The **Palais Garnier**, known also as the **Opéra de Paris** or **Opéra Garnier**, but more commonly as the **Paris Opéra**, is a 1,600-seat opera house on the Place de l'Opéra in Paris, France, which was the primary home of the Paris Opera from 1875 until 1989. A grand building designed by Charles Garnier in the Neo-Baroque (or "Baroque Revival") style (it is also said to be of the related Second Empire style), it is regarded as one of the architectural masterpieces of its time.

The building is located in the 9th arrondissement of Paris and is served by the metro station *Opéra* and bus 21, 22, 27, 29, 42, 53, 66, 68, 81, 95.

Upon its inauguration during 1875, the opera house was named officially the *Académie Nationale de Musique - Théâtre de l'Opéra*. It retained this title until 1978 when it was re-named the *Théâtre National de l'Opéra de Paris*. After the opera company chose the *Opéra Bastille* as their principal theatre upon its completion during 1989, the
theatre was re-named as the Palais Garnier, though Académie Nationale de Musique is still sprawled above the columns of its front façade. In spite of the change of names and the Opera company's relocation to the Opéra Bastille, the Palais Garnier is still known by many people as the Paris Opéra, as have all of the several theatres which have served as the principal venues of the Parisian Opera and Ballet since its initiation.

History

The Palais Garnier was designed as part of the great reconstruction of Paris during the Second Empire initiated by Emperor Napoleon III, who chose Baron Haussmann to supervise the reconstruction. During 1858 the Emperor authorized Haussmann to clear the required 12000 square metres (1.2 ha) of land on which to build a second theatre for the world-renowned Parisian Opera and Ballet companies. The project was the subject of architectural design competition during 1861, and was won by the architect Charles Garnier (1825–1898). The foundation stone was laid during 1861, with the start of construction during 1862. Legend is that the Emperor's wife, the Empress Eugénie, asked Garnier during the construction whether the building would be built in the Greek or Roman style, to which he replied: "It is in the Napoleon III style, Madame!"

Setbacks

The construction of the opera house was plagued by numerous setbacks. One major problem which postponed the laying of the concrete foundation was the swampy ground under which flowed a subterranean lake, requiring the water to be removed by eight months of continual pumping. More setbacks came as a result of the disastrous Franco-Prussian War, the subsequent end of the Second French Empire, and the Paris Commune. During this time construction continued sporadically, and it was even rumoured that construction of the opera house might be abandoned.

Fire

On 29 October 1873, an incentive to complete the Palais Garnier came when the previous theatre of the Paris Opéra, known as the Salle Le Peletier, was destroyed by a fire which raged for 27 hours. The Salle Le Peletier had been the chief venue of the Paris Opera and Ballet since 1821. The Salle Le Peletier is also famous for housing the heyday of the romantic ballet (along with Her Majesty's Theatre in London).

Completion

During late 1874 Garnier and his massive workforce completed the Palais Garnier. The Palais Garnier was inaugurated formally on January 15, 1875 with a lavish gala performance. The ball consisted of the third act of Fromental Halévy's 1835 opera La Juive, along with excerpts from Giacomo Meyerbeer's 1836 opera Les Huguenots. The ballet company performed a Grand Divertissement staged by the Paris Opéra's Maître de Ballet en Chef Louis Méranté, which consisted of the celebrated scene Le Jardin Animé from Joseph Mazilier's 1867 revival of his ballet Le Corsaire, set to the music of Léo Delibes.
Leroux’s The Phantom of the Opera

During 1896, the falling of one of the counterweights for the grand chandelier resulted in the death of one person. This incident, as well as the underground lake, cellars, along with the other elements of the Opera House even the building itself were the inspirations of Gaston Leroux for his classic 1910 Gothic novel, *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Recent history

During 1969, the theatre was given new electrical facilities, and during 1978 part of the original *Foyer de la Danse* was converted into new rehearsal space for the Ballet company by the architect Jean-Loup Roubert.

