

## 6. Materiality in Action: Costume and Light on the Eighteenth-Century Stage

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Together with sets and props, costume and light are among the main components that create the aesthetic effect of a performance. When it comes to historical research, though, they have traditionally been treated only as visual elements, while their materiality has been almost entirely forgotten. This is largely because of the iconographical nature of the evidence that is available for the study of these scenographic elements: paintings, engravings, sketches, drawings, preserved designs, and actual sets. These sources tend to invite an iconological analysis, which, although contributing to our understanding of the practice and general visual appearance of the performances, rarely contributes to our understanding of their materiality.

Within the Performing Premodernity project, we focused on the corporeal, material, temporal, and relational aspects of the historical performance, as connected to its practice, both then and now. The practice of HIP (Historically Informed Performance), both in the experimental setting of the workshops and in actual performances, offers the possibility of creating *historiographical sources* as well as *historiographical experiences*. Through these experiences, however, we are also made aware of the differences between then and now, requiring us to negotiate the perception of *the Own* (of our time) and of *the Other* (of the past). Our research is an open process; it never claims to create a definite model of historical theatre practices.<sup>1</sup>

The focus of this chapter is a two-day (19–20 September 2017) experimental workshop in which the research group examined

1. See chapter 2 in this volume, Meike Wagner, ‘On a Praxeology of Theatre Historiography’.

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2. See chapters 2 and 3 in this volume, 'On a Praxeology of Theatre Historiography' and 'Aesthetic Historicity'.

3. Kjellsdotter has created historically informed costumes for the following productions, among others: *Don Juan* (Drottningholm Palace Theatre, 2011), *The Magic Flute* (Ulriksdal Palace Theatre, 2011), *Beatrice and Benedict* (Läckö Summer Opera, 2015), *Così fan tutte* (Ulriksdal Palace Theatre, 2016), *Orfeo ed Euridice* (Ulriksdal Palace Theatre, 2017). See also Anna Kjellsdotter, 'The Royal Swedish Opera Costume Collection and Gustavian Dress', in *Dance Body Costume*, Prospektiven 2, ed. Petra Dotlačilová and Hanna Walsdorf (Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2019), 187–212.

4. He has collaborated with Karin Modigh (*Kärlek med förhinder* at Varberg Teater in 2013) and Marie-Geneviève Massé (*Don Juan* at the Drottningholm Palace Theatre in 2011 and *Renaud et Armide* at the Opéra Royal de Versailles and the Opéra-Comique in Paris in 2012).

the material and visual aspects of historical performance. In their respective chapters, Meike Wagner and Willmar Sauter describe our investigations focusing on the positioning of the performers on stage.<sup>2</sup> This remained an important aspect of our experiments and observations, but in the workshop in September 2017 the investigations were expanded to include candlelight and costumes.

The workshop took place in the eighteenth-century Ulriksdal Palace Theatre (also known as Confidencen) sited in the outskirts of Stockholm. The Performing Premodernity research group was joined by cutter, tailor, and costume designer Anna Kjellsdotter, dancer Noah Hellwig, and singer Maria Sanner. Using our knowledge and training, we generated new historiographical sources, i.e., material objects and aesthetic experiences that might serve as sources for further historical research. These included costumes and lighting, dancing and singing, which were then performed in this historic space. Through our practice, we created experiences that made us reconsider our ideas and understanding of the historical artefacts and practices.

We focused specifically on:

- 1) the effect and aesthetic experience created by the candlelight;
- 2) the interaction between the lighting, the materials of the costumes, and the performance on stage; and
- 3) the materiality of the costumes in relation to the performer's movements.

The knowledge, skills, and experience that our collaborators brought to the workshop were of crucial importance. Anna Kjellsdotter is a specialist of period costumes, who also worked as a cutter at the Royal Swedish Opera;<sup>3</sup> Noah Hellwig is a former member of the Nordic Baroque Dancers with long experience in this dance style;<sup>4</sup> Maria Sanner is an opera and concert singer (contralto). She has played leading roles in several early operas, including Handel's *Giulio Cesare*

in *Egitto*, Cavalli's *Il Giasone*, and Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. Another participant was Kateřina Cichrová, the curator of the costume collection at the 1766 theatre built into the State Castle of Český Krumlov. She contributed her expertise on historical materials and fabrics used for theatre costumes.<sup>5</sup> The general manager of Confidencen, Fredrik Forslund, and stage technician Christer Nilsson also contributed their practical experience of lighting the space with candlelight and with working the machinery and sets.

### Lighting up the stage

The space itself was of course another invaluable contributor. We were privileged to work in Confidencen, constructed in 1753, which, in the words of its former director Kjerstin Dellert, was the 'oldest rococo theatre in Sweden'.<sup>6</sup> It was not used after the death of Gustav III in 1792, however, and in 1860 the stage and machinery were ripped out when it was converted into a hunting lodge. After the death of Charles XV in 1872, the space was used variously as a storehouse, a school, a telegraph station, and as a military facility until the 1980s when Kjerstin Dellert and the association Confidencen Rediviva (Friends of the Ulriksdal Palace Theatre) invested a great deal of energy and money to restore the theatre to its original state. The reconstruction of the eighteenth-century stage, machinery, and sets were based on sources from the period and from the surviving eighteenth-century theatres at Drottningholm Palace and Gripsholm Castle. The reconstruction was complete in 2003. While the space of the auditorium has not been altered since 1753, the staging equipment is reconstructed on the basis of available historical evidence. The overall visual and material appearance, the sets, the machinery below the stage, and the stage floor look and feel much like a theatre would have done in the eighteenth century, while its more recent reconstruction allows the managers to use real candlelight in their

5. See her articles 'The Wardrobe of the Baroque Theater', *Czech Theater* 7 (1994), 27–31, and 'The Wardrobe of the Baroque Theater', in *The Baroque Theater in the Chateau of Český Krumlov: Miscellany of Papers for a Special Seminar*, 27.9.–30.9.1993, ed. Věra Ptáčková (Prague and České Budějovice: Divadelní ústav Praha and Památkový ústav České Budějovice, 1993), 56–64.

