Château de Versailles Spectacles

© Nicolas Chavance

A private subsidiary of the Château de Versailles, Château de Versailles Spectacles' mission is to perpetuate the tradition of shows and performing arts through exceptional events. True to its history, Château de Versailles continues today to be the backdrop for a rich cultural life and a great variety of events.

Shows and performances are programmed all year long in exceptional settings – open air shows, Versailles Fountains Shows, costume receptions – and a musical season at the Opéra Royal and the Chapelle Royale de Versailles, with operas, concerts, theatre, and ballets interpreted by world-renowned artists.

The Opéra Royal reopened in 2009, and now offers a programme of opera, music and dance performed by renowned French and international artists including Cecilia Bartoli, Philippe Jaroussky, Marc Minkowski, Raphaël Pichon, Leonardo García Alarcón, Jordi Savall, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Angelin Preljocaj, Sébastien Daucé, Franco Fagioli, Jean-Christophe Spinosi, Robert King, Hervé Niquet, William Christie, Sébastien d'Hérin, Vincent Dumestre, and others.

The Opéra Royal celebrated its tenth season from 2018-19 with the launch of a new record label, Château de Versailles Spectacles, comprising both CD and DVD recordings made during concerts taking place in the Opéra Royal and the Chapelle Royale.

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The Opéra Royal

Inaugurated on 16 May 1770 with Lully's *Persée*, the opulent **Opéra Royal** was commissioned by Louis XV and built to celebrate the marriage of the Dauphin, the future Louis XVI, to the archduchess of Austria, Marie-Antoinette. Designed by Jacques-Ange Gabriel, the Opéra Royal provided a permanent location for palace entertainment, and with operas heard by assembled nobility including Rameau's 1777 *Castor et Pollux* (for the visit of the Emperor Joseph II) and Gluck's 1782 *Iphigènie en Aulide*.

The luxurious Opéra Royal was intended for exceptional use, and never served as a public theatre nor hosted a full season, hosting only forty or so performances before the fall of the French monarchy. Thousands of candles were needed to light the theatre, and the theatre also doubled as a ballroom and banqueting hall, with an ingenious mechanism designed to raise the orchestra pit to stage level to allow for dancing. The spectacular acoustics are a feature of the original neo-classical design, with the building made of wood painted as faux marble, rather than marble itself.

Opéra Royal © Agathe Poupeney

Historic state visits continued to take place in the Opéra Royal after the French revolution, including a visit by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in 1855 and Queen Elizabeth II in 1957. The building has since enjoyed a colourful history, with the Sénat convening there for three years from 1876.

The stage mechanisms (© Thomas Garnier)

The theatre has since been restored to its 1770 original state, and reopened in 2009 after an extensive two-year renovation brought equipment to a modern standard. The old staging mechanisms can still be seen, and lighting imitates the original candlelit performances.

Sacred music-making took place in the historic **Chapelle Royale**. Completed in the reign of Louis XIV and inspired by Gothic architecture, the King would have attended King's mass in the chapel each morning, performed by musicians of the Royal Court, including François Couperin.

Today, music can be heard across the grounds of Versailles, with **Château de Versailles Spectacles** performances taking place from the Galerie des Glaces to the Cour de Marbre to the Gardens. Such a practice harks back to music-making at the Château before 1770, before the long construction of the Opéra Royal was finished, when temporary makeshift performance venues would be constructed all over the premises to celebrate major occasions.