During 1994, restoration work began on the theatre, which consisted of modernizing the stage machinery and electrical facilities, while restoring and preserving the opulent décor, as well as strengthening the frame and foundation of the building. This restoration was completed during 2007.
Architecture and style

Although slightly smaller in scale than its predecessor, the Théâtre de l'Académie Royale de Musique, the Palais Garnier is a building of exceptional opulence. It seats an audience of about 2,200 under a central chandelier which weighs more than six tons, and has a huge stage with room to accommodate as many as 450 artists. The style is monumental and considered typically Beaux-Arts, with use of axial symmetry in plan, and its exterior ornamentation.

The Palais is decorated opulently with elaborate multicolored marble friezes, columns, and lavish statuary, many of which portray deities of Greek mythology. Between the columns of the theatre's front façade, there are bronze busts of many of the great composers, Mozart, Rossini, Daniel Auber, Beethoven, Meyerbeer, Fromental Halévy, Spontini, and Philippe Quinault.

The central roof group, Apollo, Poetry, and Music, was the work of Aimé Millet. The two gilded figural groups Harmony and Poetry were both designed by Charles Gumery, and the two smaller bronze Pegasus figures at either end of the gable are from Eugène-Louis Lequesne. The facade incorporates major multifigure groups sculpted by François Jouffroy (Harmony), Jean-Baptiste Claude Eugène Guillaume (Instrumental Music), Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (The Dance, criticized for indecency), Jean-Joseph Perraud (Lyrical Drama), and other work by Gumery, Alexandre Falguière and others.

The interior consists of interweaving corridors, stairwells, alcoves and landings allowing the movement of large numbers of people and space for socializing during intermission. Rich with velvet, gold leaf, and cherubim and nymphs, the interior is characteristic of Baroque sumptuousness.

The ceiling area, which surrounds the chandelier, was given a new painting during 1964 by Marc Chagall. This painting was controversial, with many people feeling Chagall's work clashed with the style of the rest of the theater.

Influence abroad

The building became one of the most inspirational architectural prototypes for the next thirty years.

Several buildings in Poland were based on the design of the Palais Garnier, and include the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Kraków, built during 1893, The Lviv Theatre of Opera and Ballet in Lviv, built between 1897 and 1900 and also the Warsaw Philharmony edifice in Warsaw, built between 1900 and 1901.

In Ukrainia, the influence of the Palais Garnier can be seen at the National Opera House of Ukraine edifice in Kiev, built during 1901.

The Thomas Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. is modelled after Palais Garnier, most notably the facade and Great Hall.

The Theatro Municipal do Rio de Janeiro (1909) was also modeled after Palais Garnier, particularly and Great Hall and stairs.

The Amazon Theatre in Manaus (Brazil) built from 1884 to 1896. The overview is very similar, though the decoration is more simple.
The Hanoi Opera House in Vietnam is considered to be a typical French colonial architectural monument in Vietnam and is also a small-scale replica of the Palais Garnier. The Saigon Opera House is a smaller counterpart.

Image gallery

The Palais Garnier as seen circa 1900

The Inauguration ceremony held at the Grand Escalier, 1875

Apollo, Poetry and Music roof sculpture by Aimé Millet

Apollo, Poetry and Music; Apollo’s lyre detail

Liberty roof sculpture by Charles Gumery

Lyrical Drama façade sculpture by Jean-Joseph Perraud

The Dance by Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux

Bronze busts of Beethoven and Mozart on the front façade
The Grand Foyer

Detail from the front

Marc Chagall's ceiling, repainted in a modern style and which is very different from the colour scheme of the rest of the building. At the center is the grand chandelier.

References


Notes


External links

- Official website (http://www.operadeparis.fr/cns11/live/onp/site/index.php?&lang=en) (in English)
- History of architecture (http://www.unav.es/ha/007-TEAT/operas-paris.htm) (in Spanish)
- The Palais Garnier (http://paris1900.lartnouveau.com/paris09/l_opera_actuel.htm) current photographs and of the years 1900.
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