6. Kjerstin Dellert and Inger Marie Opprud, *Confidencen: An Old Theatre Resurrected*, tr. Louise Hadorph (Solna: Confidencen Rediviva, 1999), 4; see also the official website of the theatre: <http://www.confidencen.se> (accessed 21 March 2023).

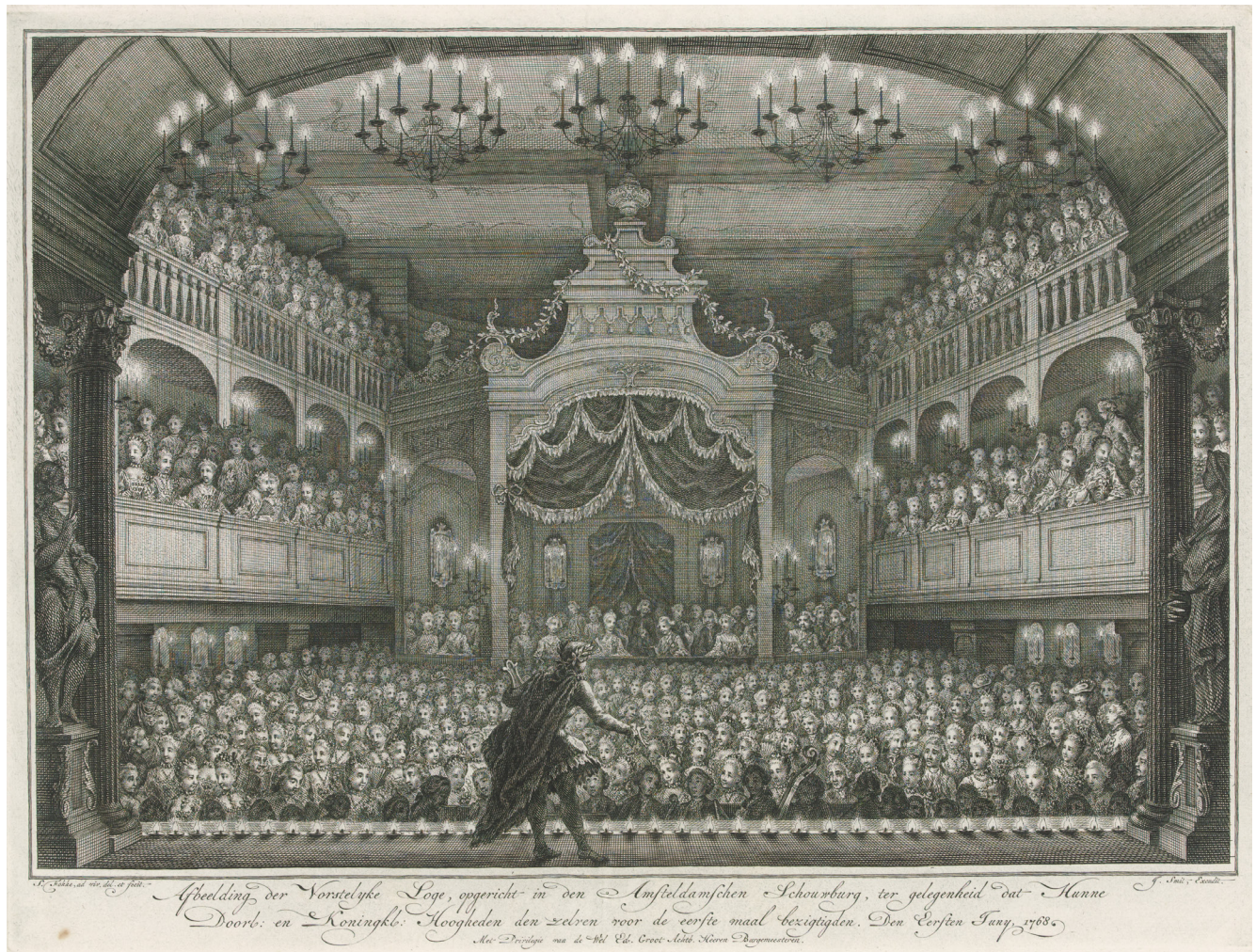
productions of eighteenth-century operas without endangering a historical heritage site. Certain spatial aspects, such as the size of the proscenium, the height and depth of the stage, and the placement of the orchestra – which has an impact on the acoustics of the theatre – may not have been accurately reconstructed. For this reason, it was ideal to focus on the visual and material aspects of performance in this workshop, and not on the acoustic-musical aspects, which had been the focus of our 2015 workshop at Drottningholm discussed in Wagner's and Sauter's chapters.

The positioning of the sets was based on the floor plan designed by Carl Fredric Adelcrantz in 1783. This shows six pairs of flat wings on the stage that is 6,8 metres wide and 9 metres deep. However, the placement of candles and chandeliers had to be recreated on the basis of general knowledge of the practice in the period, as no further visual sources from Confidencen have survived. Today, the six pairs of flat wings on the sides of the deep wooden stage can be illuminated by up to four pairs of candles each. The footlights consist of 17 pairs of candles (34 candles), and the illumination is completed with four chandeliers, each containing four candles (16 candles), hanging within the proscenium frame above the footlights. The chandeliers seem to be a modern solution as they are relatively small, and have screens on one side, which impedes the spread of the light into the auditorium. When we compare this to images of other European theatres from the period, including Drottningholm, we can see that normally the cartwheel chandeliers were a prominent feature, with four or five chandeliers each carrying up to ten candles (Fig. 1).<sup>7</sup> The positioning of these chandeliers would have contributed significantly to the brightness of the proscenium from above, in combination with light coming from the footlights, the orchestra pit, and the auditorium.

