Architectures of Festival in Early Modern Europe

Fashioning and Re-fashioning Urban and Courtly Space

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Chapter 6

From ephemeral to permanent architecture

The Venetian palazzo in the second half of the seventeenth century

Martina Frank

Around 1700 the range of Venetian palace architecture was enhanced by a small number of unfamiliar structural features. These were intended for the celebration of festivities and were characterised by decorative systems and architectural developments that broke with a well-established tradition. The most spectacular testimony to the thirst for new directions, and an indispensable term of comparison for our present purpose, is the double-height central hall in Palazzo Zenobio (see Plate 9).

In 1695 the Zenobio family, recently assimilated into the patrician class, appointed Antonio Gaspari to renovate a Gothic palace in the ownership of Angelo Raffaele, which the family had bought in 1664 from the Morosini family. Gaspari eliminated, or at least radically modified, a fundamental feature of Venetian houses, namely the *portego*, the rather long and narrow passage hall typical of the *piano nobile* or principal storey of the house. On the ground floor, the architect introduced a colonnaded passageway, narrowing towards the garden, while on the *piano nobile* the *portego* was designed to open up to form a room that breaks not only its lateral confines but also its upper confine as it soars two storeys high. The connection between the ground floor and the *piano nobile* seeks to inspire in the visitor a feeling of wonder and surprise. The grand staircase at the end of the ground-floor colonnaded passageway leads up to a *porteghetto* with a Serlian window looking out on the garden, while a second Serlian arch constitutes a spectacular entrance to a hall, the dimensions, proportions and decorations of which could hardly fail to induce a feeling of awe and wonder. A space such as this was

Massimo Favilla and Ruggero Rugolo, 'Dorigny e Venezia. Da Ca' Tron a Ca' Zenobio e ritorno', in Giorgio Marini and Paola Marini (eds), *Louis Dorigny (1654–1742): Un pittore della corte francese a Verona* (Venice: Marsilio, 2003), pp. 37–59; Massimo Favilla and Ruggero Rugolo, 'Progetti di Antonio Gaspari, architetto della Venezia barocca', *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze*, *Lettere ed Arti, classe di scienze morali, lettere ed arti*, 165 (2006–2007), 139–91.

undoubtedly designed for new functions and new events leading to equally new decoration.

Antonio Gaspari is regarded as the most evidently baroque of Venetian architects, who tried, in his own words, to follow Roman rules and adapt them to Venetian habits, an aim which can clearly be read in the façade of Palazzo Zenobio (see Plate 10). The façade speaks a Venetian language, but interpreted in the light of Roman models, in particular those of Gianlorenzo Bernini's Palazzo Chigi in Piazza SS Apostoli. The pyramid-shaped composition of the façade culminates in a coat of arms enclosed in a curved tympanum, while the balcony indicates the hall's extent, and the Serlian window organises the depth of the space.³

The elaborate pictorial scheme in the central hall, which historians call the music room, is situated within an architectural space structured by pilasters and decorated with exquisitely modelled stuccos by Abbondio Stazio.⁴ The pyramidal composition of Louis Dorigny's fresco echoes that by Gaspari on the façade, leading towards a skyward-facing opening and depicting a Triumphant Aurora followed by Apollo's chariot.⁵ Mezzanine openings are repeated in *trompe l'œil* along the whole perimeter, forming a proscenium for the *orchestra* and for the allegorical figures that belong to the terrestrial realm. The hall thus breaks with the typology of the *portego*, the passage hall that traditionally occupies the centre

of a Venetian palazzo in double or triple superposition, depending on the number of floors. It also completely erases the usual compositional and lighting focus of a nobleman's house on the lagoon, namely the *portego*'s tight sequence of openings on the *piano nobile*. The *portego*'s traditional proportions and orientation prevent the eye from adopting a high focal point, and are usually reinforced by apparently secondary elements such as the shining floor-surfaces, which tend to reflect, in the interior of the building, the quality of the liquid surface outside. In Ca' Zenobio, windows are restricted to serving as sources of light for the decorative scheme overhead, and thereby lose their Venetian essence, namely the quality of connecting the interior with the exterior.

The development of Gaspari's architectural reasoning can be followed in a number of autograph sketches illustrating various stages of the Palazzo Zenobio project. One particularly interesting item documents the concept of the main hall as a transverse oval opening, a solution which would have emphasised even further the break with local tradition (Figure 6.1).⁶

If the plan of Ca' Zenobio's central hall seems to draw inspiration for its T shape from medieval precedents, the fact that it is two storeys high shows that we are in no way dealing with a concession to tradition. And the fact that Gaspari initially considered using an oval for the palazzo's central space suggests his and his patron's wish to introduce a spectacular element of novelty.

I would therefore suggest that, in the case of Ca' Zenobio, the Venetian *portego* abandoned what had always been its characteristic rectangular shape, its real and ideal extension, to conform to a more 'international' taste, in this way nullifying the relationship between inward and outward perspectives. The palazzo's music or ball room is a setting whose claim to permanent significance involves isolating the palazzo from the city, preventing that natural extension of space ensured by the *portego*'s terminal source of light. The room's function as a place designed for music is expressed by the overhanging balcony, its role emphasised by a range of musical instruments carrying iconographical significance, together with other elements extrapolated from theatrical tradition.

