

PARISIAN THEATRES

EXCEPTIONAL VENUES

DIMITRI BOURRIAU

JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

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THÉÂTRE DU PALAIS-ROYAL

38 Rue de Montpensier, 1st arrondissement, Paris

The Palais-Royal, built in 1783, is one of the oldest theatres in Paris and a living witness to the history of French theatre. Erected in the gardens of the Palais-Royal, once owned by Cardinal Richelieu and later by Louis XIV, it was part of a prestigious tradition from the outset. As a hub of cultural and social life, Puppet shows were first hosted there, then a troupe of child actors directed by Delomel, before being taken over by the famous Mademoiselle Montansier (Marguerite Brunet).

This remarkable businesswoman and leading actress and theatre director, close to Marie-Antoinette, brought exceptional renown to the Palais-Royal. She staged *opéras-comiques* and comedies there, and launched the career of Mademoiselle Mars. A pioneering and tenacious woman, she founded several theatres in Paris and the provinces, weathering political upheavals, but eventually left the stage ruined and forgotten.

In the 19th century Dormeuil revived the theatre. With its overhanging balcony above Rue Montpensier, it welcomed leading writers such as Eugène Labiche, who created 88 plays including *La Cagnotte* and *L’Affaire de la rue de Lourcine*. Composer Hervé, Jacques Offenbach and actress Hortense Schneider also found success there. *La Vie parisienne*, Offenbach’s celebrated *opéra bouffe* (comic opera), premiered there in 1866.

Under Gustave Quinson, a visionary director of the early 20th century, the theatre welcomed stars such as Mistinguett, Raimu, Sacha Guitry and Michel Simon, along with playwrights Tristan Bernard and Georges Feydeau, who premiered two of his best-known comedies there: *Monsieur chasse!* and *Le Dindon*. Théâtre du Palais-Royal thus became a comedy landmark.

With Jean de Létraz in the 1940s, the theatre remained a popular venue even during wartime. His widow, Simone de Létraz, succeeded him before entrusting the directorship to Jean-Michel Rouzière in 1965. He revitalised the programme with revivals such as Georges Feydeau’s *La Dame de chez Maxim*, starring the triumphant Zizi Jeanmaire, as well as numerous new productions, notably *La Cage aux folles* (1973), Jean Poiret’s immense success performed with his lifelong partner on stage, Michel Serrault.

After Rouzière’s death in 1989 the theatre was directed by Francis Lemonnier, Francis Nani and Christian Azzopardi. Together they welcomed artists such as Valérie Lemercier, Line Renaud, Robert Hirsch, Marthe Villalonga, Roland Giraud and Michel Aumont, as well as *Le Quatuor*, a musical performance that won a Molière Award. The theatre alternated between contemporary comedies and great classics of humour, such as *Un Fil à la patte*, without ever betraying its founding spirit: high-quality entertainment.

In the 2000s the theatre continued to innovate. Alexis Michalik’s *Edmond*, a resounding triumph, will soon celebrate its 2,000th performance, while the historic façade has also been restored. True to the motto inspired by Rabelais inscribed above the stage, Théâtre du Palais-Royal continues to celebrate joy, laughter, and the French art of living.









LE GRAND REX

1 Boulevard Poissonnière, 2nd arrondissement, Paris

Le Grand Rex is far more than just a cinema: it is an institution that embodies the history and evolution of the seventh art in France. This majestic building, opened on 8 December 1932, was designed by French cinema visionary Jacques Haïk, known for introducing Charlie Chaplin to France.

From the outset Le Grand Rex stood out for its impressive Art Deco architecture and exceptional capacity. With a façade rising 35 metres high and a theatre that could accommodate up to 3,300 spectators, it was then the largest cinema in Europe. Guests at the inaugural evening were greeted by 80 ushers in tailcoats and white gloves, to discover a sumptuous interior featuring an artificial starry sky, swaying palm trees, and decor evoking Spanish haciendas and Venetian palaces.

During the Second World War Le Grand Rex was requisitioned by German forces and transformed into a “Soldatenkino” to entertain the troops. Despite this dark period, the cinema was able to rise again after the Liberation, quickly regaining its place in Parisian hearts. In 1946 it became the first cinema to screen Walt Disney’s *Pinocchio*, marking the beginning of an annual tradition of showing Disney animated films during the Christmas season, accompanied by magical shows for the delight of both children and adults.

