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Christine Jeanneret

MAPPING ARTISTIC NETWORKS
Eighteenth-Century Italian Theatre and Opera Across Europe

Edited by
Tatiana Korneeva



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CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	7
List of Tables	8
List of Musical Examples	9
Introduction: Italian Theatre Reverberated Tatiana Korneeva	11
A Note on Transcription, Transliteration, and Translation	23

PART I. ITINERANT ITALIANS

Italian Singers on the Move: Networks, Social Support, and Contact with the Native Land during Senesino's London Years Melania Bucciarelli	27
The Italian Opera in Prague in the Eighteenth Century: Networks, Strategies, Repertoires Marc Niubo	41
Pursuing Enlightenment Delights: Processes and Paths of Italian Operatic Migrations to Warsaw, 1765–93 Anna Parkitna	53
Operatic Patchworks and Their Crossings: The Masi Family of Singers and Pasticcio Practices in Europe, 1750–70 Gesa zur Nieden	65

PART II. RUSSIAN ITALIANS

Italian <i>Operisti</i> in Early Eighteenth-Century St Petersburg: Repertoire, Audience, and Translation Tatiana Korneeva	89
The Scenographic Fantasies of Giacomo Quarenghi: Stylistic Migrations from the European to the Russian Stage Nadezhda Chamina	111
Italian Stage Designers and the Staging of the First Russian Epic Drama with Music by Catherine the Great, <i>The Early Reign of Oleg</i> Anna Korndorf	125
Andromeda Rescued on the Banks of the Neva: Opera for the Grand Master of the Order of Malta Bella Brover-Lubovsky	143

PART III. TRANSLATIONAL ENCOUNTERS

The Textual Evolution of Metastasio's <i>Semiramide</i>: Aesthetic Transformation and Proportional Identity	
Javier Gutiérrez Carou	173
Carlo Goldoni's Repertoire in Dresden: The Earth Seen from the Moon	
Piermario Vescovo	203
A Mirror of Deceit: Giacomo Casanova's Theater	
Massimo Ciavolella	213
Index of Names	223
Notes on Contributors	229

THE SCENOGRAPHIC FANTASIES OF GIACOMO QUARENGHI: STYLISTIC MIGRATIONS FROM THE EUROPEAN TO THE RUSSIAN STAGE

NADEZHDA CHAMINA

The graphic works for the theatre (and more precisely, the scenographic sketches) by Giacomo Quarenghi (1744–1817),¹ a well-known architect from Bergamo whose style embraced neoclassical and Palladian elements and who arrived at the Russian court at the invitation of Catherine II (the Great, r. 1762–96) in 1780, seem to occupy a peripheral place in his busy career as an architect. Nevertheless, his corpus of inventions also includes a considerable number of designs for the theatre. Not only did Quarenghi create actual theatres (the famous theatre inside the Hermitage, 1783–85) but he was also a skilled scenographer. This essay is dedicated to the theatrical designs attributed to Quarenghi and focuses on some threads that run through his legacy of graphic works from the Russian and Italian traditions. These are revisited in the context of interpreting the scenic space and in terms of the theatrical repertoire contemporary to the era. I also aim to retrace some of Quarenghi's iconographic approaches by placing them within the scenographic discourse of the time. From an interpretative point of view, I consider the readability of some themes in his graphic repertoire regarding theatre in Russia. Finally, I examine Quarenghi's imagery in terms of the great theatre of architecture and his interior design vision as a graphic artist.

ITALIAN DECORATORS ON THE RUSSIAN STAGE BEFORE QUARENGHI: VISIONS AND TASTES

Quarenghi was recommended to Catherine primarily as a court architect, since his tastes seemed to be fully attuned to those of the enlightened Russian context of the previous three decades of the eighteenth century. Catherine, as a promoter of an absolute monarchy, approved the stylistic system of neoclassicism in architecture and the fine arts as an ideal for the formation of the new enlightened

1. Giacomo Quarenghi arrived in St Petersburg in January 1780, at the invitation of Catherine II. For details see L. M. Starikova, 'Giacomo Quarenghi i russkii teatr v epokhu Ekateriny II' [Giacomo Quarenghi and the Russian Theatre in the Age of Catherine II], *Iskusstvoznanie*, 1 (2012), 423–33. Letters from Quarenghi have been preserved that contribute to the study of his activity in Russia. See, for instance, *Signor Giacomo Riveritissimo: quarantotto lettere a Giacomo Quarenghi conservate nella Biblioteca Nazionale Russa di San Pietroburgo*, ed. by Vanni Zanella and Graziella Colmuto Zanella (Bergamo: Centro Studi Valle Imagna, 2017). See also Christoph Frank, 'Appendice documentaria sul viaggio in Russia di Giacomo Quarenghi e Giacomo Trombara nell'anno 1779', in *Dal mito al progetto: la cultura architettonica dei maestri italiani e ticinesi nella Russia neoclassica*, ed. by Nicola Navone and Letizia Tedeschi, 2 vols (Mendrisio: Accademia di architettura, Università della Svizzera Italiana, 2004), I, pp. 78–91.

man. In theatrical scenery too, the Empress wanted to see buildings with more concrete forms, in line with the architectural ideals of the builders of the new capital, which was becoming increasingly transformed along these lines. From the 1780s onwards, St Petersburg, defined as ‘a window on Europe’,² was assuming the forms of a veritable neoclassical utopian dream city thanks to its architecture. Infinite colonnades that disappeared into perspective proliferated, as did buildings with solemn arcades, and suburban residences such as those of Tsarskoe Selo and Pavlovsk, with parks, seemed like theatrical sets appearing out of nowhere. With the designs by Iuri Felten (1730–1801), Antonio Rinaldi (1710–94), Charles Cameron (1745–1812), and, of course, Giacomo Quarenghi, came the realization of Catherine’s dream of seeing Russia reborn under the banner of classical antiquity and acquiring — albeit on a smaller scale — features to match the greatness of the Roman state.³ The fashion of installing imitation ancient ruins in the landscape spread everywhere in Russia, where ‘real’ neoclassical antiquities did not exist. The architecture went from Byzantine forms to the Gothic of the Kremlin and then, abruptly, to an introduction of the late Baroque by Peter I (1672–1725), to arrive, with Catherine the Great, at the local version of the classical, in all spheres.⁴

In the specific field of Russian theatrical decoration, Carlo Bibiena’s pompous Baroque forms endured for a long time.⁵ The first scenographers, who had arrived in Russia at the beginning of the eighteenth century, were able to enjoy a certain freedom of expression in the various kinds of decoration they attempted, as there was no developed local school. The greatest mark was made in the 1750s–1760s by Giuseppe Valeriani (1708–61).⁶ The Roman architect moved to Russia with his brother Domenico (d. 1771), equipped with artistic expertise and studies in perspective, after having studied with Filippo Juvarra (1678–1736) and Marco Ricci (1676–1730), and having acquired training in Bolognese art and Padre Pozzo’s (1642–1709) models. In Vienna, with the success of Pietro Metastasio and Ferdinando Galli-Bibiena, a very particular taste had taken hold, oriented towards scenes inspired by Venetian models and those employing Ferdinando Bibiena’s ‘scena per angolo’ (an angular perspective along the diagonal), wherein the previously singular focal point was split in two and shifted towards the peripheries of vision. Valeriani became the spokesman for these trends at the Russian court. He had a variety of tasks, from decorator and perspective painter (‘quadraturista’) for palaces and summer residences to painter and theatrical engineer. With Valeriani, the art of scenic design in Russia achieved ‘European’ levels of quality. In the second half of the eighteenth century