The lighting of Confidencen can be compared to that in historic theatres of a similar size, or smaller. Several inventories held in the French National Archives and in the archive of the Comédie-Française detail expenses for candles for rehearsals and performances

7. See as examples the etchings from the Stadsschouwburg in Amsterdam, by Simon Fokke, 1768 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam); the painting *Les Farceurs français et italiens depuis soixante ans* from 1670 (Comédie-Française); the etching *Le Turc généreux: Ballet Pantomime executé à Vienne sur le théâtre près de la cour, le 26 Avril 1758*, by Bernardo Bellotto (Canaletto); the etching *La Fête Les Plaisirs de l'Île Enchantée donnée par Louis XIV à Versailles*, by Israel Silvestre, 1664 (RMN – Château de Versailles).





**Figure 1.** Simon Fokke: Stage of the Stadsschouwburg in Amsterdam. 1768. © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, object no. RP-P-OB-84.694. License: CC BY-NC.

at the Paris theatre and at the court where artists from the Comédie-Française, the Comédie-Italienne, and the Opéra appeared regularly. For instance, the meticulous records of a performance in October 1749 by the company of the Comédie-Italienne at the theatre of Fontainebleau Palace offer insights into the illumination of this space,

8. *État de la bougis blanche, bougis jaune, flambeau jaunes et terrines fournis pour les officiers de la fruiterie du Roy du quartier d'octobre 1749 pour les Comedies représentées devant leurs Majestés aux Fontainebleau*; F-Pan O/1/2986.

9. Piganiol de la Force, *Description de Paris, de Versailles, de Marly, de Meudon, de S. Cloud, de Fontainebleau et de toutes les autres belles maisons et châteaux des environs de Paris* (Paris: Poirion, 1742), 125.

10. Vincent Droguet and Marc-Henri Jordan (eds.), *Théâtre de Cour: Les spectacles à Fontainebleau au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 2005), 37–50.

11. The stage was illuminated by six chandeliers with eight *bobeche*s (candle holders), therefore holding 48 white candles, ten *girandoles* with five *bobeche*s each (holding 50 candles) and two other *girandoles* with three *bobeche*s each (six candles). Behind the scenes they used five 'plates' (*plaques*) with two *bobeche*s on each side, which perhaps means that they had five sets of wings and six 'wing-ladders' (*porteurs*), each holding five plates with two candles, altogether 60 candles. These carriers were probably portable lights that could be placed behind the wings according to the requirements of the play. The 'heaven' was equipped with three triangles and four plates with two candles each, i.e. with 24 candles in total, and the footlights consisted of 52 candles. The auditorium was illuminated with six *girandoles* with five *bobeche*s each, i.e. 30 white candles in total.

which was located at the time in the Salle de la Belle cheminée.<sup>8</sup> Before its reconstruction of 1753–1754, this theatre was rather small – 'low and narrow' according to Piganiol de la Force<sup>9</sup> with only four pairs of wings, but with a large proscenium that was bordered with three boxes on each side.<sup>10</sup> The theatre itself was built in a room that was just 30x10 metres. While we do not know the exact placement of the candles, the impressive lists tell us that the proscenium was lit from below (52 candles in the footlights) as well as from above (48 candles in six chandeliers). Additional sources of lights were the *girandoles*, placed on stage, and the 80 candles on wing-ladders behind the scenes. When compared to this luminous weaponry, the auditorium must have appeared rather dark, with only 30 candles illuminating the entire space.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, the inventory does not mention the lighting in the orchestra pit, but we can estimate that the orchestra was made up of between ten and 25 players, each of whom would have had one or two candles to read his music by, and this would have added, from below, to the illumination of the stage.<sup>12</sup> The situation seems to have been very similar at the Comédie-Française where the stage, which was only five metres wide, had six pairs of wings.<sup>13</sup> In 1757, this theatre, the auditorium and proscenium, were lit by four chandeliers (48 candles), the footlights had 32 oil lamps, and the sides of the stage had 116 candles carried by wing-ladders and *girandoles*.<sup>14</sup>

These inventories confirm the research of Swedish theatre scholar Gösta Bergman.<sup>15</sup> His extensive historical studies show, among other things, the change in stage lighting that occurred in France at the middle of the eighteenth century. While French theatres formerly tended to be lit both on stage and in the auditorium, more and more people called for an intensification of the light on stage and a darkening of the rest of the space. Later in the century, the use of moveable sources of light from the sides, like *girandoles* or *porteurs*, or even early forms of reflectors (*reverbères*) from the top, were preferred to the chandeliers, which blocked the sightlines of the audience.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the eighteenth-century stage used various lighting



techniques for special effects: the candles could be placed behind transparent cloths, waxed paper, or glass; the use of open fire (torches) and explosives such as lycopodium powder was also common.<sup>17</sup> While the theatre makers were able to create intense light on the stage, they were also able to darken it by turning the *porteurs*, or by playing with shades and transparencies.

For our evening experiments at Confidencen, we had a very dark auditorium (lit only by two chandeliers in the front) and a limited amount of light from above the stage: 16 candles, while there were 37 candles in the footlights. On the other hand, only half of the candles in the wings were lit (48 candles), so the stage seemed equally lit in the front and in the back, with enhanced lighting from below when the performer approached the footlights. With only one exception, we did not use any additional light on the stage, nor did we use the torches. But although we used only one third of the lights proposed by the Fontainebleau inventory, the stage was quite well lit. The tone of the light was warm and yellowish when compared to electric light, and, as one participant remarked, it was very quiet compared to the background hum of electricity. Another inimitable effect of the candlelight was its flickering, which added movement to the scenic picture.<sup>18</sup> However we used modern wax candles, rather than experience the smoke and smell of tallow candles and oil lamps mentioned in historical sources. In the following, I will discuss what the lights did when in contact with the action on stage and the costumes.

