area, becoming the capital decoration of the stage.
BERNARDO BUONALDI	Florentine Mannerist, painter, sculptor, theatre decorator and stage designer, as well as		Perfected invention and revival of the Telari technique.

	military fortification engineer, hydraulic engineer, inventor		
JOVANNI BATISTO ALEOTTIN I	Italian architect, military engineer, hydrologist, baroque theatre decorator.	He lived and created in the years 1546-1636.	There are many grounds that the Duke of Farnese in Parma, where behind-the-scenes techniques were used, was the theatre builder.
VIKTOR LUI	Architect and painter	Theatre in the city of Bordeaux in 1780	Invented the possibility of vertical change of the stage space.

5 CONCLUSION

Theatre buildings' halls, regardless of their size or development, typically serve as the experimental foundation of the theatre, acting as the primary space for a variety of genre performances, impromptu shows, and the continual search for innovative stage designs. If we consider the halls as a unified space without distinct boundaries between the auditorium and the stage, it would be ideal for organizing any of the aforementioned types of theatrical scenes. Various systems designed to modify the hall's layout are employed to achieve this.

While acknowledging its independent spiritual significance, the theatre hall is intricately linked to scenography and stage design, forming an inseparable connection with architectural creations. The theatre, being dependent on other art forms and the economy, not only shapes the building itself but also its interiors, providing ample grounds for the spiritual and economic expression of these theatrical structures. A prominent illustration of this symbiosis is that, akin to other art forms, theatre reflects the spirit of its time, the human milieu, social constructs, and the societal requirements.

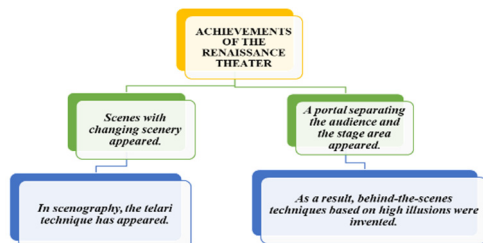


Figure 1: Achievements of Renaissance theatre.

Throughout the developmental history of the stage, masters of their crafts, including artists, technologists, directors, architects, and various specialists, have consistently endeavoured to reshape the configuration of theatre spaces. At each juncture in historical development, innovative proposals emerge, often breaking away from established traditions and providing a fresh perspective on stage and hall architecture. The architecture of contemporary theatres is the culmination of the arduous journey of theatre evolution over the extensive and systematic development of theatrical art.

In contrast to the initial theatre constructions, the distinctiveness of the new theatres conceived during the Renaissance extends beyond mere architectural composition. It involves the integration of theatre art with nature, the introduction of novel building structures, the arrangement of buildings, and the capacity of the auditoriums. Essentially, the construction of theatre spaces and the evolution of typological structures have created conditions conducive to diverse compositional schemes. This evolution has been marked by the formulation and advancement of key architectural objectives. Varied urban planning conditions, typological foundations, and the unique characteristics of individual theatres have given rise to new entities that diverge significantly in structure, style, and artistic expression.

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