2. The term is taken from *Eugenii Onegin* by Aleksandr Pushkin, who attributes it to Francesco Algarotti instead.
3. See *Gli artisti italiani in Russia: scrittura, pittura, e arti minori*, ed. by Ettore Lo Gatto and Anna Lo Gatto, 4 vols [1934] (Milan: Libri Scheieller, 1990–94).
4. In Russia, due to the particular development of the arts and enduring presence of medieval forms, all European styles were established late, but quickly and in specific manifestations. With the reforms of Peter I and his invitation of foreign artists for the construction of St Petersburg, the late Baroque taste, which came from Nordic states through the works of the Swiss architect Domenico Trezzini (c. 1670–1734), was quickly established. In the 1740s, during Empress Elizabeth Petrovna’s reign (1741–61), the rocaille fashion arrived in the creations of Antonio Rinaldi (1710–94), whereas in the 1760s, at the court of Catherine II, a neoclassical circle of masters became prominent. The architecture of the center of St Petersburg and its suburban residences reveals all these forms.
5. The Bibiena family was a famous artistic dynasty which dominated stage design in Europe in the eighteenth century. The founders, Ferdinando (1657–1743) and Francesco (1659–1739), were the sons of the painter Giovan Maria Galli (1625–65). Their sons were active in spreading the family style throughout Europe. Giuseppe’s son Carlo (1721–87), a member of the third generation, worked for Catherine II in Russia as well as for Gustav II in Sweden. For different aspects of their career see, for example, *I Bibiena. Una famiglia europea*, ed. by Deanna Lenzi and Jadranka Bentini, catalogo della mostra (Venice: Marsilio, 2000).
6. The most specific work on Giuseppe Valeriani remains the monograph by M. S. Konopleva, *Teatral’nyi zhivopisets Giuseppe Valeriani: materialy k biografii i istorii tvorchestva* [The Theatrical Painter Giuseppe Valeriani: Materials for a History of His Life and Work] (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennyi Ermitazh, 1948). Cf. also Federica Rossi, ‘Giuseppe Valeriani, primo scenografo alla corte degli Zar’, *Studi piemontesi*, 34 (2005), 367–87.

at the Russian court, working together with Valeriani's German collaborator, Friedrich Hilferding (?–1798),⁷ were Pietro Gradizzi (or Grandizzi, 1710–80) and his son Francesco (1729–92), who was also an expert in 'la grande decorazione' ('monumental decoration', following the great Baroque tradition of the seventeenth century) and in festive stagings. From 1762 to 1764, Pietro Gradizzi replaced Valeriani as the imperial theatre's first decorator, stylistically continuing with the same Baroque approach.⁸ Starting from the 1770s, with the arrival of the new dramatic repertoire⁹ as well as Palladian architectural themes on the Russian stage, Classicism was received with great enthusiasm.

In the Italian theatre of the late eighteenth century, with which Quarenghi must have been thoroughly familiar before his arrival in Russia, there was instead a popular trend in 'illusion' enhanced by 'verisimilitude', aimed at achieving greater simplicity in the decorations and machinery. Neoclassicism therefore sought to replace Baroque ornamentation with compositional austerity and greater historical fidelity. Many investigations were made at that time on the most suitable decorative themes to be carried out in the different environments, depending on their destination. Francesco Milizia (1725–98), the Italian theoretist and propagandist of neoclassical taste, for example, insisted that 'Le vesti e gli ornamenti degli attori debbono essere più che sia possibile alle usanze de' tempi, delle nazioni, e de' soggetti, che sono rappresentati sulla scena' ('The clothing and accessories of the actors ought to be as close as possible to those of the times, the nations, and the subjects represented in the scene').¹⁰

7. Friedrich Hilferding (?–after 1798, active in Russia in 1750–90) was an Austrian decorator, theatre engineer, and landscape painter. He collaborated at the St Petersburg Imperial Theatres with Giuseppe Valeriani and Antonio Peresinotti (1708–78). He moved to Moscow in 1760 and then became the head decorator of the Petrovskii Theatre. In the perspective views of Moscow he showed great interest in Russian antiquities, and in the 1780s he created the scenery for the private theatres of Count Nikolai Sheremetev in the Moscow villas of Kuskovo and Ostankino.
8. The Venetian scenographers Pietro and Francesco Gradizzi (Grandizzi) arrived in Russia in 1751. They also created *trompe-l'œil* decorations in the St Petersburg palaces and the ceiling frescoes in the residences at Oranienbaum, Tsarskoe Selo, and Peterhof. On Pietro Gradizzi and his other collaborators in scenography, see Milica Korshunova, 'Gli scenografi italiani a Pietroburgo', in *Pietroburgo e l'Italia. 1750–1850: Il genio italiano in Russia* (catalogo della mostra, Roma, Complesso del Vittoriano, 30 aprile–15 giugno 2003), ed. by Sergei Androsov and Vittorio Strada (Milan: Skira, 2003), pp. 79–95 (p. 84).
9. Starting in the 1770s, classical and sentimental trends arrived in Russia and quickly penetrated the literary and musical repertoire. The first Russian tragedies and pompous Italian *opere serie* were replaced by new genres: sentimental melodramas and bourgeois dramas. The Russian narrative, following the French tradition, provided the material for pastoral-themed libretti for spectacles and moralizing or sentimental tragedies about the natural virtues or the conflicts between reason and sentiment (such as *Derevenskii prazdnik ili vechernianaia dobrodetel'* [The Festival of the Peasants, or the Triumph of Virtue], 1777 by Vasilii Maikov, or the tragedies of Aleksandr Sumarokov, such as *Dmitrii Samozvanets* [Dmitrii the Usurper], 1771, on ancient Russian historical subjects with references to Corneille, Metastasio, and Voltaire). The imported tragedy was joined by comedy, where the unusual texts and situations were often a replica of the French ones, especially by Molière, with the emblematic names (Clarissa, Lestofantis, etc.) often replaced by Russian names. Cognac became vodka and the perfect governor became the tsar. The greatest representative of this genre was Denis Fonvizin (1744–92), who played the role of theatre guide for Russian aristocrats, including Nikolai Iusupov; he was also a brilliant translator of Voltaire and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In 1772 the first Russian comic opera was presented at the Tsarskoe Selo Court Theatre near St Petersburg, entitled *Aniuta* [Little Anna], on a libretto by the journalist and folklorist Mikhail Popov (1742–90). The plot borrowed motifs from Rousseau and Charles Simon Favart and dealt with the contrast between country life and city living; the work was performed in the presence of Catherine II with the participation of the choir from her chapel (with the final song aimed at enhancing a stratified social order: 'whoever is satisfied with his own fate is the luckiest man in the world'). The so-called 'tear-jerking comedy' gained immediate popularity and became widespread in the footsteps of Diderot and Beaumarchais (whose *Eugénie* was staged in 1770), with a *collage* of Russian folk motifs, including comic operas such as *Mel'nik–koldun, obmanshchik i svat* [The Miller who was a Wizard, a Cheat and a Matchmaker], 1779, with a libretto by Aleksandr Ablesimov; *Rozana i Liubim* [Rozana and Liubim], 1776, by Nikolai Nikolaev; *Didona* by Iakov Kniazhnin, reinterpreting the work by Metastasio (1769), and *Sankt Peterburgskii Gostinnyi Dvor* [St Petersburg's Trade Stalls], 1782 or *Kak poshivësh, tak i proshyësh* [As you live, so you will be judged], 1792 by Mikhail Matinskii. These works subsequently had a long history in amateur and private 'serf' theatre in the villas of aristocrats, and were sometimes restaged in Soviet times. See Abram Gozenpud, *Musikalnyi teatr v Rossii ot istokov do Glinki* [Musical Theatre in Russia from the Origins up to Glinka] (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1959).
10. Francesco Milizia, *Trattato completo, formale e materiale del teatro* (Venice: Pietro and Giambattista Pasquali, 1794), p. 69. Translation of the sources, here and throughout the text, are mine, unless otherwise noted.

