DAVID LEVENTI OPERA

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FOREWORD BY PLÁCIDO DOMINGO

TEXTS BY MARVIN HEIFERMAN AND THOMAS MELLINS

DAMIANI

In Memory of *Anton Gutman*

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FOREWORD

According to one of the most common superstitions in the opera world, if you say "good luck" to a performer before he or she goes onstage, it will bring bad luck. Instead, in the English-speaking world they say "Break a leg;" in Germany and Austria, "Toi-toi-toi;" in France, "Merde." But in Italy, they say, "In bocca al lupo," which means, "In the wolf's mouth." Because when we singers face the audience from the stage of a traditional, horseshoe-shaped opera house, with its tiers of boxes and galleries, we feel that we could be in the jaws of some gigantic beast with multiple rows of teeth, hoping that it will treat us kindly. Sometimes, of course, we sit in the auditorium itself, looking at the stage, when we attend rehearsals or performances by our colleagues. But it is the view of the auditorium as seen from the stage that most of us singers have in mind when we think of the various opera houses in which we have performed.

Fortunately, David Leventi's beautiful photographs of more than forty opera houses, great and small, scattered around the world in nineteen different countries, show us how these theaters look, mostly from just that perspective of the singer performing center stage. And as I looked at these photos, I surprised myself by realizing that I have sung in about three-quarters of the gorgeous venues represented in the book, and in all of the countries. To stand on any of these stages can be a daunting experience – and I don't mean only the most famous of them, like La Scala, the Met, Covent Garden's Royal Opera House, the Staatsoper in Vienna, the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, but also many of the smaller ones. Sometimes we can't help thinking about all of the singers who have preceded us, not to mention many of the great composers and conductors, and it's enough to make us break out into a cold sweat! Yet what a privilege it is to be able to make one's own contribution to opera, this great, unique art form, in the theaters for which many of the greatest operas were created.

This book will elicit fond memories in those of us who have seen these venues with our own eyes, but it will also bring vicarious pleasure to opera lovers who know the theaters only by reputation. David has traveled the world, capturing the essence of these great temples of musical art and has created what is a work of art in its own right – a labor of love by someone who has not only a photographer's expert eyes but also the ears of a true music lover.

Plácido Domingo

THE SITE AT THE OPERA

by Marvin Heiferman

"To be actor or spectator," Charles Garnier, architect of the exquisite Paris Opera, wrote in 1871, "that is the condition of human life." What makes David Leventi's sumptuous, if surprisingly minimal, photographs ingenious is that they side with neither one nor the other of those roles, but both. Over eight years and working in opera houses built over four centuries and on four continents, Leventi devised a visual strategy to produce photographs that, while straightforward in their detailed description of magnificence, are far from simple.

At each venue, once he negotiated access, Leventi set up one of his large-format cameras and got to work. Using only opera house chandeliers and house lights for illumination, he photographed systematically and, as he has explained, "from the spot at center stage where a performer would stand." Just as "the voice of each famous singer projects and bounces off ornate private boxes and resonates under painted trompe l'oeil ceilings, the light in the opera house strikes each of these features and returns to the camera." Light, instead of music, plays the featured role in the photographs.

In each carefully composed, wide-angled view, the rows of seats closest to the stage wrap around to anchor the lower portion of each picture, while tiered balconies and the spot where ornate chandeliers meet equally ornate ceilings tether the top. Although the proportions of opera houses vary, Leventi's goal was "to attain both lateral and vertical symmetry in each image...flattening out the space in perfect equilibrium." Because the photographs capture not only peripheral, panoramic visual data, but also the perpendicular equivalent of that, every image achieves a perfect balance.

In studying Leventi's photographs more deeply, though, uncanny details and unexpected responses emerge. Much of what we might expect to see in images of opera houses—singers, musicians, scenery, audience—has been excluded. The flat two-dimensionality of these sharply focused images conjures up three-dimensional space so convincingly that we, as viewers, feel simultaneously outside of and enveloped by it. The longer we look, the more archetypal and evocative these images become. The regimentation of architectural elements and gilded flourishes enforces a strict and rhythmic sense of decorum; the images remain stately, even as they picture what is meant to overwhelm.

Early in his career, Leventi's work for noted photographer Robert Polidori and interest in other image makers—including An-My Le, Gregory Crewdson, Andrew Moore, and James Casebere—caused him to question how the built world is depicted and narratives about it are implied in photography. But it is another, more poignant detail from his personal history that goes further still in shedding light on the genesis and resonance of this project. The opera houses Leventi has so dutifully researched, traveled to, and lovingly photographed are, as he describes them, "the spaces in which my grandfather, Anton Gutman, never got the chance to perform."

Gutman, a Romanian Jew and a cantor, was a prisoner-of-war in a Soviet Union camp called Krasnogorsk from 1942 to 1948. It was there, where he sang for officers and detainees, that he met the Danish operatic tenor Helge Rosvaenge, another prisoner, who upon hearing Gutman sing "E lucevan le stele," an aria from *Tosca*, offered to give him lessons. The circumstances of his release and relocation to Israel following World War II, however, put an end to any dreams that he harbored of life on the operatic stage. "Nearly a half-century later," during Gutman's visits to the United States, Leventi recalls, "listening to him sing while he walked around our living room." Leventi's awareness of his grandfather's unrealized career is what motivated—and haunts—his opera house series.

A sense of exaltation runs through the images as well. Leventi, the son of two architects, understands how "space itself can be the event." During the 17th and 18th centuries, many small, regional opera houses were constructed in the various states then comprising Italy and Germany. They seated hundreds and were decorated lavishly to reflect the glories of patronage and music. By the 19th century, ever-more imposing edifices were erected in urban centers including Paris, London, and Munich. Huge orchestra pits were burrowed under stages and jutted out into what formerly were seating areas. Upwardly mobile members of the new middle class occupied seats in auditoriums that accommodated 1,500 to 3,000 people, and were so large that tickets sales became essential if productions of opera were to remain grand and economically viable.

Leventi's photographs draw attention to the ways opera house interiors were reconfigured over time. Boxed seats for royals and the upper classes gave way to more open seating in tiered balconies. Traditionally U-shaped auditoriums were splayed wide and into a horseshoe configuration to maximize capacity, accommodate hundred-piece orchestras, and allow for more democratically shared

sightlines. By the 20th century and most notably in the United States, where the arts receive minimal national support and tend toward private funding, "high-capacity theaters became a necessity," as the critic Andrew Clark has noted. But as they expanded to accommodate 3,000 to 4,000 people, opera houses began to lose their sense of intimacy, "encourage over-singing and leave little room for the experimental."

In opera's earliest years, audience behaviors were far from circumspect. In theaters with few and movable chairs and the house lights left on, opera-goers were talkative and animated; they ate meals, played cards, and participated in scenes often as lively as those enacted onstage. As Leventi's hushed images suggest, the further audiences were distanced from performers and assigned to their own theatrical space, the more their rapt attention focused on singers whose art was to project their voices and distinguish themselves from spectacular environments both onstage and offstage.

What is, perhaps, most striking about Leventi's photographs, besides their exuberant depiction of opulence, is what is missing from them: sound. This project is as much about the act of looking as it is about performing or listening. Voices from the past may seem to echo through these images, but what makes them pitch perfect is how they explore the ways vision and architecture, like music, create aesthetic order. His project underscores how the opera house became a civic symbol and awe-inspiring building type that has been (and still is) duplicated with slight modification, from one city to the next, around the globe.

These photographs are, without doubt, impressive, but somewhat surprising too. At the center of each photograph is a large spatial void that gives Leventi's renditions of architecture a life and an energy all their own. In spite of their stolid formality, these images feel as anticipatory as they appear to be documentary. They manage, as only photographs can, to conflate the past, present, and future. They strongly hint at what it might feel like for a performer to command the same spot Leventi has claimed for himself in this project, take a deep breath, and confront that same void as they express themselves through their art. These photographs hint, too, at what it feels like to be scrutinized by the thousands of eyes of an expectant, critical audience, waiting to be entertained and to judge.

Because they so powerfully allude to the singers absented from them, Leventi's photographs also remind us that performers are routinely watched offstage too. Photography has, for nearly two centuries, been central to opera's practice and reception. It has paid homage to the talent and fueled the celebrity of composers, singers, and conductors whose images have circulated in a variety of forms: from the carte de visite to the covers of sheet music, recordings, and recital programs; from concert hall posters and book covers to gossip columns when performers' real-life stories are sufficiently oversized to pique broader public interest. Production photographs of elaborate onstage scenes, crowded with chorus members and costumed nonsinging extras are another example of how the word "operatic" characterizes over-the-top situations or responses that escalate well beyond what is necessary.

Respectful and majestic as Leventi's photographs may be, they are not without their share of humor, irony, and contradiction. Look closely enough and you will spot the incongruities in them: peeling gold leaf in New York's Metropolitan Opera, evidence of maintenance crews at work at La Scala in Milan, and no-nonsense lighting and audio technology screwed or tucked into gloriously overwrought vintage architectural details and niches. The lush color and materiality of the historic interiors Leventi has depicted, the photographs' suggestions of timelessness, and references to the sublime are knowingly at odds with the day-to-day realities of labor disputes, shifts in musical taste, high ticket prices, and rising deficits that threaten opera companies today.

Leventi's work alludes, as well, to photographs by others, from Charles Marville's images from the 1870s that document the bulldozing and construction of boulevards leading to the Paris Opera to Hiroshi Sugimoto's meditative photographs, made a century later, of empty movie theaters. Vertiginous and monumentally scaled works by Andreas Gursky, tasteful images of dignified interiors by Candida Höfer, and, perhaps most of all, the rigorous typological and conceptual approach of influential artists Bernd and Hilla Becher are evidence of a shared photographic fixation with culturally specific building types.

What distinguishes and complicates Leventi's images are the passion and order they celebrate, the synesthesia they summon up, and the questions about opera's continuity they raise. Ultimately, it is the photographer's firmly fixed perspective that encourages our eyes and minds to alight here and there, look this way and that, and to contemplate the legacy and power of opera through the lens of his own tour-de-force performance.