Le Grand Rex has continuously evolved to meet public expectations and technological advances. In the 1980s it was classified as a Historic Monument, preserving its original architecture and decor. In 1988, the installation of the “Grand Large” screen, covering an area of 300 square metres, reinforced its position as a leading cinematic innovator. In 2022 Le Grand Rex celebrated its 90th anniversary, marking nearly a century of history and contribution to film culture. In 2023 its new Infinite theatre was unveiled, offering audiences a fully immersive experience with cutting-edge technologies, further strengthening Le Grand Rex’s reputation as a pioneering venue in the world of cinema.

In February 2025 Le Grand Rex was named “most beautiful cinema in the world” by the British magazine *Time Out*, a recognition highlighting both the architectural beauty and the cultural significance of this iconic site. This distinction is the result of constant efforts to preserve and modernise the cinema while respecting its rich historical heritage.

Le Grand Rex is far more than a screening venue; it is a living symbol of French passion for cinema, a bridge between the glorious past and the promising future of the art of cinema. An ability to reinvent itself while retaining such old-world charm makes this cinema an essential destination for all lovers of film and architecture.









Infinite auditorium



THÉÂTRE NATIONAL DE L'OPÉRA-COMIQUE

1 Place Boieldieu, 2nd arrondissement, Paris

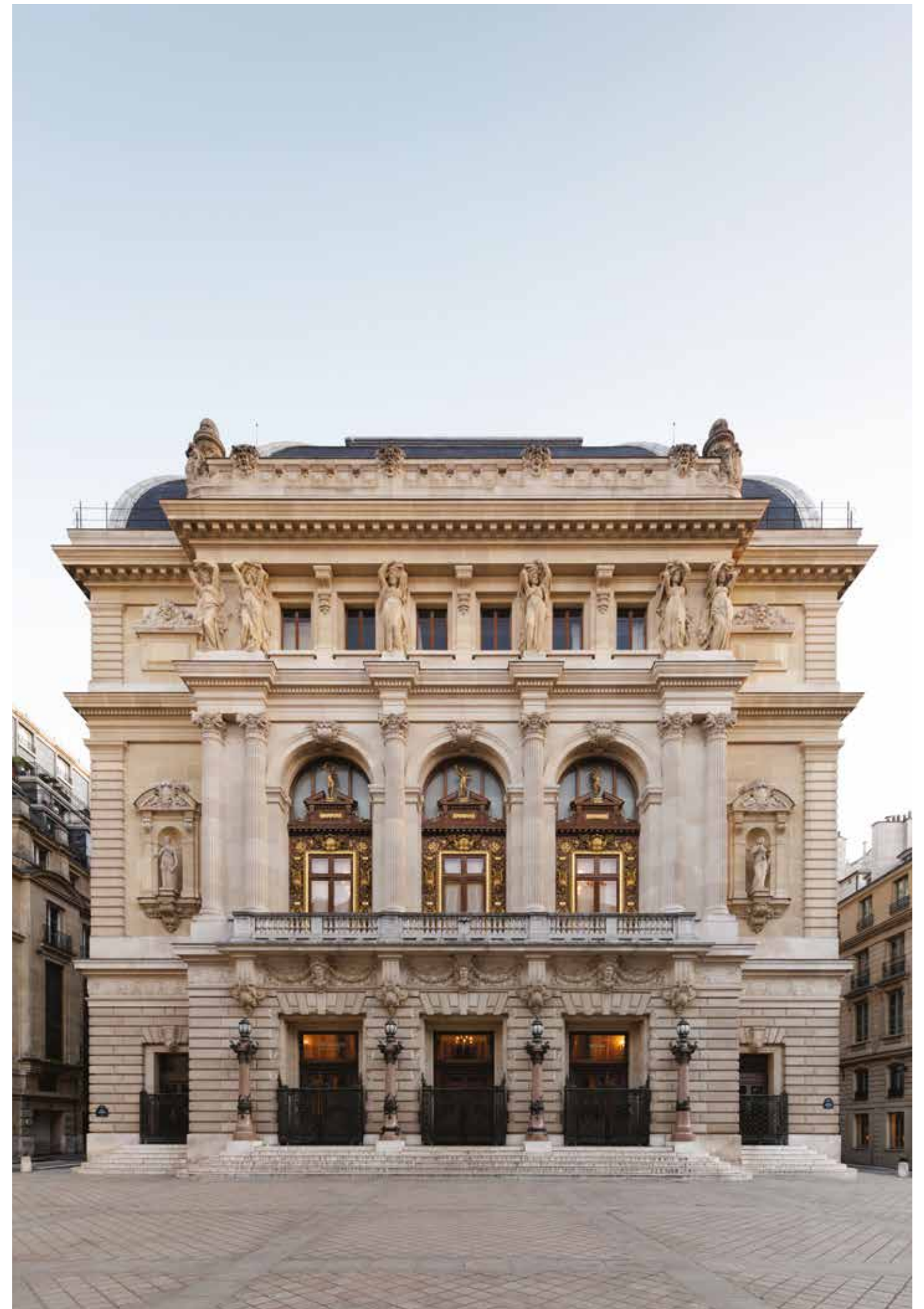
Théâtre National de l'Opéra-Comique, founded in 1714 during the reign of Louis XIV, has spanned the centuries, playing a central role in the evolution of the *opéra-comique* genre – musical comedy combining sung and spoken passages. It is now recognised as one of the most prestigious venues in the European operatic landscape, where renowned composers such as Bizet, Offenbach and Debussy have left their mark.