On the other hand, with the orientation towards widespread scene-painting in the north Italian practice of the Galliari brothers,¹¹ a marked taste for the picturesque was simultaneously making inroads,¹² laying the foundations for an openness towards a Romantic concept of scenography, consisting of settings that could evoke independent emotional effects, thus preparing for the arrival of the most important Italian Romantic scenographer, Alessandro Sanquirico (1777–1849). It should also be noted that, when in the early nineteenth century the Italian school ceased to excel in Europe, leaving room for scenographic innovations in Paris, in Russia the neoclassical Italian influence in architecture, Baroque decoration, and scenography lasted until the second half of the nineteenth century.

Innovative impulses also arrived via Italian and French neoclassical painting. In fact, in the 1780s in the circle of Catherine II the taste for Roman ruins spread, and in this context the favoured artists were Gianpaolo Panini (1691–1765) and Charles-Louis Clérisseau (1721–1820), whose works were bought by the Empress. One great success was Hubert Robert (1730–1808), who was very popular among Russian aristocratic patrons.

But more than through the canvases, the new aesthetic ideals reached Catherine through engravings of antiquities found in albums of prints (such as those of Giovanni Battista Piranesi, 1720–78) and books. The Empress wrote to Baron Grimm in 1776: ‘I’m crazy about architecture books and they are cluttering up my whole room, but even this is not enough for me.’¹³ At the Academy of Fine Arts (founded in 1757 in Moscow and then transferred to St Petersburg in 1763) classes in *vedute* (views) and landscape were inaugurated (where Semën Shchedrin and Fëdor Alexeev taught classes on the Venetian *vedutisti*). At first, these were considered to be vulgar genres, but soon a new generation of perspective painters developed, with drawings adapted for the stage (after lessons from Italian teachers such as Antonio Peresinotti). The theatre was part of this programme, even though it was aimed at a small circle of courtiers and personally controlled by the Tsarina.¹⁴ The history of musical theatre as well as European events and spectacles were in fact described in great detail

11. The Galliari brothers, from a family of painters from the Piedmont (north-western Italy), were among the most important practitioners of Baroque scenography in European theatres. The founder of the dynasty, Fabrizio (1709–90), made his skills in perspectival drawing the family’s artistic speciality on the stage, together with his brothers Bernardino (1707–94) and Giovanni Antonio (1714–84). In comparison to the creations of the Bibiena family, the style of Galliari decorations is freer and more picturesque. See Vittoria Crespi Morbio, *I Galliari alla Scala* (Turin: Allemandi, 2004).
12. This is the concept of the ‘scene as a picture’ by Galliari, where ‘la scena cambia ancora in vista ma tranquillamente, con un semplice movimento verticale di grandi elementi che calano e salgono agevolmente grazie ai tiri contrappesati. La figura dell’attore anche se entra lateralmente a metà scena, non si sovrappone al pezzo dipinto con un rapporto alterato, e la scena, ristretta in profondità, lascia tutto il retropalco a disposizione del personale e degli altri interpreti in attesa’ (‘the scene changes in full sight but calmly, with a simple vertical movement of large elements that fall and rise easily thanks to the counterbalanced pulleys. The figure of the actor, even if he enters the middle of the scene from the side, does not overlap with the painted piece in an altered relationship, and the scene, restricted in depth, leaves the backstage free for the staff and other performers awaiting their cue’). Quoted from *Illusione e pratica teatrale: proposte per una lettura dello spazio scenico dagli intermedi fiorentini all’opera comica veneziana. Catalogo della mostra*, ed. by Franco Mancini and others (Vicenza: N. Pozza, 1975), p. 105.
13. See Piervaleriano Angelini, ‘Caterina II e la cultura dell’Antico’, in *Dal mito al progetto*, I, pp. 43–60 (p. 49).
14. Theatre especially thrived at the time of Catherine the Great and her grandson Alexander I (1777–1825, r. 1801–25), who invited the major foreign architects (especially Italians) to build public and private theatres in St Petersburg in the classical ancient and Italian styles. The echo of this theatrical boom arrived in Moscow and the provinces, where local owners tried to organize their own theatrical ‘nurseries’ following the examples of the capitals, as did the aristocrats and luxurious palaces with their theatres (such as those of N. Sheremetev, A. Bezborodko, and N. Iusupov). In this regard, see V. N. Vsevolodskii-Gerngross, ‘Teatralnye zdaniia Sankt-Peterburga v XVIII veke’ [The Theatre Building of St Petersburg in the Eighteenth Century], *Starye godi* (March 1910), 18–35; Ettore Lo Gatto, *Storia del teatro russo*, 2 vols (Florence: Sansoni, 1963); and Marianna Taranovskaia, *Arkhitektura teatrov Leningrada* [Leningrad Theatre Architecture] (Leningrad: Stroizdat, 1988). The book by V. Ia. Libson, *Arkhitektura inter’era teatra russkogo klassitsizma* [Interiors of the Neoclassical Russian Theatres] (Moscow: Akademiia arkhitektury SSSR, 1950), deals with the interiors of the neoclassical theatres.

by the St Petersburg newspapers,¹⁵ while masquerade parties and Venetian carnivals were known thanks to the company of Italian comic actors who worked for years at the court.¹⁶

Quarenghi, a scrupulous scholar of the ancient and Renaissance forms of Rome and the Palladian legacy in the Veneto region, but above all well aware of the European innovations of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (1736–1806) and Robert Adam (1728–92), had the theoretical and practical preparation suited to consolidating Catherine’s intention of transforming St Petersburg into a modern neoclassical capital with his help. Quarenghi himself admitted that he had always studied ‘con un occhio e mente filosofica, senza spirito di partito’ (‘with a philosophical eye and mind, without being partisan’), adding that he paid attention to the ‘maestri viventi [...] come ancora ho cercato il più che mi è stato possibile di rendermi familiare l’interna distribuzione dei francesi’ (‘living masters [...] as I was still attempting, as much as I could, to familiarize myself with the internal distribution of the French’).¹⁷ His modern approach and artistic and intellectual independence are very clear in his letters.