## Sets and positioning on the stage

We chose excerpts from the second and third acts of C. W. Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762) for our work on stage. The first excerpt from the beginning of act 2 was a shortened version of the dance of the Furies in Hades followed by Orfeo's aria, in which he tames the Furies and gains access to Elysium. It was performed in a set with a

12. The iconography and the plans from the eighteenth century show that players were seated in the pit, on benches and facing each other, around a long orchestra desk, on which they had their music sheets and candles. For iconography and photographs of reconstructions of the orchestra seating at the Castle Theatre of Český Krumlov, see Petr Pavelec and Pavel Slavko (eds.), *Metodika pro přípravu a realizaci historicky poučených festivalů v prostředí hradů a zámků – I* (Prague: Národní památkový ústav, 2015), 89–91: <https://www.npu.cz/cs/e-shop/18472-metodika-pro-pripravu-a-realizaci-historicky-poucenych-festivalu-v-prostredi-hradu-a-zamku-i> (accessed 21 March 2023).

13. The small performance space at the Comédie-Française described in 1752 was caused by the benches for spectators placed on the stage, abolished in 1760. By comparison, the stage of the Académie Royale de musique (the Opéra) at the Palais Royal (refurbished in 1673) was 9,5 metres wide and 17 metres deep, and the Royal Opera at Versailles (built 1770) was 12 metres wide and 29 metres deep. See Jacques-François Blondel, *Architecture française ou Recueil des plans, élévations, coupes et profils des églises, maisons royales, palais, hôtels & édifices les plus considérables de Paris*, vol. 2 (Paris: Jombert, 1752), 33.

14. The lighting journal of the Comédie-Française is quoted in Gösta M. Bergman, *Lighting in the Theatre* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1977), 170–172.

15. Bergman, *Lighting in the Theatre*, 144–219.

16. The *Lanterne à reverbères* was invented in 1744 by Dominic-François

Bourgeois de Châteaublanc. This was an oil lamp with several wicks and with a reflective device made of metal mirrors. Bergman, *Lighting in the Theatre*, 171, 183–184.

17. Bergman, *Lighting in the Theatre*, 175–183. Cf. the bills of purchase of *licopede* and *esprit de vin* for ‘the fires’ during the performance of *Orphée et Eurydice* at the Opéra in 1775; F-Pan-AJ/13/4-273. However, quite complex stage lighting techniques were used for poetic and dramaturgical purposes in Italy already in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; see Francesca Fantappiè, ‘The Poetics and Dramaturgy of Light in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque Theatre’, in *Staging and Stage Décor: Perspectives on European Theatre 1500–1950*, ed. Bárbara Mujica (Malaga and Wilmington DE: Vernon Press, 2023), 3–28.

18. The Drottningholm theatre uses specially designed electric candles that imitate the flickering of candlelight. The effect, though, is not quite the same.

19. For a detailed analysis of the dance of the Furies, see the practical experiments devised by dance historian and choreographer Edith Lalonger in Paris in 2017, not long after our workshop: Edith Lalonger, *Les exigences dramatiques requises pour les danseurs dans les ballets infernaux de Jean-Philippe Rameau: L'exemple du quatrième acte de Zoroastre*, Aide à la recherche et au patrimoine en danse 2017 (Paris: Centre national de la danse, 2019): [https://www.cnd.fr/fr/file/file/1149/inline/Edith\\_Lalonger.pdf](https://www.cnd.fr/fr/file/file/1149/inline/Edith_Lalonger.pdf) (accessed 1 December 2021).

green forest and rocks. The second excerpt was Orfeo’s famous aria ‘Che farò senza Euridice’, set at the exit of the caverns of Hades using a replica of a backdrop from Drottningholm. The performance was accompanied by Mark Tatlow on the hammerklavier.

Noah Hellwig had prepared a vigorous dance solo for a Fury (normally, the scene would have involved several dancers) for the first of the two scenes. During Orfeo’s aria he played, silently, the threatening chorus of infernal demons who gradually succumb to the charm of Orfeo’s singing. While Maria Sanner as Orfeo entered from the middle wings, and moved slowly from downstage towards the middle of the stage during her aria, Noah Hellwig filled the entire stage with his dancing. During the scene, he would come closer to the singer, dancing around her, and as she was advancing towards the middle of the stage, he gradually yielded the front stage area to her before disappearing.<sup>19</sup>

Maria Sanner had performed several times in the same candlelit set during the summer of 2017, in the professional production of *Orfeo*, so she knew that a positioning around one metre from the footlights provided the best lighting conditions.<sup>20</sup> If she came just a few centimetres closer to the footlights, her face was barely visible, as it was overshadowed by the rest of her body. After she had whitened her face and hands for the second try-out of the scene, however, her visibility was enhanced. Magnus Tessing Schneider noted that, when standing in the front, the singer needed to perform slight movements with her head and arms in order to play with the reflective quality of the light; otherwise, the image became too static.

For the second scene, the backdrop with the exit from the cave divided the stage into halves, creating a more intimate atmosphere. The dead Euridice lay on a slab of rock placed on stage right, between the second pair of wings. It was a practicable podium towards which Orfeo directed his singing. Although it was quite far from the front stage, a powerful visual effect was created by the combination of light coming from the footlights, the chandeliers, and the sides, and by a



portable set of lights placed between the two canvases of the back-drop that illuminated the exit from the dark cave.

## Image-based and material-based approaches to costume recreation

When preparing the costumes for the workshop, we intended to compare the effect of different approaches to historical costume-making on the candlelit stage. In the wardrobe of *Confidencen*, we found some costumes from a 1971 production of *Orfeo ed Euridice* created by tailors from the Royal Opera for performances at Drottningholm. This production, directed by Bengt Peterson and with costumes designed by David Walker, belonged to what Willmar Sauter has called a period of ‘transference’, which was characterised by the historical positioning and gesturing of the singers (‘not yet affected by Stanislavskian realism and psychological ideals’) and by the ‘stylistic mishmash’ of the costumes, which were vaguely reminiscent of the eighteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

Some of Walker’s costumes did in fact copy the visual appearance of costumes from the period, using breeches, heavily decorated tops, silver fringes, and *tonnelets* for some of the male performers.<sup>22</sup> However, the materials (which were heavy and synthetic), the cuts and sartorial techniques, the decoration, and the choice of colours were more reminiscent of the late twentieth century, the period in which they were created. The costume of the Fury (Fig. 2) was made of heavy, synthetic black velvet, with orange and golden applications on the shoulders, the belly, and the *tonnelet*. While the sharp edges of the shoulder piece and the grotesque visage on the belly area were more in line with eighteenth-century designs, they had been sewn directly onto the costume, which created a too neat and flat effect. Moreover, the dull black velvet did not reflect the candlelight but rather absorbed it, the arms almost disappearing while the golden and orange application on the front of the Fury’s body (together with the red stocking which

20. The production, which was conducted and directed by Arnold Östman, choreographed by Bétina Marcolin, with costumes by Anna Kjellsdotter, premiered at *Confidencen* on 15 July 2017.