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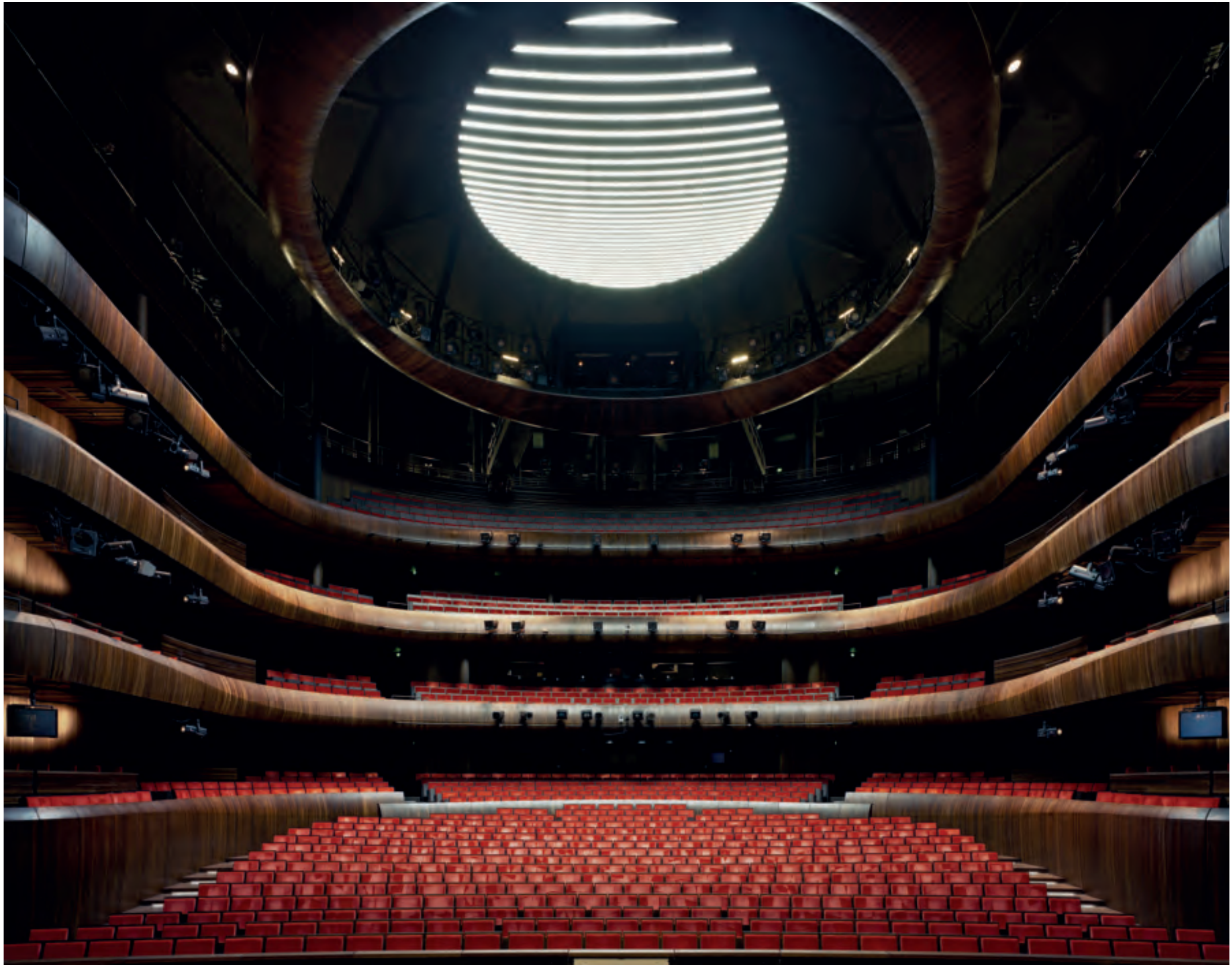

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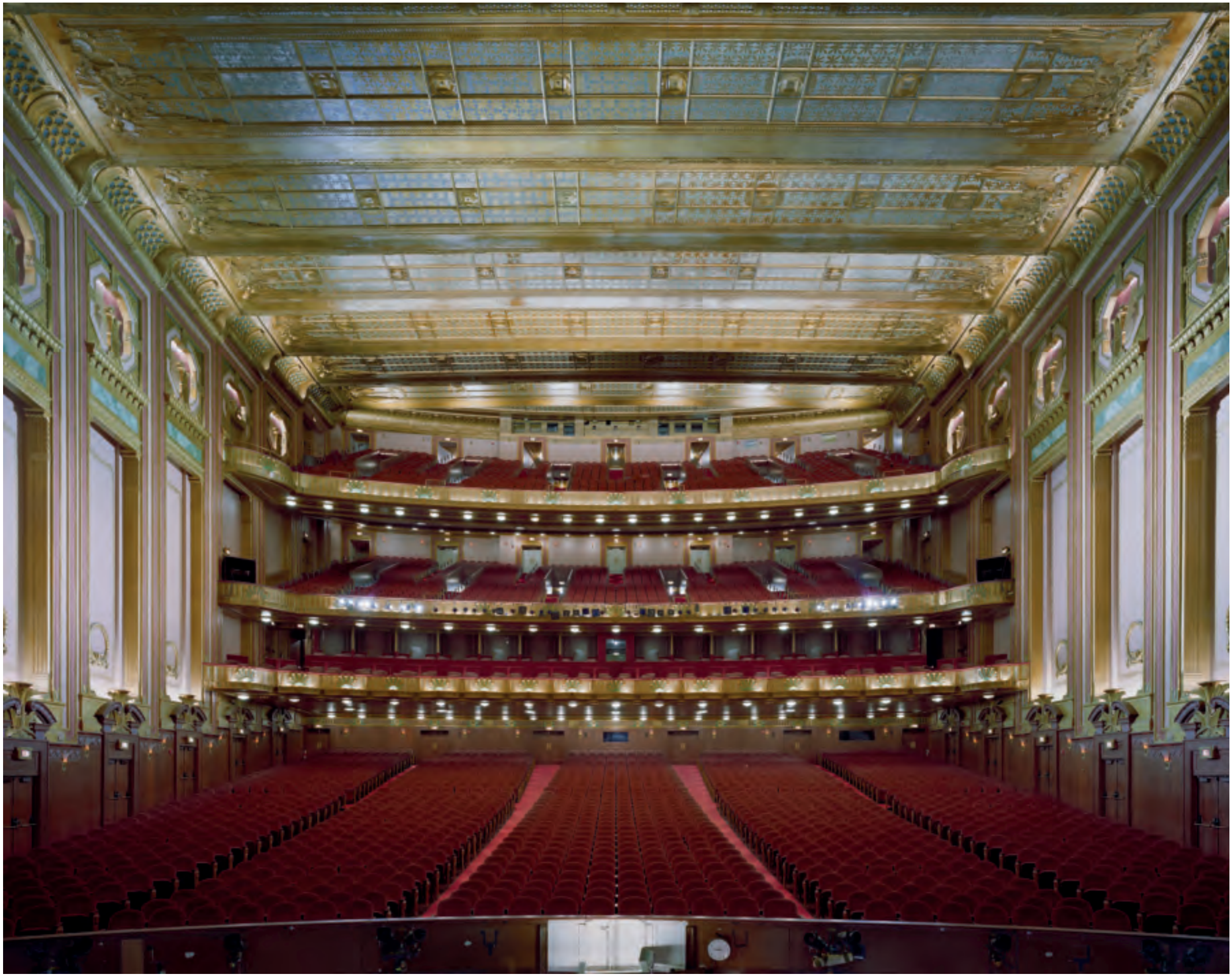

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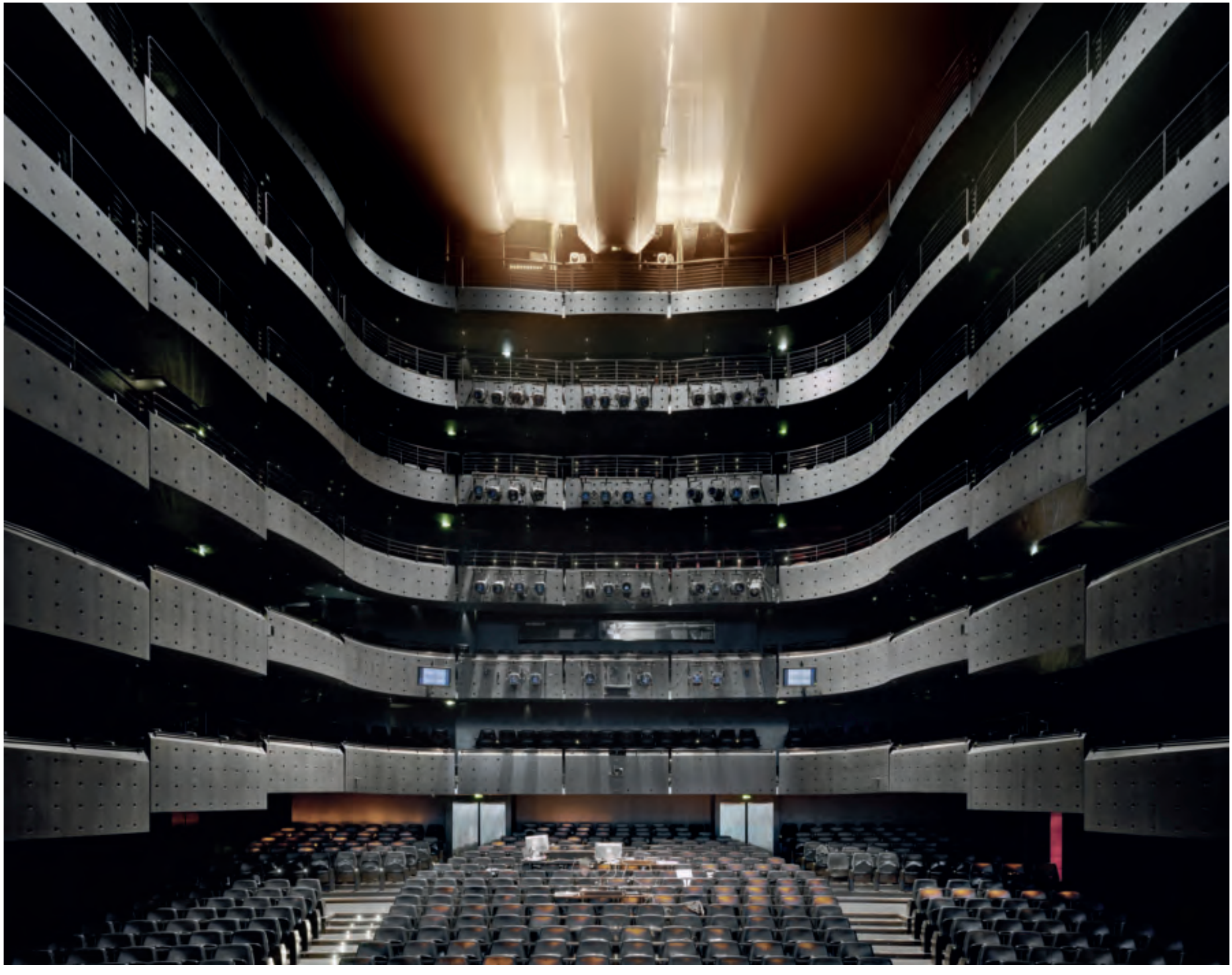

