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In the Shadow of the French Revolution: Theatre Life of Venice according to Marco Foscari

V senci francoske revolucije: gledališko življenje Benetk po mnenju Marca Foscarija

Prejeto: 18. november 2018
Sprejeto: 1. marec 2019

Received: 18th November 2018
Accepted: 1st March 2019

Ključne besede: Benetke, gledališče, opera, francoska revolucija, *La Fenice*

Keywords: Venice, theatre, opera, French Revolution, *La Fenice*

IZVLEČEK

Prispevek temelji v prvi vrsti na korespondenci Marca Foscarija IV., člana ugledne plemiške družine, ki je med letoma 1789 in 1792 služil kot Kapitan Raspa, majhne istoimenske trdnjave v Istri. Njegovo dopisovanje in obvestila, ki jih je prejemal od dobrih prijateljev, neposredno razkrivajo različne priložnosti v Benetkah, kot tudi dogodke iz beneškega nočnega življenja, v katerem je imelo gledališče, skupaj z opero, glavno vlogo. Prispevek se osredinja na raziskovanje vpliva francoske revolucije na beneško gledališče in opero. V iskanju mikro ravnih analize sta se avtorici osredotočili na lokalni pogled na francosko-italijanske odnose in na njihov vpliv na opero. Avtorici tako izpostavljata zanimiv dogodek, ki je v beneški javnosti pritegnil precej pozornosti, namreč proces izgradnje novega gledališča na trgu San Fantin v *sestieru* San Marco,

ABSTRACT

This paper was primarily based on correspondence of Marco Foscari IV, member of respectable patrician family who served from 1789 to 1792 as Captain Raspa of a small fortress in Istria. His correspondence with close friends discloses opportunities in Venice, as well as events related to its nightlife in which the theatre, along with opera, played the dominant role. Its focus is research on influence of French Revolution on Venetian theatre and opera. In search for micro level of analysis, authors put their focus on local perspective on French-Italian relations, and their influence on opera. Therefore, authors singled out one interesting event which sparked great public attention in Venice - debates and process of the construction of a new theatre in the San Fantino, *sestiere* de San Marco, theatre La Fenice. At the time of prohibition of the public

gledališča La Fenice. V pričujočem prispevku avtorici proučita položaj opere v času prepovedi javnega in zasebnega zbiranja v zgodnjih 1790-ih letih.

and private gatherings, in early 1790s, in this paper authors analysed position of opera.

Introduction: Venice opera context at the end of XVIII century

French bourgeois revolution erupted in 1789 and spread rapidly from Paris in all parts of the country, with an echo in almost all parts of Europe. Masses of immigrants that started to leave France represented the holders of the dying "ancient regime". At the same time, the ideas of the Revolution were spreading among the other nations that recognized in its achievements an opportunity to reach their own freedom. Apennine peninsula, fragmented into several independent states, with its own foreign policy, otherwise reacted to these developments. Venice, whose relations with France fluctuated through the centuries, from sympathy to hostility, lived up to this upheaval in a different social milieu, but, for example, much of the Apennine peninsula remained loyal to the tradition of Catholic dogma with rigid understanding of human freedom and of all forms of human creativity. Until the early seventies of the XVIII century Venice was considered the most important Italian state in the field of import and production of books, and as 'the leading centre for theatrical activities.'¹ Still, comedy in Carlo Goldoni manner was not only important seventeenth-century contribution of Venice, and as Franca Baricelli stated:

*"Equally important to its international recognition were the legendary extravagance of its operatic and productions and mask of its carnival...the 'myth' of the city had shifted from the uncommon stability of its political structure, derived from the merchant oligarchy and its control of the state's constitution, to the vitality of its public and theatrical life."*²

Opera was dominant form of artistic expression in Venice from XVI century.³ However, in the mid-eighteenth-century opera observed the French influences. The process marked as 'experimenting with French elements in the opera' hit all areas of Parma, via Mannheim and Stuttgart to Vienna.⁴ Therefore, in the fifties and sixties of the XVIII century French theatrical tendencies had little impact on the creation of opera in Venice, but also on the rest of the central and southern Italy. In other words, the Italian opera has remained rigid in spite of request for being spectacular like opera in France. On the other hand, Italian influences that prevailed and remained strong in France even after opera reformed through discourse and opera practices of Christoph Willibald Gluck

1 Stefano Castelvetti, *Sentimental Opera: Questions of Genre in the Age of Bourgeois Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 103.

2 Franca R. Baricelli, "Making a People What It Once Was": Regenerating Civic Identity in the Revolutionary Theatre of Venice," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 23/3 (1999): 39. For complete bibliography on characterization of XVIII century as political and economic decadence, see: Baricelli, "Regenerating Civic Identity", 54.

3 On history and bibliography about Venetian opera, see: Lucca Zopelli, "Venice (opera)," *Grove Music Online*. December 30, 2018. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000905442>.

4 Reinhard Strohm, *The essays on Handel and Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 6-7, 103-106.

(1714–1787), and their renowned battle against ‘Mestastasian’ opera stereotypes. In addition, we must keep in mind that French opera remained true to its tradition embodied in significance of choir and ballet in opera, and instrumental music in opera then in Italian counterparts. Next decade of XVIII century did not bring any change in this field in Venice. Tragedy as theatre and opera genre began referring victory over the ‘lighter’ or *buffo* opera, dominant until then in Venetian theatres. By the beginning of the last decade of the XVIII century, tragedy gained primacy in Venice by widely performed *opera serie La morte di Cesare* (*Caesar's death*, 1788), *La morte di Cleopatra* (*Cleopatra's death*,) and *La morte di Semiramide* (*Death Semiramis*)⁵ of Francesco Bianchi (1752–1810).