The Opéra-Comique is based in Salle Favart, a building dating from 1898 and classified as a Historic Monument. This sumptuous, eclectic venue was designed to offer exceptional acoustics and an intimate atmosphere, fostering a close connection between performers and the audience. The richly adorned hall stands as a living testament to French artistic and architectural heritage.

Since its inception, the Opéra-Comique has continually innovated while preserving its identity. It has staged masterpieces of the French lyrical repertoire, including Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, Jules Massenet's *Manon*, and Claude Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

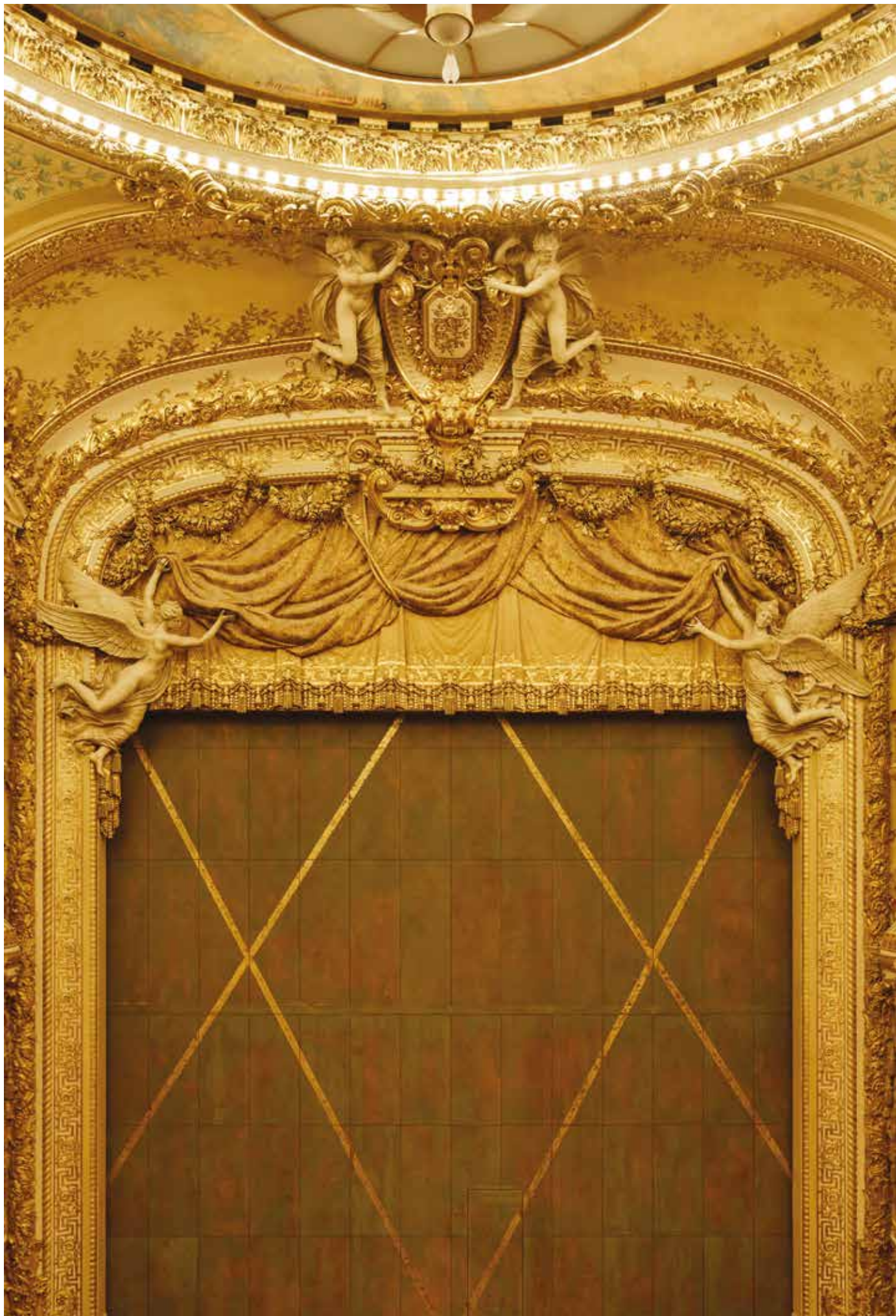
But the theatre's role goes beyond the presentation of classical repertoire: it also encourages contemporary creation by commissioning new works and collaborating with avant-garde directors and composers. The Opéra-Comique is committed to education and accessibility, offering a variety of pedagogical programmes for schools, universities and music enthusiasts to introduce a wide audience to *opéra-comique* and the performing arts. Guided tours, lectures and workshops let visitors explore backstage and gain a deeper understanding of staging and musical interpretation.