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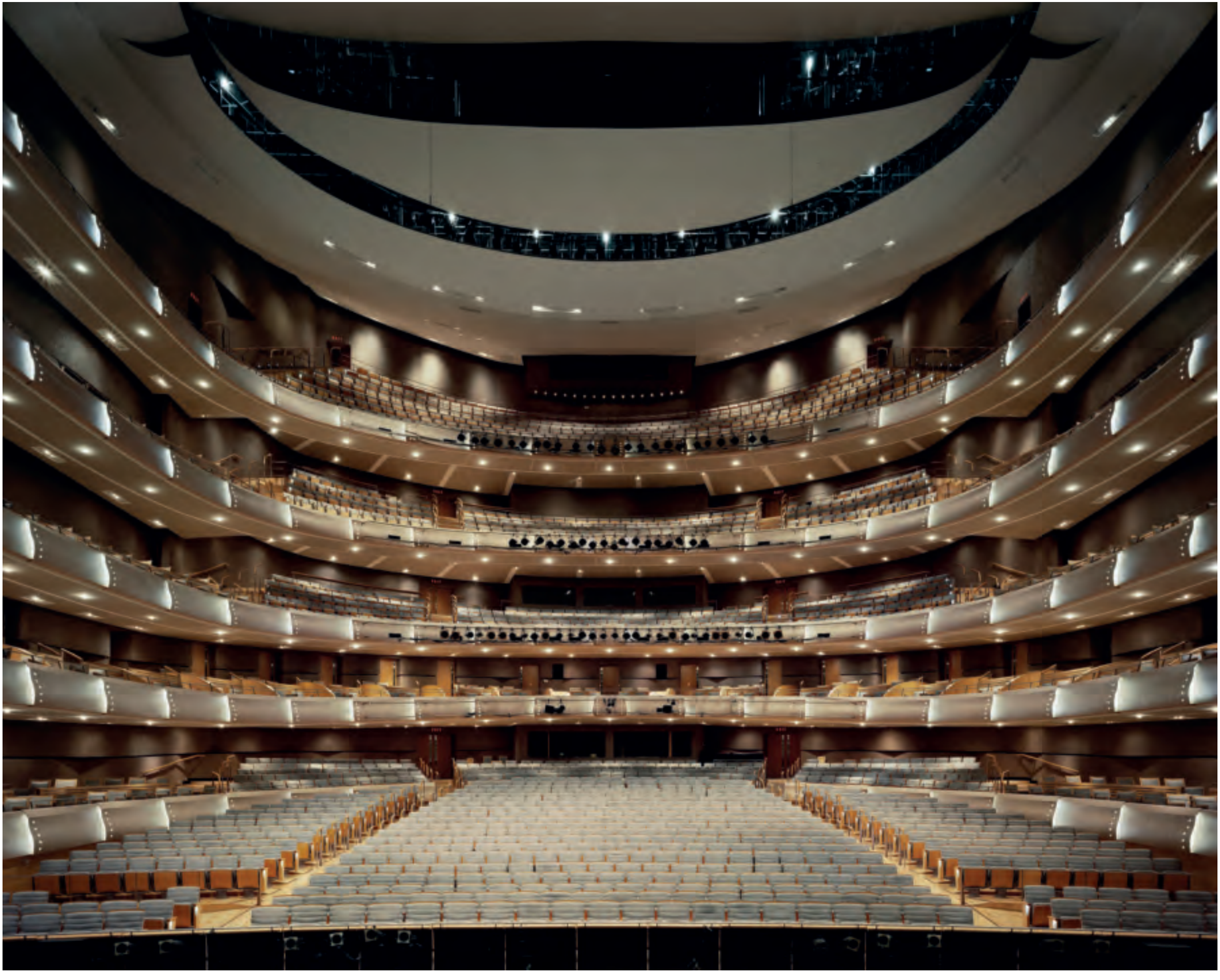

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COMMENTARIES

by Thomas Mellins

1. *La Fenice*

VENICE, ITALY, 2008
Capacity: 1,000

The aptly named La Fenice was built in 1792 as a replacement for the San Benedetto Theater, which had been destroyed in a fire, rebuilt, and ultimately lost by its owners in a legal dispute. Surprisingly, the resident company survived those setbacks and named its new theater after the mythical bird that rose from the ashes. A design competition awarded the commission for La Fenice to Giannantonio Selva, a follower of the Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio. Built on a site bordering a small plaza and a canal, the theater was directly accessible from both the street and the water. In 1836, during preparations for the Venetian debut of Gaetano Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, the second iteration of the theater was consumed by fire. It was quickly rebuilt under the supervision of the architects Tommaso and Giovanni Battista Meduna.

Throughout its existence, the theater has held a central place in the history of Italian opera. Five of Giuseppe Verdi's operas premiered at the theater, including *Ernani*, the first of his operas not to premiere at La Scala; audience reaction was so positive that the composer is said to have taken fifty curtain calls on opening night. The theater also served as the venue for the premiere of significant non-Italian operas including Richard Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, and *Götterdämmerung* and Camille Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*. The 20th century saw the premieres of Igor Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* in 1951, Benjamin Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* in 1954, and Sergei Prokofiev's *The Fiery Angel* in 1955 at La Fenice. Among the countless luminaries to perform in the theater were: Maria Callas, Enrico Caruso, Toti Dal Monte, Mirella Freni, Beniamino Gigli, Luciano Pavarotti, and Joan Sutherland.

La Fenice was destroyed by fire in 1996—an act of arson for which two electricians behind in their work and facing stiff fines were convicted (one apprehended at the Mexico-Belize border). Following the fire, Sutherland noted, "Of course, I have beautiful memories of La Fenice, since that is where I made my wonderfully successful debut in Handel's *Alcina*, in a production directed by Franco Zeffirelli, and where I was first given the name 'La Stupenda.'" The theater was rebuilt under the direction of the architect Aldo Rossi, who was reputed to have used movie stills from the opening of Luchino Visconti's *Senso* (1954), which was filmed in La Fenice, for reference. The theater reopened in 2003.

2. *Romanian Athenaeum*

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA, 2007
Capacity: 794

Beginning in the 1880s, the Romanian Athenaeum Cultural Society, founded in 1865, sought to construct a prominently located building in Bucharest dedicated to the pursuit of the arts and sciences. The French architect Albert Galleron designed a domed classical building housing a circular auditorium, and construction began in 1888. The project was stymied by financial constraints, and the effort, which ultimately relied on well-publicized fundraising campaigns, was not completed until 1897. Inspired by the design of ancient amphitheaters, the auditorium provides uninterrupted sightlines from every seat. In the auditorium, a fresco by Costin Petrescu depicts twenty-five scenes from Romanian history.

The theater made its own history too. In 1919, the Athenaeum served as the location of a political conference that ultimately led to the creation of the modern Romanian state. The theater also became strongly associated with George Enescu, widely acknowledged as Romania's most important 20th century composer; it initiated an international festival named in the musician's honor in 1958.

3. *Cuvilliés-Theater*

MUNICH, GERMANY, 2009
Capacity: 509

Now known as the Cuvilliés-Theater after its architect, François de Cuvilliés, the Altes Residenztheater, as it was originally named, reflects a time when opera was largely enjoyed by royalty and not yet generally accessible to the broader public. Built by Prince Elector of Palatinate and Bavaria Maximilian III Joseph, the rococo-style theater is located within the Munich Residenz, which Cuvilliés also designed. The intimate theater was inaugurated in 1753 with a presentation of Giovanni Battista Ferrandini's *Catone in Utica*. In 1781, the theater hosted the premiere of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's opera seria, *Idomeneo*. Commissioned by Prince Charles Theodore, the opera was attended by the composer and his family. A century and a half later, during World War II, bombing significantly damaged the theater; however, the interior was preserved, as it had been taken apart and safely stored in remote locations. In 1958, the reconstructed theater, complete with its opulent ivory, red, and gold-colored interior, reopened with a performance of Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*. At the outset of the 21st century, the theater was again remodeled, and it reopened with a production of *Idomeneo* in 2008.

4. *Bolshoi Theater*

MOSCOW, RUSSIA, 2011
Capacity: 2,153

The architect Alberto Cavos (whose father was the opera composer Catterino Cavos) reconstructed the Bolshoi—its name Russian for "grand"— after a fire in 1853; as rebuilt, the opulent theater was intended to rival the cultural resources of St. Petersburg, where the architect had designed the imposing Mariinsky Theater. Cavos was renowned not only for his skills as a designer but also as an acoustician. In reference to the theater, the architect asserted, "It is constructed as a musical instrument."

The Bolshoi has hosted the premieres of many classic Russian operas, including: Pyotr Tchaikovsky's *The Voyevoda* (1869) and *Mazeppa* (1884); Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Maid of Pskov* (1873), at which Feodor Chaliapin sang the role of Ivan the Terrible; Dmitri Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1935); and Sergei Prokofiev's *War and Peace* (1959). On October 28, 2011, after a costly and controversial six-year-long renovation, the theater reopened with a concert televised worldwide—Natalie Dessay, Plácido Domingo, and Angela Gheorghiu were among the featured artists. In addition to being known as a setting for opera, the theater is also known for its role in Russia's turbulent political history. Vladimir Lenin often used the hall to address the All-Russia Congress of Soviets, and the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was announced at the Bolshoi in 1921. So essential is the theater to the nation's cultural identity that its image graces the hundred-ruble banknote.

5. & 6. *Palais Garnier*

PARIS, FRANCE, 2009
Capacity: 2,013

In 1861, at the age of thirty-five, Charles Garnier won the commission for the Théâtre National de l'Opéra, which would in time bring the young architect great acclaim. Garnier beat out 150 other entrants, including the influential architect Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc. The immense theater, now widely known as the Palais Garnier, took fourteen years to complete. During construction, the building was used for a variety of purposes, including a food-storage facility during the Paris Commune. The theater's construction coincided with Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris; he destroyed many buildings to create the grand Avenue de l'Opéra, which leads to the Palais Garnier.