The development from *portego* to *salone* (main hall) was not, however, straightforward, and no radical or general reform of the internal distribution of space in the Venetian palazzo was ever actually achieved.⁷ It is also true that the period around

² A drawing of Antonio Gaspari for Villa De Lezze bears the inscription: 'Romanae Architecturae Leges servavi / Ut Venetis Legiis servire'. The drawing, held in the Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venice (BMCVe), Raccolta Gaspari, I, 93, is discussed by Martina Frank, 'Appunti su villa da Lezze', in Martina Frank (ed.), Da Longhena a Selva: Un'idea di Venezia a dieci anni dalla scomparsa di Elena Bassi (Bologna: Archetipo Libri, 2011), pp. 111–22, 119. For Gaspari's hypothetical stay at the Roman Accademia di San Luca, see Massimo Favilla and Ruggero Rugolo, 'La verità sul caso Gaspari', Studi Veneziani, 45 (2003), 243–63, 246–50.

³ The coat of arms now lies in the garden. For the original state of the façade see Luca Carlevarijs, *Le fabbriche e vedute di Venetia disgnate, poste in prospettiva et intagliate* (Venice: Finazzi, 1703).

⁴ Bernard Aikema, 'Il famoso Abbondio: Abbondio Stazio e la decorazione a stucco dei palazzi veneziani, circa 1685–1750', *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte*, 21 (1997), 85–122; Massimo De Grassi, 'Filippo Parodi, Pietro Roncaioli e lo stucco tardobarocco a Venezia', *Arte Veneta*, 54 (1999), 55–61.

The decoration can probably be linked to the preparations for the wedding of Carlo Zenobio with Maria Vendramin in 1698. Alessio Pasian, 'Per un catalogo di Louis Dorigny', *Arte in Friuli Arte a Trieste*, 18–19 (1999), 9–38, 17; Massimo Favilla and Ruggero Rugolo, 'Louis Dorigny. Salone e andito al piano nobile (1695–1698 circa). Venezia Ca' Zenobio', in Filippo Pedrocco (ed.), *Gli affreschi nei palazzi e nelle ville venete* (Schio: Sassi, 2008), pp. 162–71, 162–4. A previous collaboration between Gaspari and Dorigny is discussed by Adriano Mariuz and Giuseppe Pavanello, 'La chiesetta di Bernardo Nave a Cittadella', *Arte Veneta*, 50 (1997), 68–85. Dorigny was also active in Villa Da Lezze, see Martina Frank, 'Zu einer kaum bekannten Vita des Ludovico Dorigny', *Wiener Jahrbuch fur Kunstgeschichte*, 40 (1987), 103–7.

⁶ BMCVe, Raccolta Gaspari, III, 34, first published by Elena Bassi, 'Episodi dell'architettura veneta nell'opera di Antonio Gaspari', *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte*, 3 (1963), 55–108, 74–6. See also Gianmario Guidarelli, 'L'architettura civile', in Augusto Roca De Amicis (ed.), *Storia dell'architettura nel Veneto: Il Seicento* (Venice: Marsilio, 2008), pp. 224–47, 236.

Vincenzo Fontana, 'Dal 'portego' al salone', in Lionello Puppi (ed.), Giambattista Tiepolo nel terzo centenario della nascita (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 1998), pp. 115–24; Vincenzo Fontana, 'Scaloni e sale da musica, alcove e ridotti: il rinnovamento dei palazzi veneziani', in Marcello Fagiolo (ed.), Atlante tematico del barocco in Italia. Residenze nobiliari. Italia settentrionale (Rome: De Luca, 2009), pp. 251–74.

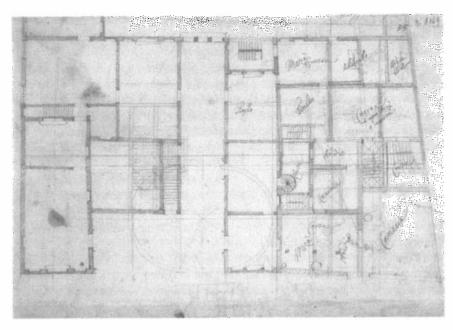


Figure 6.1 Antonio Gaspari, *Project for the ground plan of Palazzo Zenobio*, BMCVe (Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venice), Raccolta Gaspari, III

1700 is characterised by an extensive range of solutions, which indicates a need for new initiatives. These initiatives are in turn rooted in a process which had started long before, given expression in a series of experiments originating from the second half of the seventeenth century, the aim of which was to redefine the sequence and functions of space in aristocratic houses. Retracing these processes requires a multidisciplinary analysis of a number of factors. Architectural examples are not in themselves sufficient to account for this change, just as the primacy of an unprecedented decorative formula is not sufficient to do justice to the complexity of the phenomenon. Nor is it satisfactory to proceed by historical simplification, for instance, by attributing a spirit of innovation to the new aristocracy.⁸