QUARENCHI AS A GRAPHIC PHILOSOPHER OF THEATRICAL SPACE

The perception of Quarenghi’s entire graphic production is closely linked to the Bergamo master’s special operating method as an architect-draftsman also trained in painting. Therefore, through the tools and practices of drawing — drawing lines, sketching, multiple clearly legible graphic variations — he studied and interpreted architectural iconographies, ‘appropriating’ places and environments, responding to theoretical and philosophical references, and arguing or collaborating with his architectural colleagues. Quarenghi’s graphic designs are often veritable scenographies, where fantasy goes hand in hand with realism.

Thanks also to the reports in the newspapers, the echoes of the staged battles that characterized the last quarter of the eighteenth century reached Russia.¹⁸ It was undoubtedly the end of an era, as described by Charles-Nicolas Cochin in his *Lettres sur l’Opéra* (1781), where spectators mocked the puerile movements of cumbersome cardboard horses and the visible onstage changing of Baroque stage sets. There was a demand for greater realism, which was to be achieved with the help of asymmetrical sets and varied planes in the scenery.¹⁹ The neo-Vitruvian illuminists and classicists, including Francesco Algarotti (1712–64), were highly critical of the degeneration of Bibiena’s approach (for them reduced by now to a ‘bizzarria’ (‘oddity’))²⁰ and were against the structure of the theatrical building in the forms in which it was consolidated from the mid-seventeenth century. Algarotti, in

15. Most of the news appeared in the oldest newspaper in St Petersburg, the *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti* (*The St Petersburg Gazette*), published regularly since 1728, first by the Germans and then by the Russians until 1917. After the revolution, it took the name of *Leningradskaja Pravda* (*The Truth of Leningrad*); in 1991 it resumed its historical name, still in use.

16. Here I shall not discuss the development of the popular theatre that took place in the eighteenth century but focus instead on the development of court theatre. On this subject, see instead the very thorough Italian study on the various Russian street theatrical trends: Maria Chiara Pesenti, *Arlecchino e Gaer nel teatro russo dilettantesco del Settecento: contatti e intersezioni in un repertorio teatrale* (Milan: Guerini Scientifica, 1996).

17. See *Giacomo Quarenghi architetto a Pietroburgo: lettere e altri scritti (1761–1817)*, ed. by Vanni Zanella (Venice: Albrizzi, 1988), p. 77.

18. We can see the roots of this phenomenon in a much older tradition, in early seventeenth century opera, especially in Florence (*abbattimento*). See Kelley Harness, *Echoes of Women’s Voices: Music, Art, and Female Patronage in Early Modern Florence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

19. See Franco Perrelli, *Storia della scenografia: dall’antichità al Novecento* (Rome: Carocci, 2002), p. 125.

20. On the debate on the structure of the theatrical architecture between the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century, see Elena Tamburini, *Il luogo teatrale nella trattatistica italiana dell’800: dall’utopia giacobina alla prassi borghese* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1984).

particular, insisted on the ‘permeable’ nature of theatrical architecture, which ought exclusively to serve the purposes of hearing and ‘seeing’.²¹

The patron’s role in choosing the type of theatre was truly remarkable in Russia. At the end of the eighteenth century, the libraries in the villas of the aristocracy housed accumulated treasures of neoclassical theory, and these stirred the desire to reconstruct the classical forms of ancient theatre. Count Nikolai Sheremetev, more than others (e.g. the noblemen Nikolai Iusupov, Dmitrii Golitsyn, and Stepan Apraksin), supported the idea of a *revival* of ancient theatre on Russian soil. Having built his own theatre in the villa in Ostankino, Sheremetev organized an international design competition, wishing to accumulate all the freshest ideas from Europe for a ‘synthetic’ theatre worthy of the finest in Europe.²²

It should be noted that the eighteenth-century scenography in Russia was closely linked to the development of Baroque decoration (‘la grande decorazione’). Often the same Italian masters (such as Giuseppe Valeriani, Antonio Peresinotti,²³ and later Pietro Gonzaga) created not only the stage scenery, ceilings, and theatrical backdrops, but also frescoed the ceilings and painted *dessus de porte* (ornamented lintels) and *trompe-l’œil* in the structures that had just been newly built by Italian architects in St Petersburg, as well as designing and organizing fireworks and outdoor festivities. This also applies to the repertoire of Quarenghi the decorator, whose first interior design ideas appear by themselves as scenographic sketches.

On the other hand, in the last decades of the eighteenth century there was a need to change the tone of theatrical sets, to aim towards a greater simplicity of feelings and functionality and a readability of the scenic illusions. Theatrical language thus made its way into the stylistic changes in architecture and Baroque decoration introduced in St Petersburg and its environs by the Italian masters. Quarenghi became its most experienced promoter, with his broad graphic and architectural repertoire.

At the time, much thought was given to the most suitable decorative themes to be executed in various settings, depending on their function. At a European level, and undoubtedly of great interest, are the fifty *Avvertenze* (Instructions) written by the influential neoclassical architect, decorator, and member of Bolognese Clementina Academy Antonio Basoli (1774–1848). In this work he suggests, for example, that one should distinguish decorative characteristics of rooms as “parata” o “domestici”, perché certamente un’anticamera converrà meno magnifica di quella da ricevere, e così tutte e due meno gentili di un gabinetto’ (“ceremonial” or “domestic”, because certainly ‘an antechamber needs to be less magnificently decorated than a reception room, and each of them needs to be less refined than a study-room’).²⁴ Milizia, on the other hand, placed the emphasis on the differentiation

21. See Francesco Algarotti, *Saggio sopra l’opera in musica*, in *Opere del conte Algarotti*, 17 vols (Venice: Carlo Palese, 1791–94), III, p. 399.

22. On the subject see E. Springhis, *Iskusstvo i vremia* [Art and Time], guide to the Ostankino museum-estate (Moscow: Nash Dom, 1999); N. A. Elizarova, *Teatry Sheremetevikh* [The Sheremetev Family Theatres] (Moscow: Ostankinskii dvorets-muzei, 1944); E. Sheholok, *Ostankino i ego teatr* [Ostankino and its Theatre] (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1949); G. V. Vdovin, L. A. Lepskaia, and A. F. Cherviakov, *Ostankino: Theatre-Dvorets. Albom* [Ostankino: Theatre-Palace] (Moscow: Russkaia kniga, 1994); G. V. Vdovin, ed., *Graf Nikolai Petrovich Sheremetev: lichnost’– deiatel’nost’– sud’ba* [Count Nikolai Petrovich Sheremetev: Personality, Work, Destiny] (Moscow: Nash dom, 2001); *Zhizhn’ usadbnogo mifa: poterannii i obretennii rai* [The Fate of the Myth of the Residence: Paradise Lost and Found], ed. by E. E. Dmitrieva and O. N. Kuptsova (Moscow: OGI, 2008).