The theater's interiors epitomize the grandeur of the Belle Époque, though the main auditorium also houses Marc Chagall's *Bouquet de réves*, a colorful ceiling painting completed in 1964. Theater designers Philippe Chaperon and Auguste Rubé designed the stage's outer trompe l'oeil painted curtain as well as the lambrequin, which incorporates the coat of arms of Louis XIV as well as the date 1669, the year the king founded the Académie Royale de Musique. Despite the theater's opulence, Garnier had sought to create an environment in which the audience could take center stage. The architect said, "Put on your diamonds and finery, uncover your shoulders, wrap up in silk and lace; you will be seen and admired. I have tried to

create a setting that will not compete with the jewelry." In time, the building entered the realm of legend with the publication, in 1910, of Gaston Leroux's novel *The Phantom of the Opera*. Partially based on events that took place at the Palais Garnier, the popular story was immortalized in a 1925 film starring Lon Chaney in the title role and in Andrew Lloyd Webber's record-breaking musical of 1986.

For years French opera dominated the theater's offerings, particularly from the end of World War I until the Opéra National de Paris Bastille opened in 1989. Wagner's operas were an exception, though they were controversial; an early production of *Tannhäuser* was shouted off stage, and police were brought in to manage the unruly crowd during a performance of Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin*. (The Palais Garnier's opera productions ceased with the opening of the new theater but returned in 1995.)

7. *The Metropolitan Opera*
NEW YORK, UNITED STATES, 2008
Capacity: 3,975

Located at the heart of New York's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and completed in 1966, the Metropolitan Opera House, designed by Wallace Harrison, synthesizes traditional grandeur with modernist simplicity of form. The theater's imposing lobby, highly visible through the heavily glazed facade of the travertine-clad building, incorporates sweeping staircases and balconies, as well as two specially commissioned, monumentally sized paintings by Marc Chagall: *Le Triomphe de la Musique* and *Les Sources de la Musique*. The dramatic scale of the auditorium's architectural features, including a fifty-two-foot by fifty-two-foot proscenium arch that frames a seventy-eight-foot-deep stage, is matched by the complexity of its backstage mechanical equipment. Twenty-five crystal chandeliers, donated by the Austrian government in gratitude for American support in rebuilding the Staatsoper in Vienna following World War II, were designed to mechanically rise during performances so as to not obstruct views of the stage. The twenty-four-karat gold-leafed ceiling reputedly required so much gold that weekly quotas were imposed so as to not adversely affect other businesses requiring the material.

The opera's inaugural performance was the world premiere of Samuel Barber's specially commissioned *Antony and Cleopatra*, with Justin Díaz and Leontyne Price in the leading roles. Since 1972, when James Levine became the Metropolitan Opera's principal conductor, and subsequently its director and artistic director, the opera house has featured a veritable who's who of the world's greatest singers. Begun in 2006, the Metropolitan's "Live in HD" broadcasts have increased its reach and made the opera house among the most recognized in the world.

8. *Bayerische Staatsoper*
MUNICH, GERMANY, 2009
Capacity: 2,101

The Bayerische Staatsoper is the third national opera house to occupy its site. The architect Karl von Fischer designed the first one, a neoclassical theater which opened in 1818 with a production of Albert Klebe and Ferdinand Fränzl's *Die Weihe*. Following a fire in 1824, the building was rebuilt under the supervision of the architect Leo von Klenze. Bombing during World War II destroyed the building, which had served as an important venue for the presentation of works by Richard Wagner as well as Gioachino Rossini. In 1953, the Friends of the Nationaltheater initiated an annual fundraising lottery to support a rebuilding effort. The theater reopened in 1963 and soon presented contemporary German operas, including Werner Egk's *Die Verlobung in San Domingo* and Aribert Reimann's *Lear*. The theater presented more than sixty world premieres during the 20th century.

9. *Teatro Real*
MADRID, SPAIN, 2009
Capacity: 1,746

Queen Isabel II commissioned the Teatro Real, which was built opposite the official monarchial residence, the Palacio Real, in Madrid. The building's inaugural production, a performance of Gaetano Donizetti's *La Favorita*, took place on November 19, 1850, the Queen's birthday. Giuseppe Verdi attended the Spanish premiere of his *La Forza del destino* at El Real, as the theater is known, in 1863. In 1925, Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes performed in the theater with Vaslav Nijinsky dancing and Igor Stravinsky in attendance, but later that year construction of the Madrid subway system caused damage to the building and forced it to close. The theater's stage was devoid of opera productions for more than seventy years. The theater reopened in the 1960s as a concert venue, but it was not until the building was modernized in 1996 that opera returned to El Real.

10. & 11. *Kungliga Operan*
STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN, 2008
Capacity: 1,090

In 1773, King Gustavus III, a patron of the arts and a playwright, sponsored the first opera production in Sweden—Francesco Uttini's *Thetis et Pelée*—and collaborated on its libretto. Unsatisfied with previous Swedish efforts in the dramatic arts, the king felt that music would help to aurally soften the Swedish language. Early endeavors proved popular, and the country's first purpose-built opera house, designed by Carl Frederick Adelcrantz (the architect was twenty-seven years old when his design was accepted), served as the venue for important productions beginning in 1782. It was for a different reason, however, that the theater gained renown; the king was assassinated in the theater in 1792, an event that provided the story for Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Un ballo in maschera*. In 1806, King Gustavus IV, who had long objected to the building's use after the assassination of his father, closed the theater. Reopened six years later, the building was demolished in 1891. In 1898, the current Kungliga Operan, designed by Axel Anderberg, opened. Throughout the 20th century, the theater focused on the presentation of Swedish operas; Lars Johan Werle's *Tintomara*, György Ligeti's *Le grand macabre*, and Ingvar Lidholm's *Ett drömspel* are among the notable works to have premiered there. The opera house has also nurtured the careers of such famous Swedish singers as Jussi Björling, Elisabeth Söderström, Birgit Nilsson, and Anne Sofie von Otter.

12. *Markgräfliches Opernhaus*
BAYREUTH, GERMANY, 2008
Capacity: 500

Completed in 1748, the Markgräfliches Opernhaus was built by the Hohenzollern Margrave Frederick of Brandenburg-Bayreuth and Princess Wilhelmine of Prussia to mark the marriage of their daughter Elisabeth Fredericka Sophie to Duke Charles Eugene of Württemberg. Despite its connection to this specific event, however, the theater's location in the center of the city suggests that it was intended to serve a growing bourgeoisie, not exclusively royalty, as established tradition held. Princess Wilhelmine proved to be an interesting client; she established the margravial theater company in 1737 and was an opera composer, writing *Argemore*, as well as an actor and a director. As designed by the French architect Joseph Saint-Pierre and interior designers Giuseppe and Carlo Bibiena, the baroque theater's orchestra level incorporated a flat floor, so that the space could do double-duty as a ballroom. Trompe l'oeil painting creates the illusion of elaborate architectural details. Following the princess's death in 1758, the theater fell silent. More than a century later, in 1872, Richard Wagner selected Bayreuth to host a music festival, conducting Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* in the theater. Since 2013, this exemplar of baroque theater design—rare today—has been protected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

13. *Teatro Municipale*
PIACENZA, ITALY, 2010
Capacity: 1,055

In 1802, inspired by Giuseppe Piermarini's imposing design for La Scala in Milan, the architect Pietro La Boubée submitted plans for a new municipal theater to the group of noble families in Piacenza who were backing the project. His proposal was not approved, and the architect Lotario Tomba took over the project. In 1830, Alessandro Sanquirico, an architect and scenic artist who had worked at La Scala, remodeled the building's facade. On a visit to Piacenza in 1816, the French novelist Stendhal praised the theater as the most beautiful in Italy. Ernest Hemingway also noted the theater's presence in the small city in his 1929 novel *A Farewell to Arms*.

14. *Opéra de Monte Carlo*
MONTE CARLO, MONACO, 2009
Capacity: 524

Designed by the architect Charles Garnier shortly after he finished the Théâtre National de l'Opéra de Paris (which became known as the Palais Garnier), the Opéra de Monte Carlo opened in 1879; the inaugural presentation included operatic singing and a reading by Sarah Bernhardt. Two weeks later, Robert Planquette's *Le chevalier Gaston* was the first opera presented in the theater. The theater, located adjacent to the principality's famed casino, was not designed exclusively with opera in mind. However, in the early 20th century it gained renown with productions of Giacomo Puccini's *La bohème* and Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto*, both starring Enrico Caruso and Nellie Melba in the leading roles. The theater presented premieres of Puccini's *La rondine* in 1917 and Maurice Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges* in 1925.

15. *Státní Opera*
PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC, 2008
Capacity: 1,041

Originally opened by the Deutscher Bühnenverein on January 5, 1888, as the Neue Deutsche Theater, the Státní Opera was designed by the Viennese architectural firm Fellner & Helmer in association with the Prague-based architect Alfons Wertmüller. Over time, the theater's many name changes have reflected the broader context of political shifts and upheavals. From 1939 to 1945, with Nazi occupation of the nation, the theater was the Deutsches Opernhaus. From 1949 until 1989, it was known as the Smetana Theater, in commemoration of the great Czech composer. Following the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the theater was named Státní Opera. Gustav Mahler and Richard

Strauss were among the many German luminaries who performed in the elaborately decorated theater, and Enrico Caruso and Nellie Melba sang on its stage.

16. *Grand Théâtre*
BORDEAUX, FRANCE, 2014
Capacity: 1,114

So imposing is the classical facade of Bordeaux's Grand Théâtre, complete with a peristyle of twelve Corinthian columns, that it is perhaps not surprising the theater did double-duty as the French Parliament's National Assembly in 1871, ninety-one years after the building's completion. Louis XV's confidant, Louis Francois Armand de Plessis, commissioned the Parisian architect Victor Louis to design the building. The theater is reputed to have inspired the architect Charles Garnier, who attended a performance there in 1880, in his scheme for the fabled Théâtre National de l'Opéra in Paris. However, Louis's theater, with its sumptuous interiors decorated in pale blue, white, and gold—the colors of French royalty—was not universally praised. At the time of the theater's construction, members of the public and the press criticized its cost, and literary luminaries Victor Hugo and Stendhal subsequently lampooned the theater's opulence. Whatever the building's ambitions and arguable pretentions, it was carefully integrated into the city of Bordeaux's social and commercial life, housing numerous cafes and boutiques in addition to the auditorium itself. The theater presented the French premieres of Ruggero Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* (1894), Jules Massenet's *La Navarraise* (1895), Benjamin Britten's *Gloriana* (1953), and Paul Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler* (1963).

