

Tenth anniversary: Opéra Royal de Versailles celebrates 10 years since the theatre was restored and returned to use

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The Opéra Royal de Versailles (© Thomas Garnier)

The Opéra Royal de Versailles is currently celebrating the tenth anniversary of the theatre's restoration with a season which includes one of the first Italian operas ever to be performed in France, *Requiems* for both King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette, and Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* with Lully's original musical interludes, as well as the launch of a record label.

Despite having a keen interest in opera, King Louis XIV never quite got round to creating a permanent opera house at Versailles, plans to do so were overtaken by the building of the chapel and by the time there was scope to do so, the king's interest in opera and large scale dramatic events had waned as the court became more religious. It would not be until later in the reign of King Louis XV that the theatre was built, and it was always designed as a multi-valent space, acting as a theatre, concert hall, banqueting hall and ball-room. It was inaugurated in 1770 and in fact only used some 40 times before the revolution. So it is not a space particularly associated with the great period of French operatic history, which allows the present company to range rather more widely in the selection of works performed.

The vicissitudes that the space suffered post-revolution, including being the home to the Chamber of Deputies of the Third Republic in the 1870s, meant that during the post-War period the space could not function as a theatre at all with most of the surviving original stage machinery being destroyed in the post-War re-construction. All this was reversed during the 2007/2009 period of restoration of the theatre, as a theatre, bringing the space brilliantly back to life.

The theatre's 2019 season, includes a new version of Gay's *The Beggars Opera* created by Ian Burton and Robert Carsen, with William Christie and Les Arts Florissants, a very ironic piece with which to start the season. Francesco Saccati's 1641 opera, *La Finta Pazza* was one of the first Italian operas to be seen in France and the first to be seen by King Louis XIV. (The fashion for Italian opera would not survive the anti-Italian feeling created by the civil war, the Fronde, which developed antagonism to the policies of the Italian-born Cardinal Mazarin into dislike of things Italian, including opera and castrati). *La Finta Pazza* will be performed by Leonardo García Alarcón and the Cappella Mediterranea, in a staging by Jean-Yves Ruf. Another rare opera is Giovanni Legrenzi's *La Divisione del Mondo*, the only one of the composer's 20 operas to survive, and here being presented by Christophe Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques, in a production directed by Jetske Mijnsen. Director William Kentridge has transposed Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria* to 20th century Johannesburg for a new staging to be presented in April.

Lully had a long collaboration with Molière, writing music for his plays and creating a new genre which mixed drama and dance. In June there is a chance to see Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* with Lully's original music performed by Academy and soloists of the Musiciens du Louvre directed by Marc Minkowski. Concerts include Herve Niquet and Le Concert Spirituel's programme of

Requiems by Cherubini and Plantade for King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette, which is also being given at the Barbican. Pygmalion and director Raphaël Pichon will be performing Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610* in the Chapelle Royal, and their pasticcio *Stravaganza d'amore* in the Galerie des Glaces.

The venue celebrates its tenth season with the launch of a new record label, Château de Versailles Spectacles, comprising both CD and DVD recordings made during concerts which have taken place in the Opéra Royal and the Chapelle Royale, with a repertoire which ranges widely and does not present works simply associated with Versailles. Four recordings have already been released: Charpentier's *Les Arts Florissants* (Ensemble Marguerite Louise, Gaétan Jarry), Campra's *L'Europe galante* (Les Nouveaux Caractères, Sébastien d'Hérin), Praetorius' *Messe de Noël* (Gabrieli Consort & Players, Paul McCreesh), and Rousseau's *Le Devin du village* (Les Nouveaux Caractères, Sébastien d'Hérin). Upcoming discs include *The Coronation of George II* (The King's Consort, Robert King) and Cavalli's *Missa Concertata* (Galilei Consort, Benjamin Chénier).

Full details from the [Versailles website](#).

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