The construction type adopted by Ca' Pesaro – launched by Giovanni Pesaro, (doge 1658–1659), then taken over after his death by his nephew Leonardo – belongs to the tradition of the *palazzo principalissimo* deriving from the palazzo's position on the Grand Canal as well as its dimensions, materials and architectural vocabulary.

while also exhibiting a propensity for grand dimensions typical of the second half of the seventeenth century. The long history of its construction stretches from the 1620s to the early-eighteenth century. The palazzo, based on two pre-existing aristocratic structures, which long influenced the project, was a venue for experimentation, especially regarding the relationship between the *portego*, the stairs and the courtyard. Baldassare Longhena's initial conception did not challenge conformity with tradition, and the exceptionally wide and deep *portego* remains the founding element of the design. Leonardo Pesaro and Antonio Gaspari, who, according to Hopkins, came onto the scene in the mid-1670s, brought a new impulse to the project, aiming to find a solution to the problem of an exceedingly deep and dark passage hall while respecting the pre-existing structure of the walls. Furthermore Ca' Rezzonico provides an example where Longhena had already proved his sensitivity to these considerations by reducing the depth of the *portego* through the expedient of an intermediary courtyard. The sketches for Palazzo Pesaro feature the recurring theme of a monumental staircase as a link between the *portego* and the courtyard (Figure 6.2).

Longhena's staircase at San Giorgio Maggiore (1642) had recently shown the architect's capacity for connecting the two levels of the cloister with a strong sense of theatricality, thus creating a dialogue between the various architectural elements. In the case of Palazzo Pesaro, none of the schemes involving a multi-flight staircase on the central axis, opening toward the portego and courtyard through a series of light-filled arcades, was ever carried out. After 1700, Antonio Gaspari introduced a one-flight monumental staircase, placed as a semi-autonomous element to the right of the portego, near the land entrance. Nevertheless, the objective of breaking the continuity of the portego influenced choices relative to the groundfloor entrance hall. The fact that our reading of the façade, even in the completed building, is determined by the same choices as are found in its structure before the definitive resolution of the planimetric aspects, proves that the architectural structure was designed as a whole. On the façade, the two huge twin gates, separated by a recess, were designed to meet the two openings on the courtyard axially, while the 'blind' portion in the middle was supposed to correspond to the central flight of the staircase. This is a complex design which takes into account visual

⁸ For an analysis of the phenomenon of new membership of the patriciate, see Roberto Sabbadini, *L'acquisto della tradizione: Aristocrazia e nuova nobilità a Venezia* (Udine: Gaspari editore, 1995). The relationship between new and old families in social, cultural and political matters has been studied by Dorit Raines, *L'invention du mythe aristocratique: L'image de soi du patriciat vénitien au temps de la Sérénissime*, 2 vols (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2006).

The expression palazzo principalissimo goes back to Francesco Sansovino, Venetia città nobilissima et singolare (Venice: Sansovino, 1581), p. 149. He uses it to describe the palazzi Loredan (Mauro Codussi), Dolfin, Corner Ca' Granda (both by his father Jacopo Sansovino) and Grimani at San Luca. For the phenomenon in the baroque period see Martina Frank, 'Committenza pubblica e privata', in Augusto Roca De Amicis (ed.), Storia dell'architettura nel Veneto: Il Seicento (Venice: Marsilio, 2008), pp. 8–12; Andrew Hopkins, Baldassare Longhena and Venetian Baroque Architecture (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 172.

See the drawings in Archivio di Stato di Venezia (ASVe), *Archivio Gradenigo Rio Marin*, busta 259, published by Alessandro Borgomainerio, 'Due disegni inediti di Baldassare Longhena per Ca' Pesaro', *Arte Veneta*, 66 (2010), 211–15; Hopkins, *Baldassare Longhena*, p. 208, for their dating in the late 1650s.

Figure 6.2 Baldassare Longhena and Antonio Gaspari, *Project for the ground plan of Palazzo Pesaro*, BMCVe (Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venice), Raccolta Gaspari, III

axes, sources of light, and movement within the building.¹¹ We will not encounter another such instance of theatrical insight applied to the relationship between interior and exterior until Domenico Rossi's project of 1723 for Ca' Corner della Regina, located on the Grand Canal near Ca' Pesaro, which certainly constitutes a response to its seventeenth-century precedent.

Venetian architecture and theatrical and festive space

Giorgio Bellavitis has described the lower part of the façade at Ca' Corner della Regina as a *frons scenae*, capable of being read when the three gates are open (Figure 6.3). The larger, central gate leads to an extremely deep *portego* ending in a courtyard, while the two minor gates offer an axial correspondence that is both visual and functional via the two flights of stairs located on the lateral sides of the entrance hall, which itself therefore takes on a T-shape, with the wider side oriented towards the Grand Canal. The *piano nobile*'s extremely long *portego*, on the other hand, indicates a return to tradition.

In his sketch of the floor plan of Palazzo Mocenigo Casa Vecchia, Antonio Visentini emphasises two staircases, symmetrically located on both sides of the entrance hall. We do not know if his observation corresponds to reality, nor when such a solution might have been conceived.¹³ Significantly, however, an etching by Giuseppe Filosi celebrating the visit of Augustus of Saxony to the Mocenigo family in 1716 shows the ideal use of the space, transformed into an elaborate *scena per angolo* to accommodate the reception of the monarch (Figure 6.4).