17. *Magyar Állami Operház*
BUDAPEST, HUNGARY, 2008
Capacity: 1,261

In 1872, a committee masterminded by Ferenc Erkel, who composed the Hungarian national anthem, and Ferenc Liszt proposed to erect a purpose-built opera house in Budapest; for the preceding two centuries, opera had been performed in Hungary exclusively in the homes of the nobility and in multiuse theaters. Following a design by the prolific Hungarian architect Miklós Ybl, construction of the elaborate theater, which incorporated pioneering backstage hydraulic lifts, began in 1874 and was completed nine years later. Busts of Erkel and Liszt by Alajos Stróbl flank the building's main entrance. Inside, a ceiling fresco by Károly Lotz depicts the Greek gods on Mount Olympus, and the royal box is decorated with sculpted figures representing the four operatic voice types: soprano, alto, bass, and tenor.

The opera house opened with a performance of selections from Hungarian operas as well as the first act of Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin*. Erkel, who founded the Budapesti Filharmóniai Társaság Zenekara, served as the opera house's first music director, and Gustav Mahler held the director's post from 1887 to 1891. Half a century later, from 1947 to 1951, in a Europe transformed by two world wars (the opera house's basement functioned as an air-raid shelter during World War II), Otto Klemperer directed the theater. Béla Bartók's opera *Bluebeard's Castle* premiered at the opera house in 1918. Thomas Beecham, Herbert von Karajan, György (George) Solti, and Bruno Walter were among the many esteemed conductors to work at the theater.

18. *Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie*
BRUSSELS, BELGIUM, 2010
Capacity: 1,152

The federally supported Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, also known as the Koninklijke Muntschouwburg, serves as Belgium's premier opera house. It is the third building on its site; in 1856, the current building replaced a former opera house, which in turn had supplanted a building that housed a coin-minting operation and gave rise to the subsequent theaters' names. Following the destruction of the first theater by fire, the architect Joseph Poelaert's eclectic design was realized. La Monnaie opened with a performance of Fromental Halévy's *Jaguarita l'Indienne*. Throughout the late-19th and 20th centuries, the theater staged the world premieres of many notable operas, including: Jules Massenet's *Hérodiade* (1881); Vincent d'Indy's *Fervaal* (1897); Darius Milhaud's *Les malheurs d'Orphée* (1926); Arthur Honegger's *Antigone* (1927); Sergei Prokofiev's *Igrok* (1929); and John Adam's *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1991). In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, the directorships of Gérard Mortier and Bernard Foccroulle expanded the opera house's renown and its reputation as a champion of the new and avant-garde. In 1986, as an expression of the theater's focus on modernism, the architect Charles Vandenhove renovated the building and commissioned contemporary artists to create site-specific works and spaces: Sol LeWitt designed a marble floor pattern; Sam Francis painted a ceiling-mounted triptych; and Daniel Buren designed a reception room adjacent to the royal box.

19. *Teatro di Villa Aldrovandi Mazzacorati*
BOLOGNA, ITALY, 2014
Capacity: 80

In 1763, inside the imposing 17th-century, Palladian-style Villa Aldrovandi Mazzacorati, the property's owner, Giovan Francesco Aldrovandi, who was a playwright and amateur actor, built a private aristocratic theater reflective of the cultural interests and ideals of the Enlightenment. Above the main rectangular floor, two tiers of U-shaped balconies surmounted twenty-four stucco statues depicting tritons and mermaids, while the walls were frescoed with *putti* in the lower section, cameos on the first tier, and floral motifs throughout. Noted for its splendid acoustics, the theater opened with a production of Voltaire's tragedy *Alzira*, translated from French by Aldrovandi's father-in-law, and has long been used as the setting for opera productions. Today, this intimate theater shares the villa with a health center.

20. *Teatro Comunale di Bologna*
BOLOGNA, ITALY, 2010
Capacity: 1,034

Completed in 1763, the Teatro Comunale di Bologna was the first theater in Europe to be fully financed and operated by a municipality. In the late-19th and 20th centuries the theater, designed by Antonio Galli Bibiena, was strongly associated with Arturo Toscanini, who conducted Giuseppe Verdi's *Falstaff* there in 1894 and remained in residence until World War II. Surprisingly, however, in the 18th and early-19th centuries, the theater was a hotbed of activity for German composers. Christoph Gluck composed *Il Trionfo di Clelia* for the theater's inaugural performance on May 14, 1763. The Teatro Comunale later gained a reputation for being "Wagnerian," as many of the composer's operas—including *Tannhäuser*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tristan und Isolde*, and *Parsifal*—received their Italian premieres there. Wagner attended the Italian premiere of his opera *Lohengrin* in the theater in 1871, and so did Verdi.

21. *Teatro Olimpico*
VICENZA, ITALY, 2010
Capacity: 470

The architect Andrea Palladio, a giant of the Italian Renaissance, designed the Teatro Olimpico to serve as a setting for classical drama. The theater—Palladio's last building—was inaugurated in 1585, nearly five years after the architect's death. It was completed under the supervision of the architect and theatrical designer Vincenzo Scamozzi. The initial stage design incorporated a series of painted panels that used forced perspective to portray a long street, even though in reality the recession was shallow. The panels, depicting the ancient city of Thebes, were intended for the theater's first offering: Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, presented on March 3, 1585. Over the course of the theater's long existence it has presented a wide variety of dramatic and musical events, including a 1998 recital that propelled the soprano Cecilia Bartoli to international stardom.

22. *Guangzhou Opera House*
GUANGZHOU, CHINA, 2014
Capacity: 1,804

Designed by the Iraq-born London-based architect Zaha Hadid and opened in 2010, the Guangzhou Opera House brought international attention to the rapidly expanding commercial city as well as to China's changing cultural landscape. In 2002, an international design competition for a performing arts center attracted high-profile entrants, including Hadid, Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, and the Vienna-based Coop Himmelb(l)au. Hadid's winning scheme called for two complexly massed buildings said to resemble pebbles shaped over time by the waters of the Pearl River. (The performing arts center occupies a site in a riverfront industrial area isolated from the city's downtown.) The architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff, writing in the *New York Times* at the time of the opera house's opening, noted: "Stepping into the main hall is like entering the soft insides of an oyster. Seats are arranged in a slightly asymmetrical pattern, enveloping the stage on three sides, with undulant balconies cascading down in front of the stage. The concave ceiling is pierced by thousands of little lights, so that when the main lights dim before a performance it looks as if you're sitting under the dome of a clear night sky." Directed by the American filmmaker Shahar Stroh, a production of *Turandot*, Giacomo Puccini's opera set in 12th-century China, inaugurated the opera house on May 9, 2010. The opera was controversial in China due to its portrayal of Chinese people and history and had been banned until the end of the 20th century.

23. *Mariinsky Theater*
ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA, 2009
Capacity: 1,625

The Mariinsky Theater has played an outsized role in the history of Russian opera and ballet, serving as the venue for numerous Russian masterworks, including Modest Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* in 1874, Pyotr Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades* in 1890 and *Iolanta* in 1892, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel* in 1909. The theater's name has undergone numerous changes, reflecting the nation's tumultuous politics. At its inception in 1860, it was known as the Imperial Mariinsky Theater, commemorating the Empress Maria Alexandrovna, Tsar Alexander II's wife, but it subsequently went through iterations, following the Russian Revolution, as the State Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet and as the Kirov State Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet. The latter name honored Leningrad's Communist Party leader, Sergey Kirov, who was assassinated in 1934. Since the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the theater has returned to a variation of its original name: the State Academic Mariinsky Theater.

The theater, designed by Antonio Rinaldi and completed in 1783, was renovated in 1836 by Alberto Cavos, who had been responsible for the design of the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow. The theater reopened with the world premiere of Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka's opera, *A Life for the Tsar*. The Mariinsky later served as the setting for a prominent scene in Leo Tolstoy's 1877 novel, *Anna Karenina*; Anna, whose reputation in high society has been tarnished due to her marital indiscretions, attends a show at the theater in hope of rejoining her social circle, but she is openly snubbed and humiliated by her former friends.

Valery Gergiev has served as the theater's artistic director since 1988. He has strengthened the Mariinsky's association with leading opera companies and orchestras worldwide and significantly broadened the theater's international profile. He has championed the work of Mussorgsky and Sergei Prokofiev, while at the same time favoring the presentation of non-Russian operas in their original languages. In 1993, the theater presented Giuseppe Verdi's *La forza del destino*, recreating sets and costumes from the opera's St. Petersburg premiere in 1863.

24. *Stavovské Divadlo*
PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC, 2008
Capacity: 659

Perhaps no theater in Europe is more closely associated with a single musical genius than the Stavovské Divadlo in Prague, where Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart conducted his masterworks *Don Giovanni* in 1787 and *La clemenza di Tito* in 1791. The Czech aristocrat František Antonín Count Nostitz Rieneck commissioned the architect Anton Haffenecker to design the theater, which was completed in 1783. Inaugurated with a performance of German playwright Gotthold Lessing's Enlightenment tragedy *Emilia Galotti*, the neoclassical Stavovské Divadlo gained fame with Mozart's operas, both of which had Italian-language librettos. Following the positive reception given *Don Giovanni*, Mozart was invited back to the city to conduct a performance of *La clemenza di Tito*—commissioned by Leopold II to mark his coronation as King of Bohemia. So appreciated was the composer's work that he is reputed to have said, "My Praguers understand me." Today, the Stavovské Divadlo, which served as a location for the film *Amadeus* (1984), is the only venue in which Mozart performed that is still in existence.