The Opéra-Comique is a meeting place of tradition and modernity. Each year, it hosts talented artists, renowned orchestras and prestigious choirs, ensuring productions of the highest artistic quality. The theatre also participates in numerous international collaborations and plays an active role in promoting French culture abroad. As such, Théâtre National de l'Opéra-Comique remains a gem of French cultural heritage, sustaining a rich and vibrant lyrical tradition. Whether you are an opera enthusiast, curious about new musical experiences, or simply drawn to the beauty of the venue, the Opéra-Comique offers an unforgettable immersion into the fascinating world of live performance.





Iron Curtain: commissioned by Alwyne de Dardel





SALLE GAVEAU

45 Rue La Boétie, 8th arrondissement, Paris

Salle Gaveau is one of the most iconic venues for classical music in France. This concert hall, founded in 1907 by pianist and composer Louis Gaveau, has managed to preserve its authenticity while evolving to meet contemporary standards of acoustics and musical experience. It stands out for its warmly intimate atmosphere, ideal for appreciating the richness of classical sound, particularly the piano.

Designed to offer exceptional acoustics, Salle Gaveau is a place where music reveals its full depth. Its main hall, with a capacity of around 1,100 seats, features architecture that enhances natural resonance. The wood-panelled walls and stucco-decorated ceiling complement a space where the acoustics remain faithful to their origins, while being optimised with modern technologies. This distinctive quality attracts both musicians and music lovers from around the world, who come to experience the unique magic of the venue.

Since its beginnings, Salle Gaveau has hosted numerous concerts and recitals by world-renowned artists, including pianists, conductors and ensembles. Among its most celebrated guests are legends of classical music such as Maurice Ravel and Sergei Rachmaninoff, as well as more recent contemporary artists who continue to enhance the hall's international reputation.

The hall's programme is rich and varied, ranging from piano recitals to chamber music concerts, as well as orchestral performances and special events dedicated to composers. Salle Gaveau also supports young talent by providing a platform to gain recognition and perform before a discerning audience.

Beyond its musical function, Salle Gaveau plays a key role in preserving the capital's cultural heritage. It is one of those venues that bear witness to its musical history, offering each concert as a unique experience where architecture and music meet in perfect harmony.

The centrally located hall benefits from its proximity to the city's main cultural landmarks. Visitors can enjoy the magical atmosphere of this venue while being at the heart of Parisian life, between Faubourg Saint-Honoré and Avenue des Champs-Élysées.





LOUXOR

170 Boulevard de Magenta, 10th arrondissement, Paris

The Louxor is an iconic cinema that opened in 1921. Its neo-Egyptian architecture, designed by architect Henri Zipcy and decorated by Amédée Tiberti, reflects the early 20th-century fascination with Ancient Egypt, particularly following the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb.