These 'scenographic' staircases find an important model in Palazzo Priuli Scarpon in San Felice, where in the 1660s Alfonso Moscatelli designed a multi-flight staircase serving not only as a means of connecting one level with another, but also as an autonomous structure of theatrical architecture. Moscatelli, an engineer from Mantua, is known not only for his buildings but also for his work as a set designer; for instance, during the carnival of 1659, he staged *La Costanza di Rosmonda* for the theatre of Santi Giovanni e Paolo. 15

For the use of twin gates in a wider Venetian context see Martina Frank, 'Riflessioni sul Longhena', *Storia dell'arte*, 64 (1988), 241–7.

Giorgio Bellavitis, 'Note sul restauro di Palazzo Corner della Regina e sull'uso temporaneo del pianoterra come spazio espositivo', in *La Biennale di Venezia Annuario 1976* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 1976), pp. 897–908.

Elena Bassi, *Palazzi di Venezia: Admiranda Urbis Venetiae* (Venice: Stamperia di Venezia Editrice, 1976), p. 134.

Bassi, *Palazzi*, pp. 278–81. The staircase was destroyed by fire in 1739 and is documented only by Visentini's drawing published by Bassi.

Jonathan E. Glixon and Beth L. Glixon, *Inventing the Business of Opera: The Impresario and His World in Seventeenth Century Venice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 330.

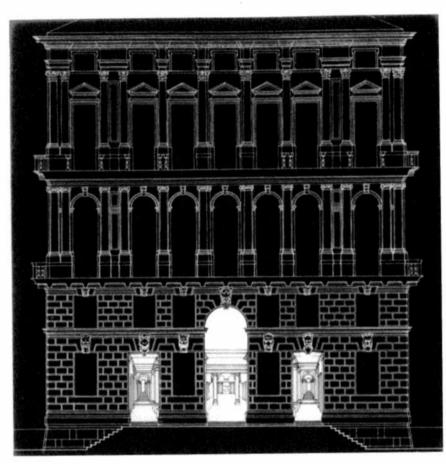


Figure 6.3 Venice, Palazzo Corner della Regina, scheme of the façade (Giorgio Bellavitis, in *La Biennale di Venezia Annuario*, 1976)

A celebrated exhibition mounted in 1980 was entitled *Venezia e lo spazio scenico* ('Venice and stage space'). In addition to retracing Venice's theatrical life, the exhibition explored the notion of an entire city envisaged as theatrical space, where a change of scene is achieved by the change of location of the viewer-visitor. This is not the place to survey the packed calendar of Venetian festivities, based precisely on processional movement and celebration of the Republic's history. It is necessary to reiterate however that this is not an *a posteriori* interpretation but a well-established and thought-through process which started inside the Serenissima itself. Elements of this process include the *andate ducali* (ducal processions), and historical festivities such as *la Sensa* (the Ascension), together with occasional celebrations such as the

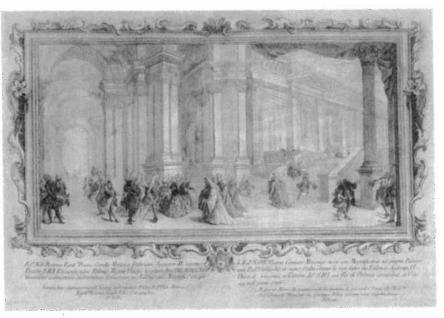


Figure 6.4 Giuseppe Filosi, *The visit of Augustus of Saxony to the Palazzo Mocenigo in 1716* (engraving owned by author)

ingressi (entrances) of the ambassadors and procurators of San Marco, the ceremonies for the arrival of high-ranking visitors, funerals, celebrations of military victories and others. On all these occasions, the itinerary and its point of arrival were marked by ephemeral architecture and decorations resulting from collaborative planning.¹⁶

To further emphasise the notion of an entire city configured as a stage, it is worth mentioning that even the historiography of Venice (the so-called Myth of Venice and its commentaries) stresses the principles of itinerary and mobility. Although much has been written on the topic, it is worth repeating that Venice as a state without a royal court, or more precisely an oligarchic republic, transferred the concept of central authority onto a carefully-conceived quasi-processional sequence of all those elements capable of ensuring congruence and integrity between the state's various components.

Overviews on religious and civic ceremonies include: Giustina Renier Michiel, Origine delle feste veneziane, 2 vols (Milan: Editori degli annuali delle scienze e dell'industria, 1829); Bianca Tamassia Mazzarotto, Le feste veneziane: i giochi popolari, le cerimonie religiose e di governo (Florence: Sansoni, 1961); Matteo Casini, I gesti del Principe. La festa politica a Firenze e Venezia in età rinascimentale (Venice: Marsilio, 1996); Lina Urban, Processioni e feste dogali. Venetia est mundus (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1998).