25. *Slottsteater*
DROTTNINGHOLM, SWEDEN, 2008
Capacity: 436

As much a time capsule as a working theater, the Slottsteater perfectly reflects the artistic vision and ambition of Princess Louisa Ulrika of Prussia, sister of Frederick the Great. The princess had first visited Drottningholm—the Queen's Island—in 1744 when she married Crown Prince Adolf Fredrik, heir apparent to the Swedish throne. As part of elaborate wedding festivities, a Swedish theater ensemble performed for the couple, but the queen was not impressed. She replaced the company with a troupe from Paris and built a theater complex, complete with housing for the actors and their families—150 people in all. So skillful was the troupe chosen by Louisa that in 1762, when an actor ran on stage shouting "fire! fire!" and fainted, audience members remained in their seats. The warning proved real; the fire claimed the lives of four people and destroyed the theater. The architect Carl Fredrik Adelcrantz designed a new theater, twice the size of the original, which was completed in 1766. Remarkably preserved, the theater is itself a work of stagecraft. Its intricate cornices and moldings are made of papier-mâché, and its flat, wooden ceiling is a triumph of trompe l'oeil painting. Backstage, original equipment designed by Donato Stopani is still used today—as are thirty original sets. Specially designed electric lights that mimic wax candles are the dimly illuminated interior's only concession to contemporary theatergoing. As the British conductor Andrew Parrott has stated, "I don't know of another opera house in which—not least in purely musical terms—the 18th century repertory is so effortlessly at home."

26. *Teatro Municipale Valli*
REGGIO EMILIA, ITALY, 2010
Capacity: 1,170

Designed by the architect Cesare Costa, the Teatro Municipale Valli features interior decoration by Girolamo Magnani, ceiling frescoes by Domenico Pellizzi, and a theater curtain by Alfonso Chierici. The theater opened on April 21, 1857, with a presentation of the opera *Vittor Pisani* by the local composer Achille Peri. In near-continuous use since its completion, the theater is perhaps best known as the site of tenor Luciano Pavarotti's opera debut. On April 29, 1961, Pavarotti sang the role of Rodolfo in a production of Puccini's *La bohème*, conducted by Francesco Molinari-Pradelli. Though Pavarotti did not achieve international fame immediately and his debut at La Scala came two years later, his initial appearance on the stage of the Teatro Municipale attests to the important role this small regional theater has played as a showcase for opera talent.

27. *Teatro Regio*
TURIN, ITALY, 2010
Capacity: 1,592

In the 1730s, King Charles Emmanuel III, formerly the Duke of Savoy, commissioned Filippo Juvarra to design a theater in Turin, with its construction in the hands of Benedetto Alfieri. The theater opened in 1740 with a production of Francesco Feo's *Arsace*. Built to serve the needs of the king, the theater contained a royal box directly connected to Charles Emmanuel's private living quarters in the adjacent royal palace. In the early 20th century, having undergone name changes that reflected political shifts and temporary French control of the area, the theater hosted the Italian premieres of several renowned operas, including Richard Strauss's *Salome*. The theater was destroyed by fire in 1936, and rebuilding efforts languished for nearly four decades, despite successive proposed schemes by architects Aldo Morbelli and Robaldo Morozzo della Rocca. Opening on April 10, 1973, with a presentation of Giuseppe Verdi's *I vespri siciliani*, the new theater consisted of a modernist structure designed by Carlo Mollino and Marcello Zavelani-Rossi; their work was tucked discretely behind the previous theater's original classical facade. Mollino also designed the auditorium's distinctive chandelier, which holds 1,762 rods containing light bulbs as well as 1,900 reflective elements.

28. *Den Norske Opera og Ballett*
OSLO, NORWAY, 2008
Capacity: 1,369

A worldwide design competition held in 1990 resulted in the commission for a new opera and ballet theater in Oslo, Norway, being awarded to the architectural firm of Snøhetta. As conceived of and realized by the Oslo-based, international design team, the building synthesizes urbanism, landscape, and art, with aesthetically dramatic and technically state-of-the-art performance facilities. Occupying a prominent site facing the city's harbor, the building—clad in granite, white Carrara marble, white aluminum panels, and glass—embraces the waterfront with a large sloping plaza that invites public gatherings. At the same time, public access to the building's roof via a dramatic ramp transforms the building itself into a landscape to be explored and enjoyed. Public engagement continues inside, with generously scaled, light-filled, oak-paneled lobby spaces and cafes. Perforated wall panels designed by the Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson hide structural supports as they provide visual interest. The main auditorium, inspired in its size, shape, and surface treatments by the Semperoper in Dresden, is distinguished by its highly regarded acoustics; a modernist, oculus-like, circular chandelier, also designed by Snøhetta, comprises 5,800 handcrafted crystals that not only provide illumination, but also diffuse sound throughout the hall.

29. *Staatsoper*
VIENNA, AUSTRIA, 2008
Capacity: 2,276

In the 1850s, envisioning Vienna's Ringstrasse as a grand boulevard commensurate with the power of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Emperor Franz Joseph I claimed one of the new street's principal sites for a proposed opera house. An architectural competition for the prominently situated building resulted in a commission for August Sicard von Sicardsburg and Eduard van der Nüll. (Neither architect lived to see the building completed, von Sicardsburg dying of tuberculosis and van der Nüll committing suicide.) The Renaissance style building, officially known as the Kaiserlich-Königliches Hofoperntheater and nicknamed the "Hofoper," presented Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Don Giovanni* on opening night in 1869. The Emperor and his wife, Empress Elisabeth, were in attendance. With the demise of the empire and its replacement by the First Republic of Austria in 1920, the theater was renamed the Staatsoper. In 1945, toward the end of World War II, the theater endured bombing; though the building's arcade had been protected, the rest of the opera house suffered extensive damage. After considerable institutional and public debate regarding the possibilities of demolishing the building and rebuilding on the same site or building a new opera house on a new site, the decision was made to restore the existing structure. It was not until 1955, however, that the restoration was completed, and the opera house reopened with U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in attendance. The opera house's many renowned artistic or musical directors include Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, Bruno Walter, Herbert von Karajan, Lorin Maazel, Claudio Abbado, and Seiji Ozawa. In 1994, the opera house served as the setting for Christa Ludwig's final operatic performance; the famed German mezzo-soprano sang the role of Clytemnestra in Richard Strauss's *Elektra*.

30. *War Memorial Opera House* SAN FRANCISCO, UNITED STATES, 2009
Capacity: 3,346

The War Memorial Opera House in San Francisco was the first municipally owned opera house in the United States. The building commemorates the men and women who served in World War I; it was realized as part of a complex encompassing the nearby Veterans Building. Arthur Brown Jr., architect of the San Francisco City Hall (1916), together with the

theater specialist G. Albert Lansburgh, designed the grand Beaux-Arts opera house. It was completed in 1932, its style in contrast to the many civic buildings across the nation that had begun to reflect the influence of an ascendant architectural modernism, though a somewhat reductivist architectural vocabulary as well as a stylish chandelier inside its auditorium gave the War Memorial Opera House a contemporary feel. Designed to accommodate large audiences, perhaps in recognition of economic imperatives, the building's auditorium was considerably larger than many of the great European opera houses, including the Palais Garnier in Paris and the Royal Opera House in London.

The theater opened with a production of *Tosca* conducted by Gaetano Merola, the founding conductor of the resident San Francisco Opera. Since that time many internationally recognized singers have made their American debuts at the War Memorial Opera House, including Anna Netrebko, Birgit Nilsson, Leontyne Price, and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. The San Francisco Opera has presented numerous world premieres, particularly works by American composers, such as Conrad Susa's *The Dangerous Liaisons* (1994), André Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1998), Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking* (2000), and John Adams's *Doctor Atomic* (2005). (Following an earthquake that caused significant damage in 1989, the building was renovated and retrofitted by the architectural firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.)

31. *Teatro Regio di Parma*
PARMA, ITALY, 2010
Capacity: 1,252

The Teatro Regio di Parma stands in the shadows of its nearby rivals, chief among them La Scala in Milan and La Fenice in Venice; nonetheless many opera lovers cherish the theater in Parma as an essential showcase for the enduring traditions of Italian opera. In the 1820s, Marie Louise, the Austrian archduchess who reigned as the Duchess of Parma from 1816 to 1847, masterminded the construction of the theater. (The theater is also known as the Nuovo Ducale in reference to Parma's demolished Teatro Ducale, which was built in the 17th century.) The new theater, occupying the former site of the Monastero di S. Alessandro, adjacent to the Palazzo Ducale, opened in 1829 with the premiere performance of Vincenzo Bellini's *Zaira*. The unpopular opera was written after Gioachino Rossini declined an invitation to compose the opera house's inaugural work. The building was renovated in 1853; at that time, Giovan Battista Borghesi adorned the auditorium's ceiling with frescoes and decorated the stage curtain with an allegorical painting, *Trionfo della Sapienza*.

Historically, the theater has favored the work of Giuseppe Verdi, born near Parma and adopted as a native son. All of Verdi's operas, including more than 175 performances of *Aida*, have been staged at the theater, and the composer has been the subject of numerous opera festivals there. Maria Callas was featured in a 1951 production of *La Traviata*, and numerous other superstars graced the stage throughout the 20th century, including José Carreras, Alfredo Kraus, Renata Tebaldi, Renata Scotto, and Richard Tucker. Despite the presence of such luminaries, however, it is perhaps the Teatro Regio's famously discerning and demonstrative audiences that are most associated with the opera house. Audience response has reputedly caused the premature lowering of the curtain during a performance and, in another case, the termination of members of the resident company.

32. *Semperoper*
DRESDEN, GERMANY, 2014
Capacity: 1,323

In a tribute to its designer, the influential architect, historian, and writer Gottfried Semper, the Staatsoper in Dresden is often referred to as the Semperoper. Opened in 1841, the Königlich Sächsische Hoftheater, as the building was first identified, employed an eclectic architectural vocabulary, which exemplified what became known as the Dresden School. In 1849 Semper, who was involved with the revolutionary movements that swept through Europe in this period went into exile; though he was never to return to the city with which he strongly identified, he was nevertheless asked to rebuild the opera house following a devastating fire in 1869. Semper's son Manfred, also an architect, oversaw the project following his plans.

Richard Wagner's *Riezi* premiered at the theater in 1842, and the following year the composer became resident Kapellmeister. So anxious was Wagner about the length of his opera—it ran over six hours—that he reputedly had the clock above the stage stopped during the performance. His *Der fligende Holländer* and *Tannhäuser* received their premieres in the theater in 1843 and 1845, respectively. In the 20th century, world premieres of *Salome* (1903), *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), *Die Ägyptische Helena* (1928), and *Daphne* (1938) brought international acclaim to the composer Richard Strauss. In 1945, the theater was once again destroyed; bombing during World War II left only the opera house's exterior walls standing. Decades-long public debate regarding how to rebuild ensued. In 1975, original architectural drawings for the building were found in Vienna, and, ten years later, on the fortieth anniversary of its destruction, the theater reopened with a production of Carl Maria von Weber's *Der Freischütz*.