23. There are notable decorations by Giuseppe Valeriani and Antonio Peresinotti in Catherine’s palace in Zarskoe Selo (1753–55). Valeriani’s ceiling, entitled *Ascension of Aeneas on Olympus*, is preserved in the white room of the Stroganov palace (1754) in St Petersburg.

24. See Anna Maria Matteucci, ‘Il trionfo dell’antico nella decorazione degli interni’, in *Dal mito al progetto*, II, pp. 751–90 (p. 780).

of the apartments: first, for comfort; second, for socializing; third, for show.²⁵ As for theatrical sets in Russia, at the time there was no fixed conception, but, with the arrival of Pietro Gonzaga (in 1792) theatrical space acquired its first theorist.²⁶

The starting point for this chapter was the lack of clear documentary information on Quarenghi's specific activity as a scenographer. Despite the fact that construction of a better-known theatrical and avant-garde architectural model had begun in St Petersburg in 1783, namely the Hermitage Theatre, and many projects that had been drafted remained on paper (no less influential), Quarenghi has never been considered a true scenographer. Instead, he called in collaborators from Italy, set designers and decorators who, in Russia, formed a new team with a neoclassical and pre-Romantic style.²⁷ Involved in his projects were Giambattista Scotti (1776/77–1830), Pietro Gonzaga (1751–1831), Domenico Corsini (1774–1814), Antonio Canoppi (1774–1832), Francesco Camporesi (1747–1831), and Luigi Rusca (1762–1822), not to mention generations of serf artists.²⁸ This suggests that Quarenghi's vision for the theatre went beyond the stylistic limits of pure classicism in the Palladian sense and proved to be free and open to development in a Romantic and naturalistic vein.²⁹

A series of sheets exists where Quarenghi starts from a plane or sections of the building in the process of being designed and arrives at his fantastic variations within the landscape. And vice versa: from the view of the place (often realistic) forms of architectural design are developed. Here, the artist's two creative lines co-exist, rationalist and visionary, the concepts of the classical and the Romantic, to be precise. It is no coincidence that Quarenghi's creations were consciously placed within the contemporary debate on taste, connected to the concepts of *veduta* and *capriccio*, acquiring aesthetic value independently of the realization of the architectural project. They are full of life and dynamism thanks to the vaporous rural landscapes and the presence of local figures interacting with the compositions of that era created by Hubert Robert (see Fig. 6.1) or Charles-Louis Clérissieu (see Fig. 6.2).

25. Matteucci, p. 780.

26. On the subject see the recent critical readings by Elena Tamburini in *Il luogo teatrale*, and *Il quadro della visione: arcoscenico e altri sguardi ai primordi del teatro moderno*, with the collaboration of Andrea Sommer-Mathis and Anne Surgers (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004). In particular, see the in-depth study by Maria Ida Biggi in her edition of the writings of Pietro Gonzaga, *La musica degli occhi: scritti di Pietro Gonzaga* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 2006).

27. One of the first critical works on neoclassical scenography is by A. Müller, in which the author lists almost all the Italian decorators and stage designers working in neoclassical Russia (at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). See A. P. Müller, *Inostrannye zhivopistsy i skulptory v Rossii* [Foreign Painters and Sculptors in Russia] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1925), pp. 51, 64, 82–83. We should also mention the extensive study by Ettore Lo Gatto on Italian masters in Russia (see note 3 above), conducted from 1934 until the 1990s and continued by other scholars. Among the recent research on Italian artists working in Russia (especially in St Petersburg) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are the collections of essays *Gli architetti italiani a San Pietroburgo*, exhibition catalogue, ed. by Giampiero Cuppini (Bologna: Grafis, 1996); *Pietroburgo e l'Italia: 1750–1850*, ed. by Androsov and Strada; Sergei Androsov, *Russkie zakazchiki i italijskie khudozhniki* [Russian Patrons and Italian Artists] (St Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2003).

28. Many talented artists, painters, and stage designers in Russia were serfs or the property of nobles till 1861 (when serfdom was abolished). Serf artists could study in the Academy of Fine Arts, sponsored by Russian aristocrats, and some of them (such as the architect Andrei Voronikhin with the son of his owner, the Earl Pavel Stroganov, in 1786–90), also studied and travelled in Europe on the Grand Tour with their patrons.

29. In 1783, Catherine, to oversee theatrical developments directly, first founded a Commission and then the Special Directorate for the management of all types of spectacles. Aware of the need for change, Quarenghi sent a letter (dated 1 May 1786) to the sculptor Giuseppe Franchi in Milan in which he asked him to gather information on 'a certain Mr Gonzaga' who, according to the rumours that had reached St Petersburg, seemed to have 'well-developed taste and great inventiveness'. This was in order to bring him to the Russian court, where he would be paid a salary of 2,000 rubles a year. See Milica Korshunova, 'Gli scenografi italiani a San Pietroburgo', in *Dal mito al progetto*, II, pp. 515–26 (p. 523).



Fig. 6.1. Hubert Robert, *Villa Madama*. France, c. 1760. Inv. No. OR-14307. The State Hermitage Museum. © The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2020



Fig. 6.2. Charles-Louis Clérissseau, *Architectural Fantasy*. France, 1760s. Inv. No. OR-2512. The State Hermitage Museum. © The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2020

The remarkable body of Quarenghi's drawings has been well studied on several occasions and today is divided between public and private collections in Bergamo, Milan, and Venice (thanks to his son Giulio, who brought his father's patrimony to Italy), and in Russia in Moscow and St Petersburg, including the important works in the Hermitage and the St Petersburg State Theatre Library. Recently, some celebratory events were held (200 years following the architect's death), accompanied by catalogues and publications.³⁰

EARLY IDEAS AND THE ANTIQUITIES OF ROME: THE STUDY OF REALISM IN TERMS OF SCENOGRAPHY

This line of reasoning takes its cue from Quarenghi's early drawing experiences, when, having arrived in Rome in 1762 and been disappointed by the teachers chosen, he rejected Baroque decorative tastes and found in Palladio's Renaissance works an intellectual and moral model, also drawing on contemporary examples provided by the French and the English, for example, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (1736–1806) and Robert Adam (1728–92). He copied plans, sketched and measured buildings and ancient ruins, and designed homes for British patrons. At this point Quarenghi began the daily practice of keeping a drawing diary where he recorded all impressions in clear and defined forms. It is important to note that he started mostly with an existing motif, which interested him as an initial structuring idea, and then he 'orchestrated' it with various landscape additions and costumed extras. This was unlike his follower at the Russian court, Pietro Gonzaga, who liked to define the art of scenography as 'music for the eyes',³¹ which could have been a veritable theatrical genre in its own right, capable of arousing in the spectator a variety of emotions equal to that inspired by a spectacle with actors.