Such a premise, while too briefly described to encompass the phenomenon in all its complexity, may nevertheless draw attention to a distinctive aspect of Venice - the Città nobilissima et singolare (most noble and unique city), in the words of Francesco Sansovino - which in 1637 acquired a further distinguishing element: the opera theatre. This initiative was left entirely to individual patricians or groups of patricians, without any state involvement. The culture of musical performance thus presented itself as complementary to the packed calendar of official or semi-official festivities. Between 1637 and the end of the century, twelve theatres were founded, devoted at least periodically to melodrama only. These theatres and their repertoire radically altered the social function of music and its performance, leading to its evolution from a widespread activity into a closed and regulated system. The birth of public theatres involved private individuals, or in any case the owners of residential palazzi, reshaping their role as promoters of festivities and performances staged in domestic spaces. Giovanni Morelli illustrated this process in a masterly essay, underscoring how the state, while not an active participant, exploited the opera season for the purpose of self-celebration.¹⁷ The state thus gained 'at zero cost' a strong attraction in the eyes of foreign visitors, ambassadors and diplomats. The performance characteristics of this theatre-form were distinctive in that it could easily be represented as a synesthetic assemblage of artistic 'wonders', both visual and auditory, simultaneously produced in different strategic venues throughout typical Venetian nights. The fact that Venetian melodrama may also be read as a celebration of the greatness of the Serenissima Repubblica was stressed by Ellen Rosand in her studies of Claudio Monteverdi's last operas, associated with the celebrated achievements of the set designer Giacomo Torelli among others. 18 Indeed, instrumental music and singing gradually lost importance in the face of the sheer spectacle offered by set design and theatrical machinery.

The introduction of paid performance demanded a reaction on the part of those who were accustomed to promote a culture of theatre and music in their own homes. One can indeed observe in seventeenth-century baroque Venice a kind of reversal of trends with respect to the late Renaissance. During the Renaissance and early Baroque periods, a specific event (a wedding or the arrival of an important visitor) occasioned a theatrical performance, addressed to a select audience. In this respect, Venice remained in line with the culture of European courts. In the seventeenth century, however, the calendar of theatrical performances dictated the choice of dates for the celebration of a given event. Foreigners, for example, often planned their travels on the basis of the opera season.

There are numerous witnesses to the changes described above. On the occasion of the wedding between Lorenzo Giustinian and Giustina Mocenigo in 1630, a

legendary performance of Monteverdi's *The Rape of Proserpine*, with a libretto by Giulio Strozzi, was staged in the palazzo of the Mocenigo family in calle delle Rasse, an event that proved a culmination and, at the same time, a final expression of a world in decline:

Con l'occasione del maridar di D... sua figliola in ser Lorenzo Giustinian fu di ser Girolamo fece ser Girolamo Mocenigo fu di ser Andrea un solennissimo & estraordinario banchetto a parenti & amici con apparato veramente regio, dando nel disnare che fece carne & pesce & freddi & caldi tutto ciò che si potea dare... doppo il qual desinare, essendosi ballato sino le 24 hore, fece poi la sera con le torcie recitar & rappresentar in musica (cosa non più veduta simile) il rapto di Proserpina con voci & instrumenti perfettissimi, con apparitioni aeree, mutationi di scene & altro, con stupore & meraviglia di tutti gli astanti. Si fece il banchetto nella casa della sua habitazione & ragione in calle delle Rasse solaro di sotto & in quello di sopra di ragione di ca' Gritto fu rappresentata la favola che fu inventione del s[igno]r Giulio Strozzi fiorentino, persona virtuosa habitante di questa città & la musica fu opera del Monteverde Maestro ducale famoso & v'intervennero li duchi di Roan & Candoles francesi con singolar soddisfattione & egual amministratione ancora.

[Ser Girolamo Mocenigo, son of ser Andrea, on the occasion of the wedding of his daughter D . . . with ser Lorenzo Giustinian, son of the late ser Girolamo, held a most solemn & extraordinary banquet for his family and friends, in a setting worthy of a king, offering for dinner every possible meat & fish & cold & hot dishes . . . After dinner, having danced until midnight, he presented a torch-lit stage and musical performance (such as was never seen before) of *The Rape of Proserpine*, with the most perfect voices and instruments, aerial shows, changes of scenes and other devices, to the awe and amazement of all the guests. The banquet was held in his residence & property on the first floor in calle delle Rasse, while the second floor, the property of ca' Gritto, hosted the performance of a tale written by the celebrated Florentine Giulio Strozzi, who resides in this city, with music composed by the famous ducal maestro Monteverde. The Dukes of Roan and Candoles assisted with singular pleasure.]

The celebration of a wedding offered an opportunity to display the prestige of the family, through theatre as well as other means, while the presence of foreign guests ensured the quality and spectacular nature of the event. A performance such as *The Rape of Proserpine* was certainly not the rule during wedding celebrations,

¹⁷ Giovanni Morelli, 'La musica', in Gino Benzoni and Gaetano Cozzi (eds), *Storia di Venezia. Dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima, VII. La Venezia barocca* (Rome: Treccani, 2007), pp. 239–305.

¹⁸ Ellen Rosand, *Monteverdi's Last Operas: A Venetian Trilogy* (Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 12–17.

Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice (BNMVe), ms. it. Cl. VII 2492 (= 10145), Diari di Girolamo Priuli. See Luca Zoppelli, 'Il rapto perfettissimo. Un'inedita testimonianza sulla Proserpina di Monteverdi', Rassegna Veneta di Studi Musicali, 2–3 (1986–87), 343–5.

but represented rather a particularly significant moment in the history of the birth of melodrama. It is also indicative of how Venetian palazzi were conceived as theatrical spaces.

It remains true that the growth of 'public' theatres gradually eliminated the custom of staging performances in private residences unable to compete with the technical devices available in specialised venues. This does not mean that palazzi lost their theatrical features, but rather that these were conveyed through different modalities and expressive forms. While we know of no performance staged inside a palazzo in the second half of the century, it is possible to point to the rather exceptional case represented by the garden theatre of the Roman prince Altieri, which occupies an intermediate position between public theatre and private staging, and whose very existence seems to be due to the fact that its promoter was a 'foreigner'. Gaspare Altieri became a Venetian nobleman in 1670, but his social behaviour remained that of a Roman outsider. To this day, few studies have appeared of performances staged in the garden of the palazzo on Canal Regio. It seems certain that these were not in fact part of an actual season, but were impromptu productions staged for particular occasions such as the wedding of Gaspare's son Emilio and Costanza Chigi in 1697.20 Meanwhile, most Venetian noblemen had transferred such initiatives to their mainland residences. In Piazzola sul Brenta, Marco Contarini, a virtually unknown figure in the theatrical life of the city, equipped his villa with a series of structures dedicated to theatre and music. In Contarini's case, chronicle accounts describe a famous series of indoor and outdoor spectacles held at the villa on the occasion of the visit of the duke of Brunswick in 1685.21

We are indebted to Cristoforo Ivanovich, canon of St Mark's Basilica, for what we might call the first history of musical theatre in Venice. This is not the place to discuss his text, published in 1681 and titled *Minerva al tavolino*, or to verify the accuracy of the information it provides on the world of melodrama. Rather it is pertinent to highlight that the dialectical and complementary relationship between public and private, theatre and palace, performance and festivity, becomes the cornerstone of his thinking. In particular, Ivanovich takes us through the codes of behaviour of the Venetian patrician class, and through the protocols regulating the organisation of events. The main occasions integrating the palazzo into a wider framework of performance and transforming it from a private space into a public venue were, once again, weddings. Referring to this phenomenon, Ivanovich

significantly observes that patricians chose to celebrate their nuptials during carnival, in other words during the high point of the theatre season in the Venetian calendar, thus attracting the greatest number of foreign visitors. However, there is another fact which is just as significant: that the author refers to weddings within a text which is intended as a history of theatre.

On these occasions, patricians would throw open the doors of their palazzi in an almost unrestricted fashion. Whereas the public paid to attend theatre, the spectacle of a wedding was free and allowed one to enter a world, that of the family palazzo, which by definition was otherwise closed. Chronicles and the eye-witness accounts of travellers confirm at length how the palazzo was used on these occasions, while archival documents illustrate the lengthy preparations required to provide the palazzo with appropriate decoration, or even at times with adequate architectural adaptation.

The palazzo, which no longer needed to prove its suitability as a theatre venue, could return to being part of the wider mosaic of Venice as a scenic space, as described above. In the eyes of foreign visitors, the palazzo was seen as a place characterised by perfect architectural configuration. The notable arrangement intended to promote free circulation within a venue, a variety of functions and the celebration of the greatness of a family are described, for instance, in a 1680 text by the Frenchman Limojon de Saint Didier who, in the 1670s, had been secretary to the French Embassy in Venice. Limojon links his description of private residences with wedding celebrations, precisely because these are the public occasions par excellence of patrician houses:

Comme il est necessaire de connoitre en quelque facon la disposition des maisons, je diray que presque toutes les maisons sont baties d'une mesme manière. L'on entre ordinairement dans un long portique, dont les murailles sont bien blanchies, et qui n'est paré que de quelques bancs de bois blanc à dossiers tout unis; mais peints de diverses couleurs, avec des rateliers d'un coté et d'autre où l'on voit des piques et des hallebardes, plutost pour servir d'ornement que de deffence; l'escalier conduit dans un autre portique au dessus du premier, et qui est de toute la longueur de la maison en forme de galerie vitrée par les deux bouts, et qui communique à droite et à gauche dans toutes les chambres, lesquelles ayant leur degagement l'une dans l'autre, donnent le moyen de faire de plain-pied le tour de toute la maison en diverses manieres. Les Gentils hommes qui sont riches, se plaisent à la magnificence des meubles, on y en voit de velours à fond d'or, d'autres en broderie, avec les franges et crépines d'or, quantité de belles tables, et de miroirs de grands prix, mais on ne voit aucun lit dans les chambres de ce premier étage, pour laisser plus d'espace à la foule épouventable qu'il y a dans ces occasions.

²⁰ Franco Mancini, Maria Teresa Muraro and Elena Povoledo, *I teatri del Veneto. Venezia*, 2 vols (Venice: Corbo e Fiore, 1995), vol. 1, *Teatri effimeri e nobili imprenditori*, pp. 422–8.