33. *Civic Opera House*
CHICAGO, UNITED STATES, 2009
Capacity: 3,563

The location of an opera house in the base of a skyscraper—the most widely recognized architectural symbol of democratic capitalism—is a truly American enterprise. And how fitting, too, that this marriage of cultural and corporate power was realized in Chicago, where the skyscraper type can trace its roots. In the mid-1920s, utilities and railroad magnate Samuel Insull, who had been an employee of Thomas Alva Edison's, hired the Chicago-based firm of Graham, Anderson, Probst & White to design a forty-five-story, mixed-use building housing both offices and a theater. The principal facade of the Art Deco theater incorporated sculpture and decorative elements by Henry Herring, who had been trained at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Inside, Jules Guérin, an architectural delineator hired to illustrate Daniel Burnham's 1907 master plan for Chicago, painted a mural on the auditorium's fire curtain portraying characters from iconic operas. The theater opened in October 1929, six days after the stock market crashed. The resident opera company failed, as did the three companies that subsequently shared the facility in the 1930s and 1940s. (The Lyric Opera of Chicago, which now owns the theater, began to rent it in 1934.) The first opera presented in the theater was *Camille* by the twenty-eight-year-old Chicagoan Hamilton Forrest; the work proved unpopular and was never performed outside of Chicago. Despite its somewhat compromised start, the theater became a cultural landmark in the skyscraping city and entered the realm of myth as the putative inspiration for Charles Foster Kane's opera house in Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1948).

34. *Teatro alla Scala*
MILAN, ITALY, 2008
Capacity: 2,800

In 1776, Maria-Theresa, the Empress of Austria and Duchess of Milan (who was also an avid opera aficionado) decreed that a theater be built on the site where the 14th-century church Santa Maria alla Scala stood in Milan. This new theater would serve the function previously fulfilled by Milan's Teatro Regio Ducale, which had been destroyed in 1775 in a fire possibly caused by candles used to illuminate a performance. During construction of the new opera house, which was designed by Giuseppe Piermarini, workers unearthed an ancient Roman frieze; interpreting this as a good sign, the Empress declared, "A new theater is being built that will obscure the glory of the most famous theaters in Italy."

The opera house opened in 1778 with the premiere of Antonio Salieri's *Europa riconosciuta*; Christoph Gluck had previously rejected the commission. Maria Balducci, Francesca Lebrun Danzi, and the renowned castrato Gasparo Pacchiarotti starred in the production. Within its first 150 years of operation, La Scala, as the opera house is known in recognition of the church it replaced, served as the setting for the premieres of more than 350 operas, among them Gaetano Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* and numerous works by Giuseppe Verdi, including *Nabucco*, *Otello*, and *Falstaff*. The 1842 premiere of *Nabucco* starred Giuseppinna Strepponi, who would become Verdi's wife and set a still-unsurpassed record of sixty-five performances. The theater also became associated with legendary conductors, chief among them Arturo Toscanini, who served as director of La Scala intermittently between 1898 and 1929, when antagonism with Benito Mussolini forced him to resign. Among the many adored singers at La Scala, perhaps none had more devoted followings than Enrico Caruso, who sang at a memorial concert for Verdi in 1901, and Maria Callas, who in 1950 famously substituted for Renata Tebaldi in Verdi's *Aida*.

Yet, despite its star-studded legacy, La Scala is also known for what happens in the audience, and particularly in the *loggione* galleries situated above the theater's boxes. There, *loggionisti*, as those occupying the gallery are known, have frequently interrupted performances with their reactions. So demonstrative were unruly 18th-century audiences that the management instituted regulations governing behavior, including the prohibition of throwing paper on stage from above. The initial negative audience reaction to Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* in 1904 caused it to be removed from the repertory for twenty-one years, after which it became widely acknowledged as a masterwork. In 2006, the tenor Roberto Alagna was booed off the stage during a performance of *Aida*; his understudy appeared in the middle of a scene and did not have time to change into his costume.

35. *Opéra Royal*
VERSAILLES, FRANCE, 2009
Capacity: 712

The royals and nobles that enjoyed the privileged precinct of the Château de Versailles could attend operas in the theater of the Opéra Royal, the walls of which were seemingly slathered with marble. Yet, like the idyllic appearance of Versailles itself, the theater, designed by architect Ange-Jacques Gabriel, rested upon a deft sleight of hand: virtually every surface in the theater was made of wood, elaborately decorated with faux finishes and trompe l'oeil paintings. An imposing, oval-shaped painting by Louis Jean-Jacques Durameau depicting Apollo and the Muses decorated the theater's ceiling.

The theater had an auspicious inauguration on May 16, 1770, as the setting for the wedding of Louis-Auguste, the Dauphin of France, to Archduchess

Marie-Antoinette. Guests enjoyed Jean-Baptiste Lully's opera *Persée*. Subsequently, the Dauphin, who would ascend to the throne as Louis XIV, and his guests enjoyed performances in the theater from the discrete vantage point of their semi-enclosed royal boxes. Despite the elegant surroundings and the inclusion of behind-the-scenes machinery that allowed for state-of-the-art theatrical effects, the grandeur was short-lived; only an estimated twenty performances were staged before the French Revolution forced the theater's closure. Though the theater was later remodeled and reopened, and even used for national government assemblies between 1872 and 1876, it was not until 1957 that it was extensively restored. Another restoration in 2007 resulted in its current iteration as the setting for ambitious programming, including opera, recitals, concerts, and ballet.

36. *Teatro di San Carlo*
NAPLES, ITALY, 2009
Capacity: 3,285

The Teatro di San Carlo, rebuilt in 1816 after a fire destroyed the original theater (1737), played a central role in the golden age of Neapolitan opera. King Ferdinand IV, a Bourbon monarch, hired Antonio Niccolini to rebuild the theater, which had been commissioned by his father Charles VII. At the time of its completion, the first theater was the largest opera house in the world—its design by Angelo Carasale, a theater director, and Giovanni Antonio Medrano, known mostly for the design of military structures. The reconstructed theater incorporated a Giuseppe Cammarano ceiling fresco depicting the gods Apollo and Minerva with some of history's greatest poets.

From 1809 to 1841, Domenico Barbaia managed the theater. A highly successful theater empresario, Barbaia was said to have amassed multiple fortunes from his ownership of a string of coffee houses featuring a coffee and frothy milk drink he called a "Barbajada," the sale of munitions during the Napoleonic Wars, and gambling operations in the theater's foyers. Barbaia set a standard with lavish and daring productions, and Teatro di San Carlo exerted a strong influence throughout Europe in terms of both opera seria and opera buffa. So important was the theater that even foreign composers, including Franz Joseph Haydn and Christoph Gluck, sought to have their works performed there. Gioachino Rossini served as the theater's artistic director from 1815 to 1822; Gaetano Donizetti later took the helm and held the post until 1838. During that time Donizetti composed sixteen operas, including *Maria Stuarda* (1834), *Roberto Devereux* (1837), and *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835).

Despite the theater's important role, with the Italian national unification in 1861, Naples's status as a cultural powerhouse was on the wane. By the dawn of the 20th century, the epicenter of Italian opera had moved north, a shift that seemed to be expressed by Naples-born tenor Enrico Caruso. In 1901, following a decidedly negative audience reaction to his performance in Gaetano Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*, he never again performed in his native city. However, the theater continued to present memorable productions and performances, including Renata Tebaldi's 1948 debut as Violetta in Verdi's *La traviata* and Maria Callas's portrayal of Abigaille in Verdi's *Nabucco* the following year.

37. *Palau de la Música Catalana*
BARCELONA, SPAIN, 2009
Capacity: 2,200

The Palau de la Música Catalana, designed by Lluís Domènech i Montaner and completed in 1908, reflected the collective desire of Catalan society not only to embrace modern architecture as an expression of contemporary life, but also to embody a distinct Catalan cultural identity. Founded in 1891, the Orfeó Català, a choral society that played a leading role in the Renaixença—a movement celebrating Catalan language and culture—sponsored construction of the theater. A bust of Anselm Clavé, a poet, politician, and composer, who as an influential choral director helped to revive interest in Catalan folk music, adorns the theater's interior. The auditorium receives ample natural daylight, much of which enters through arched stained-glass windows as well as a stained-glass skylight (surrounding a ceiling-mounted light fixture) designed by Antoni Rigalt i Blanch. Numerous Catalan and Spanish artists have performed in the theater, including Victoria de los Ángeles, Montserrat Caballé, José Carreras, Pablo Casals, Manuel de Falla, Enrique Granados, Alicia de Larrocha, and Andrés Segovia. In the 1960s, the Palau became a center for the popular Nova Cançó, an artistic movement that expressed opposition to the dictatorship of Francisco Franco by promoting the suppressed Catalan language; late in the decade Joan Manuel Serrat and Lluís Llach, leading exponents of the movement, launched their careers at the Palau.

38. *Royal Opera House, Covent Garden*
LONDON, GREAT BRITAIN, 2008
Capacity: 2,256

The site of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, has housed a public theater since 1732. Though the English architect E. M. Barry, whose father, Sir Charles Barry, designed the iconic Palace of Westminster, was responsible for the design of the current opera house, it is largely the theater's association with non-English artists and performances that has garnered it a worldwide reputation. Reflecting the dominance of Italian repertory, the theater was first called the Royal Italian Opera House, a name that persisted until 1892, when Gustav Mahler conducted a production of Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, sung in the original German, and the word "Italian" was subsequently dropped. By that time, the theater was strongly associated in the popular imagination with two unofficial "divas in residence"—Adelina Patti, beginning in 1861, and later Dame Nellie Melba, who performed regularly at the Royal Opera House for nearly four decades and gave her farewell performance there in 1926. Enrico Caruso was also a frequent performer at the opera house from 1902 until 1914, when the theater closed due to the advent of World War I. At that time, it was utilized as a storage facility, and during World War II it functioned as a dancehall for servicemen on leave. British opera traditions took center stage after the war with the premieres of Vaughan William's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1951), Benjamin Britten's *Gloriana* (commissioned on the occasion of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953), and Michael Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage* (1953).