THE GRAND TOUR TOWARDS MOSCOW: THE SCENOGRAPHIC VISION OF THE THIRD ROME

As soon as he arrived in Russia, Quarenghi went to Moscow, guided by the desire to compare the local antiquities and the Russian architectural language. Moscow, proclaiming itself at the beginning of the sixteenth century to be the third Rome, which presented itself as the New Jerusalem, was the

30. One of the greatest scholars of Quarenghi in Russia in the first half of the twentieth century was the architect and scientist Vladimir Piliavskii. His research on Quarenghi and Russian Palladianism is collected in V. Piliavskii, *Palladianstvo v russkoj arkhitekture* [Palladianism in Russian Architecture], *Izvestia Vuzov: Stroitel'stvo i arkhitektura*, 7 (1969), pp. 59–66; Piliavskii, *Giacomo Quarenghi: Arkhitekt. Khudozhnik* (Moscow: Stroizdat, 1981). The same text is included in the Italian volume *Giacomo Quarenghi*, ed. by Sandro Angelini (Bergamo: Credito bergamasco, 1984), pp. 7–207. On the topic, see also V. N. Taleporovskii, *Quarenghi* (Leningrad and Moscow: Gos. izdatel'stvo po stroitel'stvu i arkhitekture, 1954); G. G. Grimm, *Graficheskoe nasledie Quarenghi* [Graphic Heritage of Quarenghi] (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Gos. Ermitazha, 1962); M. F. Korshunova, *Giacomo Quarenghi*, in *Zodchie Sankt Peterburga. XVIII vek* [Architects of St Petersburg in the Eighteenth Century], ed. by Iu. Artem'ev and others (St Petersburg: Lenizdat, 1997), pp. 719–69. See also the following Italian-language volumes: *Disegni di Giacomo Quarenghi: catalogo della mostra. Bergamo, Palazzo della ragione, 30 aprile–30 giugno 1967. Venezia, Isola di S. Giorgio Maggiore, luglio–ottobre, 1967* (Vicenza: N. Pozza, 1967); Vanni Zanella, *Giacomo Quarenghi: architetto a Pietroburgo. Lettere e altri scritti* (Venice: Albrizzi, 1988); *Giacomo Quarenghi: architetture e vedute*. Catalogue of an exhibition held at the Palazzo della ragione, Bergamo, 14 May–17 July 1994 (Milan: Electa, 1994); 'Pubblicazioni su Giacomo Quarenghi nella Biblioteca Civica di Bergamo', *Bergomum*, 93.1–2 (1998), 175–237. See also note 1 above.
31. The most famous treatise by Pietro Gonzaga dedicated to the art of scenography is in fact called *La Musique des yeux et optique theatrale* (St Petersburg: Pluchart, 1807). In the guise of Sir Thomas With (the name with which the scenographer presented himself as a translator) he expressed his thoughts on the trade. The goal was to provide 'una lista di osservazioni e di riflessioni [...] sull'efficacia e sull'ascendente delle visioni artificiali' ('a list of observations and reflections [...] on the effectiveness and ascendancy of artificial visions'). For an analysis of Gonzaga's theoretical texts, see Maria Ida Biggi, ed., *La musica degli occhi*.



Fig. 6.3. Giacomo Quarenghi, Voskresenskii (Resurrection) Monastery beside the Istra River, or New Jerusalem. Environs of Moscow. 1797. Pen, brush, India ink, and watercolour on paper. Inv. No. OP-11718. The State Hermitage Museum. © The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2020.

bearer of historical memory and traditional values.³² Unlike the dynamic and modern St Petersburg, which appeared as a well-structured ensemble out of nowhere, Moscow was the native city, with strong archetypal and mythological references. For Catherine II, Moscow represented the symbolic centre of all Russia. In harmony with Catherine's model and within the eighteenth-century iconographic debate on ancient Rome and modern Rome, it was here where she introduced images into her repertoire with a Piranesian taste. Moscovite architecture can often be glimpsed in the almost Roman triumphal arch, as if showing the historical perspective on rediscovered antiquity (see Fig. 6.3). Gothic spires in an exotic scenographic vein are emphasized.

Giacomo Quarenghi was an enthusiastic supporter of the way in which the theatrical spaces of antiquity were organized, and he demonstrated this with his Hermitage Theatre (1783–1802),³³ inspired by the study of Palladio's Teatro Olimpico but elaborated in a modernist key, in line with

32. See Rosanna Casari, 'Mosca e Pietroburgo: la questione dell'identità e il dialogo culturale tra il XVIII e il XIX secolo', in *Dal mito al progetto*, II, p. 583. To add to these, an important research work on the phenomenon of the 'Roman' myth in Russian art and on Roman influences in the development of St Petersburg is Rita Giuliani and Chiara Di Meo, 'Riflessi del mito di Roma nell'architettura russa: prima parte XVIII e XIX secolo', *Academic Electronic Journal in Slavic Studies*, 21 (2007), 50–78. The authors refer to the study by Jurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii, 'Il concetto di "Mosca terza Roma" nell'ideologia di Pietro I', *Europa Orientalis*, 5 (1986), 481–92.

33. An updated analysis of the Hermitage Theatre can be found in Irene Giustina, 'Giacomo Quarenghi: Teatro dell'Ermitage a San Pietroburgo', in *Dal mito al progetto*, pp. 871–80.

Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's architectural fantasies.³⁴ Space does not allow here a full discussion of the topic of the roots and influences of the Hermitage Theatre.

THEATRES ON PAPER: FROM 'SPEAKING ARCHITECTURE' TO THE SCENE AS A 'SPEAKING PROJECT'

The Hermitage Theatre was inaugurated on 16 November 1785 with the performance of Mikhail Sokolovskii's comic opera *Mel'nik-koldun, obmanshchik i svat* (The Miller who was a Wizard, a Cheat, and a Matchmaker), followed by the *opera seria* by Giuseppe Sarti entitled *Armida e Rinaldo*.³⁵ For this stage, Catherine herself wrote a historical libretto *Nachal'noe Upravlenie Olega* (The Early Reign of Oleg)³⁶ set to music by Sarti, Carlo Canobbio, and Vasilii Pashkevich,³⁷ the scenes were designed by Francesco Gradizzi.³⁸ Unfortunately, we do not have a complete idea of these stagings, inasmuch as — just as with all eighteenth-century Russian scenography — we must base our knowledge on the drawings that replicate the sets and scenery, since it is not possible to admire them *in situ*.

Instead we can highlight a curious drawing related to Quarenghi's design that shows a vision of the ideal scenic space for his theatre (see Fig. 6.4). This is one of the section drawings made in the 1780s, then reproduced in prints (1787). At the centre of the backdrop of the setting, as we see, is a dominant central-plan structure flanked by two rostrum columns. The forms of Quarenghi's project for the St Petersburg Stock Exchange of 1781 are clearly recognizable. That enterprise had a sad ending. After a fourteen-year suspension due to the wars with Turkey, Quarenghi's construction was dismantled and then reconstructed by his constant rival in the architectural field, the Frenchman Thomas de Thomon (1804–10).