Musical activity in Piazzola started in 1679. Marinella Laini, *Vita musicale a Venezia durante la Repubblica. Istituzioni e mecenatismo* (Venice: Marsilio, 2001), p. 148. The extraordinary event of 1685 is commemorated in a volume by Francesco Maria Piccioli, *Il Vaticinio della Fortuna. Musicali Acclamationi consacrati* . . . (Piazzola: Loco delle Vergini, 1685).

As is indicated, for instance, by the laws setting out the prohibition of access for foreigners.

[Since it is necessary to have some notion of the arrangement of the houses, I shall mention that most of them are built in the same fashion. People usually enter through a long portico with expertly whitewashed walls, whose sole decorations are several white-wood benches of similar design, painted in a variety of colours and equipped with racks on both sides containing pikes and halberds whose function is more decorative than military. The staircase leads to a second portico above the first one, covering the whole length of the building in the shape of a gallery glazed at both ends and communicating with all the rooms to its left and right. And as all of these rooms also communicate with one another, it is possible to go around the house by different paths. Rich noblemen appreciate luxurious furniture, and their houses boast gilded velvets, embroideries with golden fringes and trimmings, many beautiful tables and precious mirrors, but no beds are to be seen in the rooms on the first floor, so as to allow more space for the overwhelming crowd showing up on these occasions.]²³

Limojon goes on to describe the wedding ceremony and how the dance, led by the bride, turned into a continuous movement through all the rooms of the *piano nobile*. During the two-day celebration, the residents of the palazzo would display all their wealth. Although the *portego* remained the central element of the architectural organism, from a functional viewpoint it was no longer entirely autonomous, but rather complementary to the communicating rooms on both sides of it.

Accounts such as that by Limojon de Saint Didier are important in allowing us to catch a glimpse of life inside patrician residences. There are no systematic studies dealing with the function of spaces in seventeenth-century Venetian palazzi, and the lack of a classic historical account such as that provided by Patricia Fortini Brown with regard to the sixteenth century, is keenly felt.²⁴

We can cautiously assume in a specific case that one of the *piani nobili* was devoted to public or semi-public functions, while the second, where access was more limited and selective, was given over to cultural, educational and archival activities. An excellent example of such an arrangement is Palazzo Basadonna in San Trovaso, which can be shown to have had a library and painting gallery on the upper floor in addition to its lower-floor, more public, spaces. Palazzo Grimani in San Marcuola and Palazzo Tassis in San Canciano present a reverse arrangement, with libraries and galleries located, by contrast, on the *piano nobile*.²⁵

It may in fact be argued that a development as significant as the emergence of public theatre played an important role in changing the self-celebratory practices of the

patrician class. This was a long process, interwoven and in parallel with a series of other factors such as the War of Candia and one of its most spectacular consequences, the oft-cited launch of the *Libro d'Oro*, which granted entrance into the patrician class to numerous rich aristocratic families from the mainland and to the city's bourgeoisie.

The family palazzo, having lost – with the emergence of public theatres – the option of functioning as a temporary theatre, eventually modernised and equipped itself with spaces adapted to celebrations which became increasingly family-focused and distinct from the self-advertisement of the state. Such a process was marked by sequential stages featuring multiple aspects such as schools, galleries, libraries and *cameroni*, all of which entered into a new dialogue with the *portego* until, in Palazzo Zenobio, the *portego* emerged as a two-storey-high transverse hall. Within the general configuration of the palazzo, Ca' Zenobio's hall assumes, by its shape and function, a central position which the *portego* never enjoyed. The hall becomes the ultimate goal of an itinerary, rendering obsolete the circular movement described by Limojon de Saint-Didier. On a vertical plan, it abolishes the interplay between floors, as there is no longer space for a second *piano nobile* functioning as complementary to the first.

The goal of preserving the characteristic distribution of a Venetian palazzo while becoming equipped with a modern 'Festivities Hall' could be achieved by moving the Hall into an autonomous building separate from the palazzo, a solution which gradually emerged from the middle of the century, perhaps rooted in the experience of the casino nobile. In Palazzo Tron, the venue designated for festivities is confined to an external building in the garden, once again designed by Antonio Gaspari and decorated in 1701 with frescos by Louis Dorigny, or so it may be supposed, and elements of architectural trompe-l'ail.26 Such dislocation of the space designated for celebrations and receptions was relatively widespread at the turn of the century and is inscribed, like the new developments in scenographic staircases, in a period of intense experimentation whose goal was to adapt family residences to their functional or official requirements. It also allows preservation of the integrity of the portego and tends to feature new decorative systems and contents. Many of these structures annexed to the property were lost, such as that of Ca' da Lezze in Misercordia, or that of Palazzo Gradenigo in rio Manin. However, on the eve of the construction of Palazzo Zenobio, the now renovated casino of Ca' Zane in S. Stin plainly represents the significant endpoint of this evolution. On the rear part of the garden, and overlooking rio Manin, Antonio Gaspari designed a building consisting of a double-height room surrounded by a balcony, a well-established typology for the central halls of villas.²⁷

²³ Alexandre-Toussaint Limojon de Saint Didier, *La Ville et la République de Venise* (Paris: Guillaume de Luyne, 1680), p. 468.