39. *Opéra Nouvel*
LYON, FRANCE, 2014
Capacity: 1,100

So central was the role of contemporary French architect Jean Nouvel in transforming the Grand Théâtre in Lyon and the city's cultural profile that, following completion of the architect's expansion and renovation in 1993, the building was renamed the Opéra Nouvel. The architects Antoine-Marie Chenavard and Jean-Marie Pollet designed the original Grand Théâtre, which opened in 1831 with a production of François-Adrien Boieldieu's *La Dame Blanche*; though their disagreements prolonged the design and construction of the building, the architects collaborated again on its expansion in 1837. While Nouvel retained many of the building's classical facades, he largely replaced its interiors and doubled its height with the addition of a soaring, semicircular drum roof. Glazed at either end, the addition introduces a decidedly modern element to the traditional building, as does Nouvel's austere black auditorium.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the theater served as the setting for French national premieres of numerous operas, including Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* in 1896, Umberto Giordano's *Andre Chénier* in 1897, and Modest Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* in 1913. Additionally, Arnold Schoenberg's *Erwartung* received its world premiere in the theater in 1967. Among its music directors have been John Eliot Gardiner and Kent Nagano. Recently, the opera's repertory has been distinguished by productions directed by Laurent Pelly.

40. & 41. *Teatro Colón*
BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA, 2010
Capacity: 3,487

The Teatro Colón, which opened in 1908, is widely considered to be one of the most acoustically superior musical venues in the world; like many great singers, the American soprano Jessye Norman has stated unequivocally that it is her favorite place to perform. Only Luciano Pavarotti has complained, arguing that it was a dangerous place because if a singer made a mistake, it was immediately apparent to the audience. The building's history, entangled with tales of love and death, is itself worthy of an opera. Construction of the building (the second Teatro Colón) began in 1889 but was not completed for nearly two decades. Plagued by financial troubles, the project was further stymied by the death of the lead architect, Francesco Tamburini, in 1891, and the murder of his collaborator and former student, Vittorio Meano—killed by his own butler, who also happened to be his wife's lover. The Belgian architect Julio Dormal oversaw the building's completion. Opening night was vexed too, as the Puerto Rican tenor Antonio Paoli contracted the flu just before he was to sing the title role of Giuseppe Verdi's *Otello*. The event caused the production's last-minute replacement with an Italian production of Verdi's *Aida*, directed by Luigi Mancinelli and starring the soprano Lucia Crestani in the title role, opposite the tenor Amedeo Bassi. During a renovation of the building in 1966, frescoes by the renowned Argentinean artist Raúl Soldi were added to the interior.

42. *Amargosa Opera House*
DEATH VALLEY JUNCTION,
UNITED STATES, 2009
Capacity: 105

Nowhere do the fantasy realms of opera and the American West—a once-untamed wilderness ripe with the possibilities of fame, fortune, and self-invention—collide more dramatically than in Death Valley Junction, California. There, some ninety years ago, amidst a mineral-rich but desolate landscape, the Pacific Coast Borax Company built a Southwestern Colonial-style company town for its employees more than one hundred miles from the nearest city, Las Vegas. The town included a dormitory, a hotel, and a community meeting facility known as Corkhill Hall. Designed by architect Alexander Hamilton McCulloch, Amargosa—as the town was called—flourished until the mining ceased. In 1967, after decades of neglect and decay, the artist and ballerina Marta Becket rented and began to remodel the hall, covering many of its interior walls with her murals. Becket and her husband had accidentally encountered Death Valley Junction while experiencing car trouble on a road trip and had decided to take up residence in the largely deserted

town. Becket renamed the hall the Amargosa Opera House after the original settlement. In the early 1980s, the nonprofit Amargosa Opera House, Inc., with the help of the Trust for Public Land, purchased Death Valley Junction. Seating from another 19th-century frontier theater, the Boulder City Theater, was installed in the opera house. The Amargosa Opera House and the surrounding town are now included on the National Register of Historic Places.

43. *Gran Teatre del Liceu*
BARCELONA, SPAIN, 2009
Capacity: 2,292

Located on Barcelona's fabled street, La Rambla, the Gran Teatre del Liceu stands at the heart of Catalan. Throughout its history, the theater has celebrated Spanish and Catalan culture. When it opened in 1847, the theater, designed by Miguel Garriga i Roca and Josep Oriol, featured dramas and variety shows. Opera initially played a small role. The first opera production was Gaetano Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*. In the 20th century, Catalonian singers Jaume Aragall, Montserrat Caballé, José Carreras, and Victoria de los Ángeles performed at the theater, and Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró designed memorable sets. Leonardo Balada's *Cristobal Colón*, commissioned by Spain to mark the 500th anniversary of the explorer's landing in the Americas, premiered at the Gran Teatre in 1987.

The theater has also reflected national politics. On opening night of the opera season in 1893, Spanish anarchist Santiago Salvador Franch exploded a bomb during the presentation of Gioachino Rossini's *William Tell*, killing twenty people. The theater was later "claimed" by both sides during the Spanish Civil War; in 1936, at the war's outbreak, the leaders of the freely elected socialist Spanish Republic nationalized the theater, and three years later the victorious Nationalists—led by Francisco Franco—returned it to private ownership. In 1980, five years after Franco's death and two years after King Juan Carlos had established a democratic government, the descendants of the owners sold the theater to a consortium of public- and private-sector interests.

44. *Festspielhaus*
BAYREUTH, GERMANY, 2014
Capacity: 1,925

The Festspielhaus in Bayreuth is synonymous with Richard Wagner. The composer conceived of the theater as the site of an annual festival dedicated to presenting his music. While searching for a location to build a theater, he settled on the town of Bayreuth, home of the Markgräfliches Opernhaus and commissioned the Leipzig-based architect Otto Brückwald. Though intended as a temporary structure for the annual festival, the theater, built of inexpensive material (primarily brick and wood), still stands and has served its purpose well for nearly a century and a half. The building's cornerstone was laid on May 22, 1872, Wagner's fifty-ninth birthday. Wagner, working with the engineer Karl Brandt, was largely responsible for the design of the theater's interior. All of the theater's seating is located on a single level, the floor of which is raked; there are no boxes, galleries, or -balconies. Its largely wood interior contributes to its superior acoustics. A deep orchestra pit is partially covered by a wood canopy that serves to hide the orchestra while blending the music and the singers' voices.

The premiere performance in the theater, staged on August 13, 1876, inaugurated the first full presentation of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and was attended not only by King Ludwig II of Bavaria (who had helped to finance the building), Kaiser Wilhelm I of Prussia, Leo Tolstoy, and Friedrich Nietzsche, but also by many of the era's greatest composers: Charles Gounod, Edvard Grieg, Franz Liszt, Gustav Mahler, Camille Saint-Saëns, and Pyotr Tchaikovsky. Hans Richter conducted the performance. Wagner ran the Bayreuther Festspiele until his death in 1883, when his widow Cosima (who was also Franz Liszt's daughter) took over the reins. Tyrannical in spirit, she was rumored to have sent scathing notes to conductors in the midst of performances. Controversy has long been a hallmark of Bayreuth productions, from negative reviews of the first *Ring* cycle in 1876 to vociferous booing from the audience during a *Ring* set in a postapocalyptic landscape by the director Harry Kupfer in 1993.

45. *Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts*
TORONTO, CANADA, 2011
Capacity: 2,071

The Canadian Opera Company's decades-long search for a permanent home led to an architectural competition in 2002. Ten proposals were submitted; the Canadian firm Diamond & Schmitt won the commission. Completed in 2006, the arts complex is well integrated into its urban context, including an internal connection to the municipal subway system. To insulate the theater from noise and vibrations, it rests on a foundation of 489 rubber pads. Seating in the acoustically exemplary theater, which has sound-absorbing hardwood floors and plastered gypsum walls, is arranged so that no seat is farther than ninety-eight feet from the center of the stage. The theater opened with a production of Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

46. *Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía*
VALENCIA, SPAIN, 2014
Capacity: 1,700

The Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia, which houses both a symphonic concert hall and an opera house, was designed as part of an immense cultural complex that also incorporates a museum, a planetarium, and a botanical garden, The complex is collectively known as the City of Arts and Sciences and sometimes referred to locally as Calatrava City, after its architect, Santiago Calatrava. The soaring building rises 246 feet, making it the world's tallest opera house, and combines exposed concrete with trencadis, a type of Catalonian mosaic using broken ceramic tiles widely associated with the architect Antoni Gaudí. The building's sinuous, curving elements continue inside the auditorium, where five tiers of seating and a dramatically articulated ceiling together take on a sculptural presence. Among the many internationally recognized singers and conductors to perform in the opera house since its opening in 2005 are Zubin Mehta, Vittorio Grigolo, Maria Guleghina, and Plácido Domingo. Domingo established a center of vocal training that bears his name at the theater. The theater's first opera production was Beethoven's *Fidelio*, which was performed in 2006.

47. *Teatro Amazonas*
MANAUS, BRAZIL, 2009
Capacity: 701

Perhaps no other opera house in the world can claim a building history more fantastic and dramatic—more essentially operatic—than the Teatro Amazonas, located in the Brazilian city of Manaus. Surrounded by seemingly endless and impenetrable expanses of Amazon jungle, this unlikely setting was—by the end of the 19th century—a place of great wealth. Robber barons, rich from rubber extraction and exportation, dreamed of a cultural realm commensurate with their wealth. No artistic endeavor would more effectively rival the tastes and lifestyles pursued in the capital cities of Europe than opera. Great music demanded a great theater. Construction of the Italian architect Celestial Sacardim's ornate design began in 1884. The startlingly ambitious endeavor relied on artistic and material sources drawn from around the globe. The building incorporated English steel (then a newly invented building material), Italian marble, Alsatian tile glazed in the colors of the Brazilian flag, and French furniture. The Italian painter Domenico de Angelis provided interior decorative painting. On January 7, 1897, the glittering theater opened with a performance of Amilcare Ponchielli's *La Giocanda* that featured the tenor Enrico Caruso. (It has been claimed that Manaus's elite built the theater with the hope that the lavish building would persuade Caruso to perform in their remote city.) Though the Teatro Amazonas was initially a success, the invention of synthetic rubber in the 1910s sent the Amazon region into economic collapse. The theater was dark for nearly a century, with the sole exception of its use as a location in filmmaker Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), which tells the story of a 19th-century rubber mogul's obsessive efforts to build an opera house in the jungle. Today, with government support, the theater is a thriving setting for live performances as well and an annual film festival.

All capacity numbers are approximate

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David Leventi
January 2015

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