21. Willmar Sauter and David Wiles, *The Theatre of Drottningholm – Then and Now: Performance between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries* (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 2014), 157: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:756254/FULLTEXT01.pdf> (accessed 23 March 2023).

22. The *tonnelet* is a kind of stiff knee-length (or shorter) skirt worn by male performers as part of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *habit à l’antique* or *à la romaine*. Also called the *bas de saye*, the *tonnelet* would imitate the lower part of the Roman military uniform with its pleated skirts, and it would be covered with striped leather *lambrequins*.



**Figure 2.** Noah Hellwig (Fury) and Maria Sanner (Orfeo) in a costume *héroïque* designed by David Walker (1971), rehearsing a scene from *Orfeo ed Euridice* by C. W. Gluck, at a workshop with Performing Premodernity. Ulriksdal Palace Theatre (Confidencen), 2017. Photo: Petra Dotlačilová ©. License: CC BY-NC.

23. It should be noted that, although velvet was not a material used for the costumes of Furies in the eighteenth century, it was used for other characters. However it was silk velvet, which is lighter and reflects light much better than its modern synthetic version, that was available at the time.

we added) became the focus of attention.<sup>23</sup> His presence became less visible and effective especially when he moved upstage and turned his back to us. With the exception of the trousers, the entire costume was sewn in one piece, with the long sleeves cut straight, which turned out to be rather limiting for the movements of the dancer.

In her role as Orfeo, Maria Sanner first wore an unidentified heroic costume *à la romaine*, with an imitation of Roman pteruges on the *tonnelet* (Fig. 2), its construction resembling that of the Fury. Apart from the white shirtsleeves, it was made of a dull black and orange fabric with golden fringes on the *tonnelet*.

The second costume (Fig. 3) was created for Orfeo in 1971. Bright yellow and orange were the dominant colours. It consisted of a short coat fastened diagonally across the chest, completed with a long, draped cape, but without a *tonnelet*. Both the striped sleeves and the cape were made of a synthetic, glittering orange fabric, while the yellow coat and breeches, the main parts of the costume, were made from non-reflective materials. As Willmar Sauter noted, it ‘turned greyish in the candlelight’. Though the breeches and draping of the cape vaguely recalled eighteenth-century stage dress, the approach to costume-making is best described as ‘image-based’, that is, taking inspiration from the iconographic sources, but applying modern sartorial solutions and colour combinations.

However, when we compare the costume to a painting by Pehr Hilleström, which documents the production of Gluck’s *Orfeo* at the Drottningholm theatre in 1773, it is clear that neither the choice of colours nor the combination of patterns on the fabrics were based on eighteenth-century sources.<sup>24</sup> In Hilleström’s painting we can see Orfeo dressed in a long red satin coat, breeches, and shoes, the costume decorated with golden ornaments on the edges and golden *amadis* sleeves, all of which would have shone in the candlelight. Furthermore, Hilleström painted the same scene from the opera in 1786, which allows us to see the changes in costume design during the intervening years: Orfeo now wears a greyish knee-length tunic with short sleeves (in wool or linen), a darker sash and cape, and sandals, while his legs are bare.<sup>25</sup> This undecorated costume was made of non-reflective fabrics, representing the changes in aesthetic thinking that had been developing since the mid-eighteenth century, as well as highlighting the new concept of the Greek stage costume.<sup>26</sup>

24. Sauter and Wiles, *The Theatre of Drottningholm*, 96–98; Pehr Hilleström, *Spelbild ur Orfeus och Euridice*, 1773; S-Ssm DTM 1995–0056.

25. Pehr Hilleström, *Spelbild från Orphée och Euridice*, 1786; S-Ssm STM 2009–0320.

26. See chapter 8, ‘Costume in the Age of Rousseau and the Case of *Pygmalion*’.





**Figure 3.** Maria Sanner in the costume of Orfeo by David Walker (1971), at the workshop with Performing Premodernity. Ulriksdal Palace Theatre (Confidencen), 2017. Photo: Petra Dotlačilová ©. License: CC BY-NC.



For the second part of our experiment, we decided to create one costume on the basis of a variety of historical evidence, applying what I call a ‘material-based’ approach to costume-making. We made a costume for the Fury based on my research on the appearance of these infernal characters.<sup>27</sup> The Fury was chosen because it is one of the most peculiar and enigmatic characters in the ballets and operas of the time, and its costume is typically theatrical, and the farthest removed from everyday eighteenth-century clothing. Apart from costume designs and other iconographic evidence, I had examined descriptions of the costumes of the Furies in French inventories and in other records of their performance on stage.

During the experiment, we focused on the affects that the Furies were supposed to evoke through their movement and the materiality of their costumes: horror, fear, and disgust. This has been recorded, for instance, by Joseph Uriot, librarian to the court of the duke of Württemberg in Stuttgart, who described a performance choreographed by Jean-Georges Noverre in 1763:

[Armide] passes from desperation to fury; she invokes the Demons and Furies who, on her order, come running, armed with daggers and snakes. Vengeance and Rage are at her side. The *entrée* they dance makes us tremble with horror. Armide orders them to destroy the palace and the gardens. They are all armed with torches that they light from the torch of Vengeance, performing a ballet that presents the most frightening spectacle due to its fast and furious movements and to the spatial distribution of the characters.<sup>28</sup>

The Furies were monsters, typically armed with daggers, torches, and snakes, and their appearance and ‘fast and furious’ dance scared the audience who, it is said, even heard the snakes hissing.<sup>29</sup> Costume designs by Louis-René Boquet suggest they made a strong visual impact. Boquet designed the production in Stuttgart, and productions in France, at the Paris Opéra, and at the French royal court.