From opening day, the Louxor enjoyed instant success. Screenings lasted over three hours and combined documentaries, newsreels, musical interludes and various attractions, followed by feature films. In 1930 Pathé acquired the cinema, which was renamed the Louxor-Pathé.

During the 1930s the neo-Egyptian decor was replaced by a neo-Greek style, and talking pictures made their debut. Programming shifted towards musicals, operettas and literary adaptations. After the Second World War the Louxor reached record attendance levels – 727,030 tickets sold in 1946 – with popular genres such as comedies, crime films and swashbuckling adventures.

However, the rise of television and changing lifestyles led to a gradual fall in attendance during the 1950s. In 1954 Pathé carried out renovations to the building and the cinema began to feature film noir, peplum “sword-and-sandal” epics and B-movies. Attendance rose again in 1968 thanks to adjusted ticket prices and a more diverse film selection.

In the 1970s the Louxor became an important social venue for the immigrant population of Barbès district, showing action films, peplums and spaghetti westerns. In 1981 the building's façades and roof were listed as Historic Monuments. Despite this protection, the cinema closed in 1983 and was sold to Textile Diffusion (Tati). Between 1983 and 1988, several reopening attempts – including as nightclubs La Dérobade and Megatown – proved unsuccessful.

As the Louxor building fell into disrepair, local residents and community associations mobilised in 2001 to save it. In 2003 the City of Paris purchased the cinema and, in 2008, entrusted its restoration to architect Philippe Pumain. Work began in 2010, including restoration of the original decor and the installation of two new underground screening rooms.

After four years of renovation and an investment of €24 million, the Louxor reopened on 17 April 2013 as an art-house cinema. Since reopening, it has met with great success, surpassing one million admissions in 2017. The Louxor now offers an eclectic programme featuring art-house films, screenings for schools and children, and premieres with actors and directors in attendance. On the third floor, a rooftop bar with terrace offers a stunning view of Sacré-Cœur, adding to the charm of this historic and beautifully restored venue.







