

Curated Panel at the 2015 IFTR Conference, in Hyderabad

ABSTRACTS

Petra Dotlačilová: “Accessing the Role: J.-G. Noverre and Mlle Clairon as Pre-reformers of Theatre Costume in the Age of Enlightenment”

“Costume est la chose du monde la plus important au succès de nôtre théâtre”, stated the choreographer Jean-Georges Noverre in his treatise *Théorie et Pratique de la Danse simple et composée* (1766). He dreamed about an ideal theatre costume that would reflect ‘nature’, which he understood very broadly as that of “the character, the morals, the religion, the taste, the nation”.

In the second half of the 18th century the art form of theatre underwent considerable changes influenced by the ideals of the Enlightenment. The reformers – dramatists, choreographers and painters, but also performers – desired characters to be more ‘natural’ and ‘true’. And since the visual arts were central to the art form, the ‘true character’ should be reflected in the costume as well. The clothes of the actors, singers and dancers should no longer be tied to the social conventions of the period, but should represent the uniqueness of the characters.

In my presentation I will focus on the writings and thoughts of two important personalities of 18th century theatre, choreographer Jean-Georges Noverre and actress Mlle Clairon, who can be seen as “pre-reformers” of the theatrical costume before the establishment of the neo-classical era. I will argue that the transformation of the costume went hand in hand with the actors’ more ‘natural’ way of acting, and therefore improved the ability of the audience to identify with the characters on stage, to sympathise with their plight, etc. In this way, because it appealed directly to the sensibility of the spectators without making specific demands on their knowledge or education, the reformed costume may also have helped a larger audience to gain access to the art form. The extensive iconographical will illustrate these developments.

Maria Gullstam: “Rousseau’s Quest: Performing Humanity and Curing Inequality”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Lettre à d’Alembert sur les Spectacles* (1758) has often been seen as purely anti-theatrical among theatre scholars. However, if we compare Rousseau’s critique of the theatre in the *Lettre* to his own works for the stage, the contours of an alternative understanding of his theatrical theory take shape: His intention was not to ban the theatre, but to encourage new forms of dramatic art that, instead of poisoning the humanity and virtue of the audience, might relieve the people of the pain caused by society, perhaps even serving as an antidote to the poison of inequality.

My focus will be on Rousseau’s demand in the *Lettre* that the theatre should show us more “simple suffering humanity”. Plays should be about real people to whom the audience can

relate, and not about ancient heroes. In this way everybody, through their humanity, has the chance to get access to the core of the piece. According to Rousseau, our humanity is a product of our *amour de soi-même* (the love we have for ourselves) – not to be confused with its opposite, *amour-propre* (self-love/vanity), which is a source of inequality.

Through a reading of Rousseau's comedy *Narcisse ou L'amant de lui-même* (1753), its preface and Rousseau's description of a performance of the piece in *Les Confessions* (1782) – which all deal explicitly with the curing of *amour-propre* and with the potential effect of art on society – I will argue that Rousseau, in his works for the stage, both tried to create awareness of the dangers of deceptive art, and to give life to his ideas about theatre as a cure for the inequality among people.

Willmar Sauter: “Democratic Seating in 18th Century Theatres: The Example of Drottningholm”

The auditorium of the Drottningholm Court Theatre from 1766 makes an immediate democratic impression: all benches are parallel with the footlights, the floor is raked, no seats have a restricted view behind pillars. This court theatre looks more democratic than the Teatro Olimpico, built for an academy of peers in Vicenza; and at least as democratic as Wagner's Festspielhaus in Bayreuth which was completed a hundred years later. Used originally by the court of Gustav III, but without royal box, one wonders how democratic its design was perceived by the theatre's contemporaries. Of course, there is no evidence of a democratic access to the auditorium during Gustavian times, although the monarch allowed all the various groups of courtiers and certain invited commoners to attend the performances.

During the festival performances today, access is guaranteed to everybody who has bought a ticket. There are no restrictions in terms of class, gender or ethnicity, provided the ticket holder has paid for the ticket. The prices of the tickets create new distinctions and alternative hierarchies.

In my paper I will discuss how status, privileges and economic resources distinguish groups of spectators in the late 18th century as well as in today's festival performances and thus circumvent the democratic ideas of equality in the auditorium of Drottningholm and other historical theatres. How are these buildings managed today – are they more democratic in a democratic age – can they become more democratic?