27. See my article ‘Picturing Horror: Costume for Furies on the French Stage from 1650 to 1766’, in *Terpsichore and Her Sisters: The Relationship between Dance and Other Arts*, conference proceedings of the Early Dance Circle, ed. Trevor Williams and Barbara Segal (Cambridge: Victoire Press, 2017), 53–68. Because of external limitations, we were only able to create one costume before the workshop.

28. ‘Du désespoir, elle passe à la fureur; elle invoque les Démons & les Furies qui accourent à son ordre, armés de poignards & de serpents. La Vengeance & la Rage sont à ses côtés; l’entrée qu’ils dansent fait frémir d’horreur. Armide leur ordonne de détruire son Palais & ses Jardins. Tous s’arment de torches qu’ils allument au feu des flambeaux de la Vengeance; & forment un Corps de Ballet qui par ses mouvements précipités & furieux, comme par la distribution de ses figures offre le Spectacle le plus effrayant. Ils se dispersant de tous côtés, & dans une confusion artistement réglée, ils mettent le Feu au Palais’. Scene from the *ballet héroïque Renauld et Armide*, in Joseph Uriot, *Description des fetes donnés pendant quatorze jours a l’occasion du jour de naissance de Son Altesse Serenissime Mr. Le Duc Regnant de Wurtemberg et Teck* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1763), 146–147. My translation.

29. Uriot, *Description*, 49–50.

30. Cf. the Fury from *Renauld et Armide*, in *Desseins des habits de costumes pour les ballets de Mr. Noverre*, 1766; P-Wu Inw.zb.d. 20818-20828.

31. *Inventaire Général des habits des Ballets du Roy fait au mois de Décembre 1754 et distribué par Chapitres suivants les différentes sortes de Caractères*; F-Pan O/1/3234.

32. 'Un habit, corps, manches, tonnelet de satin feu, armure de satin noir; grand mascaron de relief brodé en glacé argent, le tout orné de mosaïque et milleret argent, une juppe sous le tonnelet de toile feu, armure de toile noire en pointe garnie de milleret argent'. *Inventaire Général des habits des Ballets du Roy*. The *armure* is a fabric decoration on the costume, usually in the form of broad stripes in contrasting colours on the borders of a mantle, a drapery on an *habit à la greque*; it is often embroidered or painted with ornaments or symbols, e.g. the *vêtement d'or avec armure pourpre brodé* worn by Egée in the opera *Thésée*, designed by Boquet: F-Po D216 VI-83. My translation.

33. 'Flame red' was very popular at the time, and it was even part of the Swedish national costume designed by Gustav III. Comparing textual descriptions of the national costume with preserved examples, we get a rather exact idea of this particular shade. See Eva Bergman, *Nationella dräkten: En studie kring Gustaf III:s dräktreform 1778* (Stockholm: Nordstedt & söner, 1938), 320–322; Lena Rangström, *Kläder för tid och evighet* (Helsingborg: Livrustkammaren, 1997), 165–178.

Some of Boquet's designs are quick pen sketches (Figs. 4 and 5), which are more expressive than detailed: though depicting the main attributes of the Furies, such as the torches and snakes, they focus more on the general effect that the costumes were supposed to create. Some of his other designs, such as those in the so-called Warsaw Manuscript (Figs. 6 and 7), are more detailed when it comes to the individual parts of the costume, the decorations, and the colours.<sup>30</sup> Here we are able to see the main elements of the Fury's costume, such as the *tonnelet*, the face depicted on the chest, the sagging breasts (which remind us that the Furies are infernal goddesses), the sharp edges of the fabric on the *tonnelet*, the shoulder pieces that resemble bat wings, and the snakes that are wound around the arms and waist and are held in the hands of the performer, as well as the general colour combination: flame red, green, black, and skin colour.

Entries in the general inventory of ballet costumes in Paris provide further details about the materiality of the costumes.<sup>31</sup> For example, the Fury Aleton in the *tragédie en musique Alceste*, which was performed by the dancer M. Besche in 1754, wore the following:

A costume, bodice, sleeves, a *tonnelet* in flame red satin, an *armure* in black satin, a large mask embroidered in silver *glacé*, everything decorated with a mosaic and silver sequins, a skirt under the *tonnelet* in red canvas, an *armure* in pointed black canvas decorated with silver sequins.<sup>32</sup>

Here we can see that all the main parts of the costume (the bodice, the sleeves, and the *tonnelet*) were made of the same material, silk satin, and were of the same bright red colour (*feu*), with applications of black satin and silver sequins, and with an embroidered *mascaron*, the relief face, on the chest.<sup>33</sup> The document contains another very important piece of information: all the elements of the costume are listed separately, which suggests that they were also attached to the body of the dancer separately, rather than sewn together as in modern examples. The separation of the sleeves from the bodice was indeed standard practice in the everyday dress of earlier periods, particularly



**Figure 4.** Louis-René Bouquet: 'Zoroastre / 1769 / Furie M. Muguet'. Ink drawing. © Bibliothèque nationale de France, BMO D216 VII-91. License: CC BY-NC.



**Figure 5.** Louis-René Bouquet: 'Zoroastre / Xbre / 1769 / Mlles Duplan Devaney / Furie'. Ink drawing. © Bibliothèque nationale de France, BMO D216 VII-92. License: CC BY-NC.

in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it would not be surprising to see this technique reflected in the dance costumes of the eighteenth century.<sup>34</sup> This theory receives further support from the costume books in the archives of the Castle Theatre of Český Krumlov, which list all the costume parts individually, emphasising their separation.<sup>35</sup> Such a composition of the garment might have had

34. See Norah Waugh, *The Cut of Men's Clothes: 1600–1900* (London and Boston MA: Faber & Faber, 1964); Janet Arnold, *Patterns of Fashion 3: The Cut and Construction of Clothes for Men and Women c. 1560–1620* (London: Macmillan, 1985).