²⁴ Patricia Fortini Brown, *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice: Art, Architecture and the Family* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

Dorit Raines, 'La biblioteca-museo patrizia e il suo capitale sociale: modelli illuministici veneziani e l'imitazione dei nuovi aggregati', in Caterina Furlan and Giuseppe Pavanello (eds), *Arte, storia, cultura e musica in Friuli nell'età di Tiepolo* (Udine: Forum, 1998), pp. 63–84.

The building was demolished in the nineteenth century. For documentary evidence, see Favilla and Rugolo, 'Dorigny e Venezia', pp. 50–3.

Massimo Favilla and Ruggero Rugolo, 'Palazzetto Zane', in Filippo Pedrocco (ed.), *Gli affreschi nei palazzi e nelle ville venete* (Schio: Sassi, 2008), pp. 178-83; also for the ceiling painted by Sebastiano Ricci. For the Venetian casinos see: Martina Frank, 'The Venetian Casino: Form and Function', in Sylva Dobalova & Ivan P. Muchka (eds.), Looking for Leisure. Court Residences and their Satellites 1400-1700 (Prague: Artefactum, 2017), 231-251.

The 'originality' of Ca' Zenobio

Finally, it may be pertinent to emphasise once more an element that might already be obvious from the last examples discussed, that is Ca' Zenobio's eccentric position in this phase. Finding a similar development, albeit in a completely different form, would entail waiting until the Magnifica sala of Palazzo Dolfin in S. Pantalon, set up in an architectural context defined by Domenico Rossi, with frescos painted between 1711 and 1715 by Nicolò Bambini and the quadraturists Antonio Felice Ferrari and Gerolamo Mengozzi Colonna (see Plates 11 and 12).28 The solution adopted in this case appears as a synthesis between the music room of Palazzo Zenobio and independent, displaced salons. The room, which stretches across the whole width of the palazzo, does not replace the portego, and any ambiguity as to its connection with other spaces in the palazzo has been avoided. All elements that would lead to its being perceived as the centre of the palazzo are missing and only its location on the top floor suggests at least an unavoidable path through a hall and up a staircase. Structural changes have deeply altered the internal distribution and no historical documentation can be constructed, no hypothesis about the connection between the room and other spaces of the residence. In its present configuration, the prominence of its massive space suggests that in this case the room itself is the palazzo. Palazzo Dolfin had been one of the venues chosen for the staging of festivities to honour the Danish king, Frederic IV, who paid a private visit to Venice between the end of 1708 and February 1709. Chronicles tell how – as the palazzo had no adequate space for dancing - it was decided that a temporary hall should be built in the garden, between the two wings of the building.²⁹ Re-ordering of the palazzo shortly thereafter seems aimed at commemorating this event by making a temporary installation permanent, and at redesigning a palazzo without an adequate space for theatrical display.

Once more, the palazzo had been called on to respond to the competition of the theatre. In Frederic's honour, the Grimani theatre in San Giovanni Crisostomo had promoted the staging of an opera and at the end of the performance the king had been offered a sumptuous dinner in a nearby location. After dinner the guests went back to the theatre, which had meanwhile been turned into a ball-room.³⁰ At that

point, what previously might have seemed one of Venice's many public theatres returned to functioning as the 'Festivities Hall' of the Grimani family, a role given emphasis by the huge coat of family arms on the stage.

Abbreviations

ASVe – Archivio di Stato di Venezia BMCVe – Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Venice BNMVe – Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice

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There are several manuscripts which describe the visit of the king. I used a copy in BMCVe, Codice Cicogna 3283. See also Renier Michiel, *Origine delle feste*, pp. 106–7; Conticelli, 'Ca' Dolfin a San Pantalon', pp. 231–2.

³⁰ Michiel, Origine delle feste, p. 108.

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Plate 9 Venice, Palazzo Zenobio, central hall, used for music (by kind permission of Luca Sassi, Sassi Editore, San Vito di Leguzzano, Italy)



Plate 10 Venice, Palazzo Zenobio, façade (photo: Martina Frank)

Plat

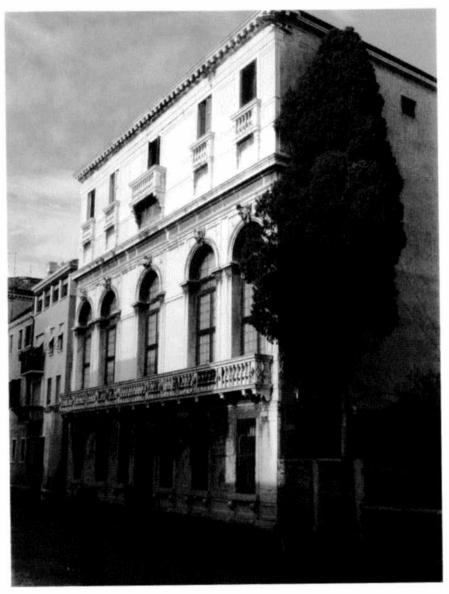


Plate 11 Venice, Palazzo Dolfin, façade (photo: Martina Frank)



Plate 12 Venice, Palazzo Dolfin, 'Magnifica Sala' (by kind permission of Luca Sassi, Sassi Editore)