In this case, the motif chosen for the representative scenography within the section of his successful theatre was his own unfinished project, an architectural fantasy. Furthermore, the drawing seems to illustrate the imagined modern Forum, while at the same time recalling the architectural

34. It should also be emphasized that the reference to Palladio (and his Teatro Olimpico) in neoclassical theatrical structures was quite widespread in eastern Europe: the ancient plan and the same source of inspiration characterize, for example, the Swedish theatre of Gripsholm Castle (architect Erik Palmstedt, 1781).
35. Giuseppe Sarti (1729–1802) was invited to St Petersburg in 1784. During the journey he made a stop in Vienna, where Emperor Joseph II received him with great honours, and where he met Mozart. He finally reached the Russian city in 1785, and immediately began, as a court maestro di cappella, to compose new works, including sacred music. Catherine II granted the composer a noble title and her successor Emperor Pavel I (1796–1801) accorded Sarti the social status of collegiate assessor. He remained in Russia until 1802, when his health became so poor that he asked Emperor Alexander I for permission to leave the country. The Emperor let him go, granting him a generous pension. He died in Berlin on his return journey to Italy. See *Giuseppe Sarti: Musicista faentino. Atti del convegno internazionale Faenza 25–27 novembre 1983*, ed. by Mario Baroni and Maria Gioia Tavoni (Modena: Mucchi, 1986); Christine Jeanneret, 'Making Opera in Migration: Giuseppe Sarti's Danish Recipe for Italian Opera', *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici*, 43 (2018), 111–33; Bella Brover-Lubovskiy, 'Giuseppe Sarti and the Topos of the Tragic in Russian Music', *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University Arts*, 9 (2019), 4–29 and her chapter in this volume.
36. The full score of *Nachal'noe upravlenie Olega* has recently been published. See *Nachal'noe upravlenie Olega (The Early Reign of Oleg). Music by Carlo Canobbio, Vasilij Pashkevich, and Giuseppe Sarti for the Play by Catherine the Great*, ed. by Bella Brover-Lubovskiy (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions Inc., 2018).
37. In addition to plays, Catherine II also wrote *Nakaz kommissii o sostavlenii proekta novago ulozheniia* [Nakaz, or Instructions to the Commission for the Composition of a Plan of a New Code of Laws], 1767, based on the ideas of Cesare Beccaria and Montesquieu — works which, among other things, were prohibited in France. Later the Empress attempted to imitate Shakespeare and began to publish literary magazines that she promoted. The greatest satirist of these was Nikolai Ivanovich Novikov (1744–1818).
38. After the departure of his father, Francesco Gradizzi was appointed — from 1762 to 1792 — as head of scenography in St Petersburg. He successfully worked with the Italian comic opera companies, which reached the peak of their fame at the court of Catherine II in the 1770s and 1780s. He had numerous invitations from Italian composer-chapel masters, among whom worth mentioning are Vincenzo Manfredini (1737–99, in Russia since 1758), Baldassare Galuppi (1706–85, in Russia in 1765–68), Giovanni Paisiello (1740–1816, in St Petersburg in 1776–83), Domenico Cimarosa (1749–1801, in St Petersburg in 1787–91), and Giuseppe Sarti (in St Petersburg in 1784–1801).

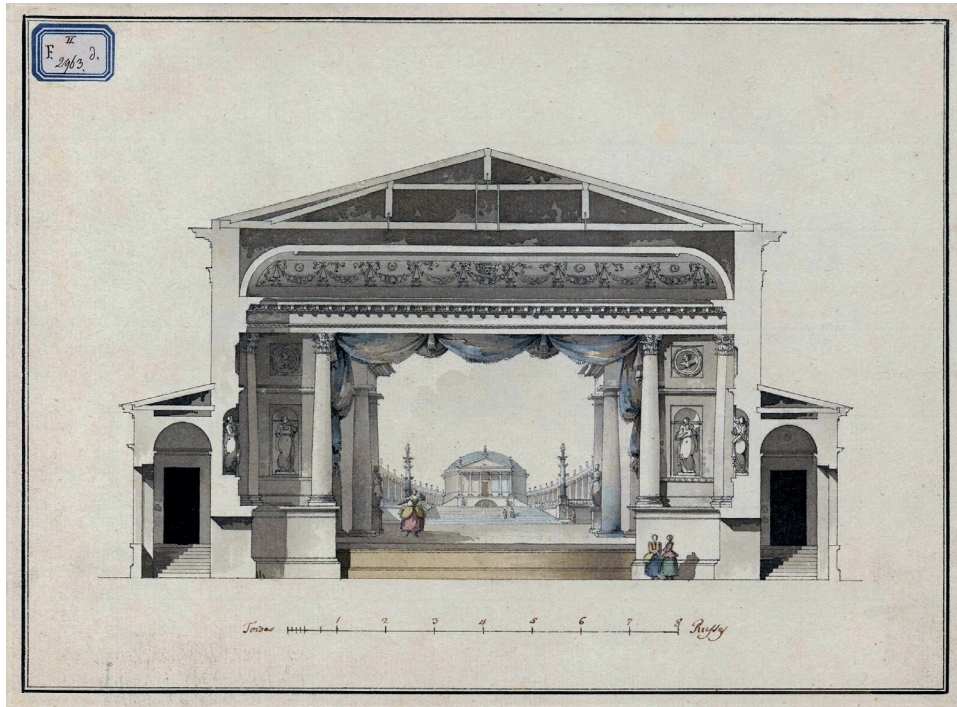


Fig. 6.4. Giacomo Quarenghi, Cross-section of the Hermitage Theatre, 1783–84 (before 1787). Pen, brush, India ink, and watercolour on paper. © The National Museum in Warsaw, Inv. No. Rys.Pol.3165/2



Fig. 6.5. Pietro di Gottardo Gonzaga, The Hermitage Theatre in St Petersburg (Curtain design). After 1802. Pen, brush, ink on paper over sketch in pencil. Inv. No. 34441. The State Hermitage Museum. © The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, 2020

forms of St Peter's and the Pantheon in Rome. There is another variant of this graphic idea in the National Museum in Warsaw (1780–90), where the same motif has been developed more freely.³⁹ Here, instead, the artist indicates the triumphant value of his own architecture by speaking through the forms of scenography. The Stock Exchange, which no longer physically exists, is immortalized in the ephemeral space of the ideal city, created by Quarenghi on the stage of his beloved Hermitage. In addition, the architect frames it in the view from the Hermitage rooms near the tip of the Stock Exchange on the Neva River, like a spectator viewing his ideal show city.

In the context of the contemporary debate on the physiognomy of places in scenography (for example, in Francesco Algarotti's essays and the above-mentioned works by Francesco Milizia⁴⁰), there are two notable responses to this scenographic statement by Quarenghi. The first response, almost impressionistic, is offered in the scenic sketches by the pre-Romantic Pietro Gonzaga, who, around 1802, proposed an exterior image of it reproduced from real life for the curtain of the same theatre (see Fig. 6.5). It is a drawing full of lyricism, now in the collection of the St Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts. This is the view of Quarenghi's facade from a corner of the river front, proposed as a prologue for the spectator. Gonzaga creates a naturalistic trick. The space of the auditorium is reversed and shows its exterior on the curtain, inviting everyone to pause before entering into the fiction of the spectacle.