**Figure 6.** Louis-René Bouquet: Tisyphone from Noverre's ballet *Orphée et Euridice*, 1763–1766. Ink drawing and watercolour on paper. © Biblioteka Uniwersytecka w Warszawie, Inw.zb.d. 20824/81. License: CC BY-NC.



**Figure 7.** Louis-René Bouquet: La Fureur from Noverre's ballet *Renauld et Armide*, 1763–1766. Ink drawing and watercolour on paper. © Biblioteka Uniwersytecka w Warszawie, Inw.zb.d. 20825/60. License: CC BY-NC.

practical reasons, for instance the parts could be easily exchanged and combined. And more importantly, it would have consequences for the movements of the performer.

In summary, the dance costumes of the Furies were usually made of highly reflective materials such as silk satin, taffeta, or *glacé*; their effect was enhanced through the use of silver sequins, glittering glass,



and gilding.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, there is an emphasis on the layering of the materials, probably in order to create a three-dimensional effect: the *armure*, the *mascaron*, the embroidered flames, the cut-outs of the fabric with sharp edges, and, most importantly, the green, gilded snakes of papier-mâché all of which expanded the costume and followed the movements of the dancer, perhaps in order to contribute to the spectral effect. As Kateřina Cichrová noted, the effect of plasticity might also have been enhanced through the combination of contrasting materials like smooth silk and coarse canvas, as seen in the costume collection at Český Krumlov. The main colours for the basic costume were often flame red, green, and black, with which visualisations of 'Perfidy' and Hell were also associated in early modern art.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, these colours always seem to have been combined, so that even if the base was black, it was complemented with red *armure*, breeches, green bat wings, and silver sequins.<sup>38</sup> The inventories and drawings also suggest that the character of the Fury, although originally a female goddess, could be performed by men as well as women. Hence the designs sometimes feature *tonnelets*, sometimes skirts, or even both, as in the earlier-mentioned costume of M. Besche.

In our workshop, we chose to work with flame red silk taffeta (close to the colour *feu*) for the main parts of the costume and with green reflective fabric for the other elements. The bodice and sleeves were made by Anna Kjellsdotter based on eighteenth-century patterns and surviving original garments (see note 34). Her work emphasised the curved line of the sleeves, which fitted the historically informed movements of the dancer's arms. The lacing of the bodice was placed at the back: this was unusual for male garments, which were usually fastened at the front, but we took inspiration from the eighteenth-century dance costume from Meleto Castle in Tuscany (now held in the Victoria and Albert Museum) and from *carrousel* costumes in the Royal Swedish Armoury. The bodice of these male costumes is fastened in the back with lacing, similar to women's stays and bodices (Fig. 8), which leave the entire front part of the bodice free for ornamental decoration, undisturbed by fastenings with buttons or hooks.

35. *Inventarium Uiber die beim Krummauer Schlosse sowohl zum Theater, als zum tanzsaale gehorig, befindlichen Garderobe und die darin vorgefundenen Masken, im Jahre 1807*, ed. Jiří Zálaha (Siegen: Universität-Gesamthochschule, 1991).

36. In Český Krumlov, waxed linen was often used for stage costumes as well, which prolonged the life of the material while it also reflected the light better than regular linen. See Cichrová, 'The Wardrobe of the Baroque Theater' (1993).

37. According to Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia overo Descrittione dell'Imagini universali cavate dall'antichità et da altri luoghi*, da Cesare Ripa Perugino: *Opera non meno utile, che necessaria a Poeti, Pittori, & Scultori, per rappresentare le virtù, vitij, affetti, & passioni humane* (Rome: Heredi di Gio Gigliotti, 1593), 392. Green often had negative connotations in the eighteenth century; see Michel Pastoureau, *Le petit livre des couleurs*, with Dominique Simonnet (Paris: Du Panama, 2005).

38. Cf. another costume for a Fury in *Alceste*: 'M. Laval. Dans Alceste. Furie. Un corps, manches et tonnelet de satin noir, armures de satin feu, grand mascaron sur la poitrine et des monstres dans les basques; le tout brodé argent, et très garni de pailletes, une coeiffure surmontée d'un mascaron, les ailes forme de viperes, une culotte de taffetas feu'. *Inventaire Général des habits des Ballets du Roy*; F-Pan O-1-3234.



**Figure 8.** Anonymous: 'En vildes klädning' ('Costume of a savage') – back (1778). White, cherry, and printed satin, linen, taffeta cut-outs in the shape of leaves. Livrustkammaren / Statens historiska museer, 14868\_LRK. Photo: Petra Dotlačilová ©. License: CC BY-NC.

At the same time, the lacing makes the costume more flexible, allowing it to adapt to the body of the performer while keeping the body straight. This type of construction – lacing in the back, curved and separate sleeves attached to the bodice with a set of ribbons, and a separate *tonnelet* – seems particularly apt for performers who need great freedom of movement. The costume was completed with upper sleeves in green reflective fabric, which covered the lacing on the shoulders, cut in the sharp shape of bat wings, as seen on Boquet's designs, and with drapery made of the same fabric. The *tonnelet*, provisionally attached to the bodice with a couple of stitches, was covered by green drapery and cut with sharp edges. In accordance with some sources, we did not add a skirt. Additionally, we created bags of red taffeta that represented the bare breasts of the Fury, a *mascaron* for its belly (although made of rubber rather than embroidered), and a couple of green snakes made of coloured and gilded papier-mâché and rope. These snakes were attached to the costume so that they encircled the dancer's arm, neck, and waist. Due to lack of time, we used the dull black velvet breeches from the modern costume used in the previous experiments, which also emphasised the differences in the way the reflective and the dull materials responded to the candlelight. In addition, the body of the dancer was equipped with a mask, a headdress with black and red feathers, and red silk stockings (Figs. 9a, 9b, and 10).<sup>39</sup>

The final presentation of the costume took place at the 2018 conference of Performing Premodernity, 'Aesthetics in Late Eighteenth-Century Theatre: Living, Performing, Experiencing the Enlightenment'. For this we added breeches in red taffeta and red shoes, so that the lower part of the dancer's body was kept in one colour, as some sources suggest.