Magnus Tessing Schneider: “Enlightenment Dramas of Political Encounters: The Case of Calzabigi's Elvira (1794)”

Ranieri de' Calzabigi (1714-95) is known as the librettist of Gluck's reform operas *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762), *Alceste* (1767) and *Paride e Elena* (1770), but his later librettos have received less attention. These often revolve around Rousseau-inspired exposures of the dehumanising mechanisms of Christian civilisation, in which concepts like glory, honour, duty and

patriotism serve as covers for disrupted or insincere human relationships. Regarding modern 'Western' speech and body language as ultimately detached and deceptive, Calzabigi strove to develop a more natural and empathetic theatrical language, as reflected in his reforms of dramatic language, construction and character, as well as of the use of singing, acting and dancing in opera.

The happy-end tragedy *Elvira* (1794), Calzabigi's last libretto, was written for Naples with music by Giovanni Paisiello. Set after the Moorish invasion of Spain in a multicultural eighth-century Granada, *Elvira* is essentially a Romeo and Juliet story about the love between the warrior maiden Elvira (daughter to the leader of the city's Christian faction) and the Emir Abdallah (leader of the city's Muslim faction). The opera explicitly represents the Arabs as the more enlightened, liberal and egalitarian, while the Christians are steeped in the patriarchal concepts of family honour and national pride. Claiming that "the customs of both the peoples represented are depicted from truth," Calzabigi tries, nevertheless, to avoid the reproduction of cultural stereotypes by means of intricate gender reversals: the role of Abdallah was written as a trouser role for a female soprano, which means that the lovers, both sung by women, would appear together on stage in full armour.

The paper studies the opera in the context of the political tensions of the time: three years after the war against the Ottomans, Naples was torn between the Bourbon royalists and the revolutionary forces that later assumed power.

Mark Tatlow: "Touching and Dissolving": Haydn's Arianna and the Question of Emotional Accessibility"

In 1790 Josef Haydn published his dramatic cantata *Arianna a Naxos*. Focussing on the short episode in the classical myth when Ariadne awakes on the island of Naxos only to find that Theseus has left her, it is a moving account of idyllic happiness gradually transformed into raging despair. A 1791 London review reported that the "Composition. . . produced effects bordering on all that Poets used to feign of ancient lyre. . . [It] is so exquisitely captivating in its larmoyant passages, that it touched and dissolved the audience. They speak of it with rapturous recollection. . ." What is particularly interesting is that this review refers to a performance, accompanied by Haydn himself at the keyboard, given by Gasparo Pacchierotti, a famous 50 year-old castrato. Why did the use of a male castrato in the heart-wrenching role of the young Ariadne not inhibit the audience's positive reaction? Was it perhaps partly because, as another commentator described it, "his recitative was inimitably fine, so that even those who did not understand the language could not fail to comprehend, from his countenance, voice and action, every sentiment he expressed"?

My paper will argue that if we want a work like *Arianna*, and the genre it represents, to be more widely accessible in the 21st century, we must once more find a way of "touching and dissolving" the audience. Historically informed performers long to revive the intensity of a singer like Pacchierotti, and I will suggest that the way to achieve this is not by

recontextualising the words or the music, but by re-empowering performers with 18th century techniques of musical expression.

Meike Wagner: “Open Access: Bourgeois Audiences enter the Theatre around 1800”

Around 1800 the concept of a ‘new national theatre’ spread quickly in German speaking countries. Informed by Enlightenment thinking on education, citizenship and the role of art literary and theatre critics developed a literary concept of theatre that connects to the idea of a pedagogical and social relevance of theatre and should therefore provide open access to bourgeois audiences. Due to these developments but also to the urgent need to relieve their budgets from the operating costs of the court theatres absolutist monarchs and rulers in the German speaking countries opened their court theatres to all audiences. From that on bourgeois citizens, students, tourists and even working class members entered the theatre and therefore gradually changed the theatrical event. Court conventions and etiquettes could no longer apply and the theatre directors as well as public authorities had to find new rules and norms for the theatre visit but also for the actors on the stage and in the institution. By investigating the case of the Munich court theatre I would like to show how theatre gradually developed into a public and modern institution after 1800. Drawing on concepts from institution theory and theories of the public sphere I will argue that today’s notion of German theatre as a modern medium with a socio-political relevance in a democratic society was prefigured during this first experimental phase of ‘open access’ and then firmly established in the second half of the 19th century.