The second response came from Moscow in the 1830s, when the imperialist neoclassicist Joseph Bové (1784–1834), designing the Petrovskii Theatre, or the Bolshoi, took up the baton of Quarenghi's statement by placing his motif of the triumphant Stock Exchange inside his sections of the theatre hall (see Fig. 6.6). A dialogue was then established between the New Rome created by Quarenghi in St Petersburg and the renewed and imperial Third Rome proposed by Bové in post-Napoleonic Moscow.

Quarenghi created numerous theatrical ideas that were not realized in more elaborated forms and remained initial fantasies, where we can trace a variety of scenographic imagery.⁴¹ Often Quarenghi inserted an example of stage design (a set of decorations) inside an architectural projection of the theatre. Thus, in the public theatre project for the Kamennyi Theatre (Stone Theatre) in St Petersburg, the proposal of scenography on stage is reminiscent of a classical structure with some Baroque decorative elements that almost recalls Christopher Wren's style; instead in the Malyi theatre and in the theatre for the estate of the Prince Bezborodko, idyllic and rural themes are developed, variations on the thematic repertoire of the Grand Tour, assimilated during Quarenghi's Roman travels.

39. The National Museum in Warsaw, Rys.Pol.3165/2. For this group of drawings see also *Giacomo Quarenghi*, ed. by Angelini, p. 65.

40. See William Spaggiari, 'Il "Saggio sopra la pittura" di Francesco Algarotti', in *Gusto dell'antico e cultura neoclassica in Italia e in Germania*, ed. by Federica La Manna (Cosenza: Università della Calabria, 2006), pp. 9–21; Ferruccio Marotti, *Lo spazio scenico: Teorie e tecniche scenografiche in Italia dall'età barocca al Settecento* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1974), p. 108.

41. For example, some of Quarenghi's ideas were later developed by the Swiss architect Luigi Rusca in his theatre at the Tauride palace in St Petersburg (1802, demolished in 1902). Rusca, who took part in the construction of the Hermitage Theatre as a master builder, incorporated the performance hall in one of the palace's wings. Its forms still closely resemble Sheremetev's private Moscow theatre. Quarenghi himself had also sent his proposal for the Sheremetev Theatre competition in Ostankino. On this case and Rusca's work in St Petersburg, see L. B. Aleksandrova, *Luigi Rusca* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1990). For the Tauride palace theatre and Luigi Rusca's work in St Petersburg, see also Luigi Rusca, *Venti disegni d'architetture pietroburghesi: presentati da Luigi Rusca (1762–1822), architetto ticinese a San Pietroburgo a Giovanni Pietro Grimani ambasciatore della Repubblica Veneta a San Pietroburgo, 1795*, ed. by Konstantin Malinovskii (Lugano: Bredford libri rari, 2003).

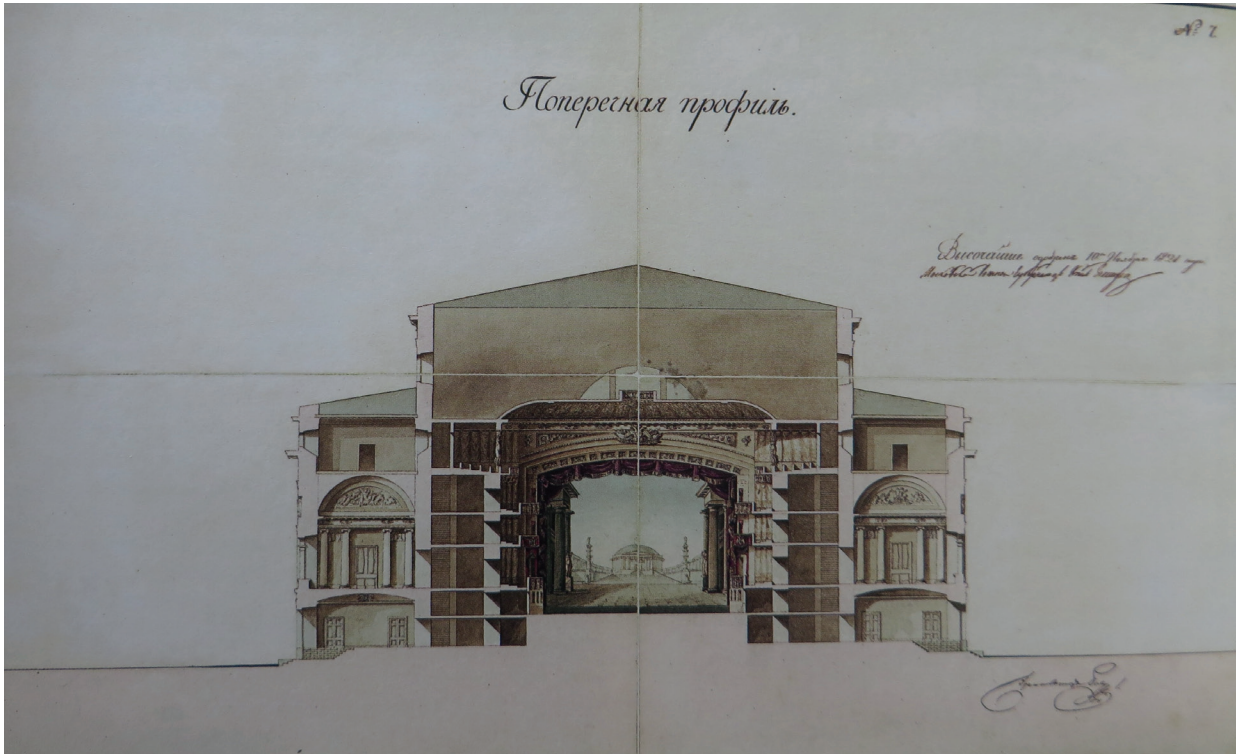


Fig. 6.6. Joseph Bové, Cross-section of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. Pen, brush, ink, and watercolour on paper. 1821. Moscow, The State Academic Bolshoi Theatre Museum, Inv. No. KP 1301. Reproduced by permission of the State Academic Bolshoi Theatre Museum

As an ornamenteer and decorator, Quarenghi drew on the vast body of his travel sketches, reproducing inventions based on his personal architectural impressions. In this way he created his own scenographic vision, which we could call scenic design, derived from his personal experience as designer-draftsman. As Charles de Brosses (1709–77) wrote, ‘the scenography is so magnificent in the Italian works, especially compared to the usual pettiness of ours, that I can only give you a vague idea of it; you would have to have seen it. Today the art of painting has been lost in Italy; only in perspective and scenography are there still some capable artists.’⁴²

With his work as a builder and conceiver of the ideal city, Quarenghi transmitted the rich vocabulary of architectural and natural motifs to the most skilled scenographers and decorators, leaving to them the execution and development of his early ideas. Not having left behind any writings on scenography, with his systematic inventions he became a true master builder and director *par excellence* of the great theatre of architecture for the Capital of the Enlightenment. Quarenghi’s importation of contemporary European styles and his role as intermediary in the migration of masters, from musicians to opera decorators, contributed to the formation of a map of the global presence of the Italians at the turn of the nineteenth centuries.

42. See the Italian translation in Perrelli, *Storia della scenografia*, pp. 122–23.