Despite the quick and rather provisional assemblage of the costume, which by no means constituted a final product, the 2017 workshop, in which we strove to make and use a costume under conditions close to those of the past, gave us several important insights into the aesthetic

39. We focused on making the costume during these experiments, and not on the mask, which was taken from the accessories stock of Confidencen. However, the mask was an important part of the Fury's costume in the eighteenth century, which would require a research project and experiments in its own right. This topic was partly explored in the Lalonger project; see Lalonger, *Les exigences dramatiques*, 16–19.



**Figures 9a and 9b.** Anna Kjellsdotter: Costume of a Fury, 2017. Photo: Petra Dotlačilová ©. License: CC BY-NC.





**Figure 10.** Noah Hellwig (Fury) in the costume designed by Anna Kjellsdotter on the left, Maria Sanner (Orfeo) on the right. Photo: Petra Dotlačilová ©. License: CC BY-NC.

effect of eighteenth-century costumes of this type. Since we worked with a candlelit stage equipped with copies of eighteenth-century sets, we were able to explore issues of visibility and theatrical effectiveness.

Firstly, the reflective quality and colour of the silk taffeta, the cut-outs, and, especially, the sequins on the costume all contributed to its animation and to the striking visuality of the performance. The dancer was equally visible and compelling downstage and upstage: though the front of the stage was brighter due to the footlights, he was not disadvantaged when moving upstage. In fact, the sequins reflecting the candlelight made him shine even more upstage because he remained in continuous movement when there. At the same time, the soft, flickering light, which highlighted the sequins and the red silk, obscured the artificiality of the *mascarón* and the snakes, which contributed greatly to the theatrical effect although not looking particularly frightening in closeup or in normal electrical light. When he danced, these three-dimensional elements of fabric, sequins, rubber, papier-mâché, and rope seemed to come alive and act together with the dancer, even to multiply the actual number of infernal creatures that threaten Orfeo.

Moreover, the structure and cut of the costume, which was rather light (being made of silk taffeta) and only loosely attached, enabled the dancer to move freely, which affected his performance. Noah Hellwig described the costume as ‘playful’, allowing him to move his arms freely in all directions and to ‘isolate the movements’, that is, to move other parts of his body, such as the torso and hips, separately. He also commented on the comfortable cut of the breeches, which allowed him to raise his legs and move around without any restrictions. This enabled him to experiment with gestures appropriate to an eighteenth-century Fury, including high positions for the arms and legs, exaggerated, ‘non-noble’ postures, and acrobatic elements.

Our costume was also used in an experimental research project, conducted by Edith Lalonger in Paris and presented at the Centre



**Figure 11.** Romain Arrenghini (Fury) in the costume designed by Anna Kjellsdotter, with a mask by Marina Donadoni. Video still: Petra Dotlačilová ©. License: CC BY-NC.

national de la danse on 17 January 2019 (Fig. 11). Lalonger's research was focused on corporeal expressivity in the dances of Furies and Demons in Jean-Philippe Rameau's operas. Her choreography included high jumps and arm gestures, pirouettes and lifts. While these movements were even more physically demanding and extensive than those employed in our workshop at Confidencen, the cut of the costume allowed the dancer to perform them without any restrictions. Furthermore, Lalonger added an expressive leather mask, which contributed to the terrifying effect.<sup>40</sup>

40. The masks were made by professional mask maker Marine Donadoni. See Lalonger, *Les exigences dramatiques*.

## Conclusion

Even with limited time and resources, the workshop provided important insights into historical theatre practices through the creation of new historiographical sources. Our experiments enabled us to generate new knowledge about performances of the past, from the point of view of both spectators and performers.

We experienced the intensity of candlelight on the eighteenth-century stage, and the way it influenced the visual appearance of the performers. Though they had to be particularly aware of their position in relation to the footlights, the lighting conditions were otherwise sufficient everywhere else on the stage. However, it is necessary to differentiate between the kinds of visibility that are required. It is important for the gestures and facial expressions of the main singers and actors to be seen, for which they need the enhanced lighting of the proscenium area, a position they would rarely have moved away from in the eighteenth century. It is similarly important for the dancers, who communicate with their entire body assisted by their costumes and masks, to be seen as they venture into the whole space of the stage without endangering the clarity of expression.

Furthermore, the construction of the costume has important effects on the movement of the performers. By dressing our performers in a variety of costumes, we were able to observe the different visual effects as well as their relation to the body of the performer. When creating the costume of the Fury, we sometimes felt that the colours, sequins, masks, and snakes made it more ridiculous than scary, possibly due to the different aesthetic perceptions and associations then and now. Some mentioned that the combination of red and green reminded them more of Christmas than of Hell. However, when the dancer began to move on the eighteenth-century stage, the costume also began to perform its part. The strong colours and sharp cuts matched the agitated movements and music of the Fury's dance. While the frightening effect of the



Furies on the eighteenth-century stage is suggested by the designs and occasionally by accounts of performances, it was only through practical experimentation that we could understand how the costume contributed to the overall effect. We saw how the costume enabled the performer to create the exaggerated movements that impressed the spectators with their ‘strangeness’ (when compared to the familiar and disciplined character of *la danse noble*), and how its visuality and materiality directly affected the spectators. The costume not only signalled which character had entered the stage; it also embodied and co-created everything that the character communicated theatrically.

Finally, we got a physical sense of the risks associated with eighteenth-century theatre. The presence of so much open fire added to both the excitement and the temperature – and this was even without torches, explosives, or flying machines equipped with candles. Presumably, the physical experience of the smoke and smell from these would have contributed to the aesthetic effect of the historical theatre performance. The sources and performances we created in our workshops enriched our understanding of eighteenth-century theatre and made us aware of many alternative options that need further consideration and exploration.