THÉÂTRE IMPÉRIAL DE FONTAINEBLEAU

Château de Fontainebleau, 41 Boulevard Magenta, Fontainebleau

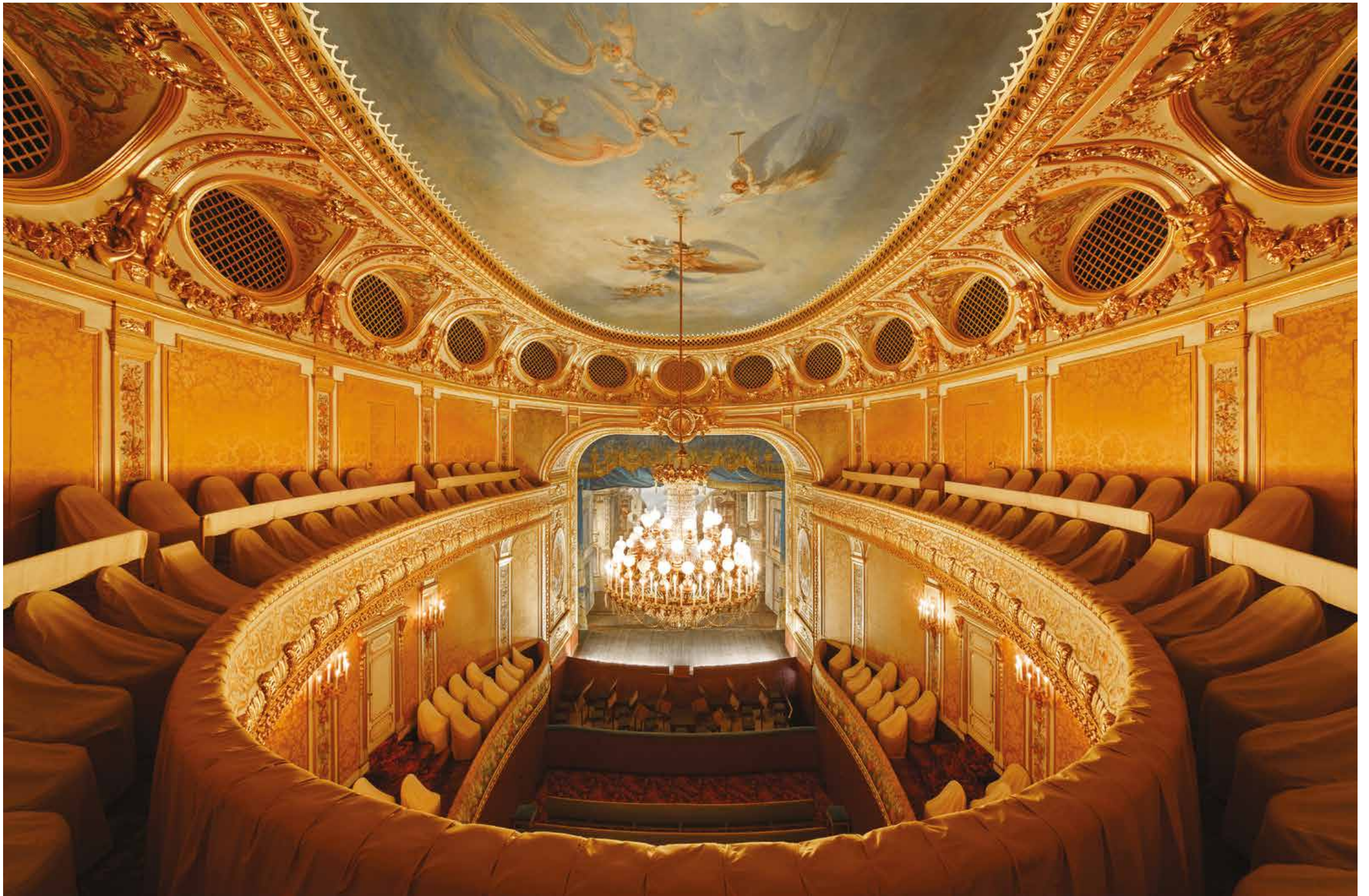
Théâtre Impérial de Fontainebleau, also known as the Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan Theatre, stands as a testament to the elegance and refinement of the Second Empire, the period in which it was built. Commissioned by Napoleon III during his first visit to Fontainebleau with Empress Eugénie in 1853, the theatre was designed by architect Hector Lefuel between 1853 and 1854. Directly inspired by Queen Marie-Antoinette's theatre at Trianon, it offered a 400-seat auditorium that was inaugurated in 1857.

The theatre's interior is sumptuous, featuring quilted silks, floral carpets and gilded ornamentation that create an atmosphere both dazzling and intimate. It is the last surviving example of a court theatre in France to have retained all its original stage machinery and one of the most extensive collections of period scenery in existence. After decades of closure and deterioration, a major restoration was undertaken following a historic agreement signed on 27 April 2007 between France and the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. This ambitious project, made possible through the generosity of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, required 12 years of work and an investment of €10 million. The main objective was to preserve original materials, allowing nearly 80% of the historic decor and furnishings to be retained.

The first phase of restoration, completed in April 2014, focused on the auditorium, vestibule and imperial foyer. The second phase addressed the stage, its machinery, and the surrounding spaces and upper levels. Thanks to these efforts, Théâtre Impérial de Fontainebleau has been transformed into a unique museographic space dedicated to the performing and decorative arts of the Second Empire.

The exemplary restoration of the theatre reflects Château de Fontainebleau's long-term commitment to preserving and enhancing its exceptional heritage. This also highlights the importance of international cooperation in safeguarding cultural treasures, ensuring that future generations can experience this remarkable testament to French history.





PARISIAN THEATRES

EXCEPTIONAL VENUES

DIMITRI BOURRIAU

While everyone knows the Palais Garnier, few realise the richness and beauty of the many other theatres in Paris and the surrounding region. Their architecture can be breathtaking. Dimitri Bourriau has photographed nearly fifty of these exceptional venues. Through his lens, we discover near perfect geometry, harmonious lines and sumptuous décor, where every detail creates a sense of quiet grandeur. He invites us to take them in during the hush before the curtain rises, as works of art in their own right. But what if their splendour is only a prelude? An invitation to cross the threshold, settle into your seat and let yourself be carried away. For behind the gilding and velvet, another spectacle begins: theatre, music, the promise of a unique moment, sometimes unforgettable. There is always a touch of magic in an evening at the theatre. This book captures it.

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