After the Revolution took power in Paris, a new chapter of history/histories with new ideas started. These new ideas were not familiar to late feudal society and their own value system. The relation of Venice towards the events in France became obvious through decision against gatherings in the city brought by the Senate in 1789. The target of the law of December 1789 was the raffle, visited by citizens of all social ranks. On that occasion authorities banned all public and private gatherings, while these measures, in addition to a *café* (*Botteghe da caffè*), casinos and public places, referred also to the theatre which was open to paying public from its origin in XVI century. According to new law, number of theatres in Venice was limited on seven. Punishment for violation of prohibition of public gathering was for five hundred ducats. This measure was taken for the reasons of State, and we found evidence that it was voted by the Chamber of Ten (*Consiglio dei Dieci*),⁶ which was directly in charge of the defence of the most vital interest of the nation.⁷ Soon, it turned out that authorities were right; developments in France began to be discussed openly in Verona pubs, which thus become so politicized that conflicting opinions could easily turn into a revolt against the current government.⁸

Authors of this paper explore the history of the French revolution through “opera glasses”, inspired by Pierpaolo Polzonetti who was catching the spirit of American Revolution in the Italian opera.⁹ Therefore, we first focused on correspondence of Marco Foscari IV,¹⁰ member of respectable patrician family who served from 1789 to 1792 as Captain Raspa of a small fortress in Istria,¹¹ and then several sources on opera and his-

5 Marita Petzoldt McClymonds, “Transforming opera seria: Verazi’s Innovations and their impact on opera in Italy,” in *Opera and the Enlightenment*, edited by Thomas Bauman and Marita Petzoldt McClymonds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 119–134, 126–127.

6 The Chamber of Ten, respectively the Little Chamber was established in 1310. Members were elected each year from the Grand Chamber. Supervision was exercised by the body consisted of three members which in archival resources was called *Tre Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci*. *Consiglio dei Dieci*, and existed until the end of the Venetian Republic (1797).

7 Fausto Sartori, *Lettere a Marco Foscari 1789–1792* (Venezia: La Malcontenta, 2011), doc. 1, 3; Venice, 6. XII 1789.

8 *Ibid.*, doc. 8, 10; Venice, 24. I 1790.

9 Pierpaolo Polzonetti, *Italian Opera in the Age of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

10 Marco Foscari originated from a branch of this family known as San Simeon Piccolo. He was born in Venice in 1727. He had only one daughter, Marta, from the marriage with his other wife, Adrian Bollani, with whom his family died. During the second half of life, Marco Foscari achieved an upswing in the administrative and military system of the Republic of Venice. The first position he was elected was his appointment to *Tre ufficiali al cattaver* (1758–1759), followed by other appointments in 1789 to be elected Raspa (1789–1792). After this position, he continued to be in the other major military collegiums, while the abolition of the Republic of Venice by Napoleon Bonaparte took him to the position of *Provveditori All’artiglieria* (1796–1797).

11 Raspo (Slovene *Raspor*) today represents a small village inhabited by only a few inhabitants, northeast of Buzet (Venetian *Pinguente*). Although today the city has only 17 inhabitants, in the past it had a great significance for the defense system of Venice. From that place, the Venetian captain overcame the entire interior of Istria. The fortress in Rasp was last destroyed in 1511, after which the authorities in this country decided to transfer the headquarters of the captain to Buzet, but the occupiers of this position until the end of the Republic were named Captain Raspa. Pinguente, today’s Buzet in Istria, was the seat of the Venetian administration

tory of Venice of that time. His correspondence with close friends, in a straightforward manner discloses opportunities in Venice, as well as events related to its nightlife in which the theatre, along with opera, played the dominant role. Its focus is research on influence of French Revolution on the Venetian theatre and opera. The most significant part of the report on the theatre life in this city, Foscari received from Pietro Fabris (1740–1792).¹² The most important quality of the correspondence of Foscari lies in the fact that it dealt with the first days of one of the most important centres of the theatre life of Venice, which survived the collapse of this country (1797), and which during the following century became inspiration for the entire European theatre practice. On research level, this correspondence is of great significance for exploring micro and local perspective of French-Italian relations.

The construction of new theatre in Venice despite prohibition of public gatherings in 1790s

At the end of the XVIII century, the theatre and opera life in the city of Venice took place in the sign of its seven most important institutions (theatre companies / families). The most significant of them was certainly the San Benedetto Theater, which was in the place of today's Rossini Cinema. San Benedetto was founded in 1755 by the efforts of the Grimani family that it was not then assigned to the Noble Association of Box-holders. According to a court judgment issued in 1787, the San Benedetto Theater had to leave the building. She was then handed over to the family Venier, who owned the country where the theatre building was erected. Already in that period, there was an idea for the construction of a larger theatre building. As for the resurrection of the existing theatre society, it was proposed that it be called La Fenice in the future, as a symbol of the resurrection of the society. It was bought in 1790 by a land at the border of two Contrada Santa Maria Zobenigo and Contrada Sant'Angelo.¹³

At the time of prohibition of the public and private gatherings, in early 1790s, we singled out one interesting event which sparked great public attention in Venice – debates and process of the construction of a new theatre in the San Fantino, *sestiere* de San Marco¹⁴. The main reason for debates was a *Manifesto* published by a private company on

over this area. During the second half of the 17th century, it was a semi-urban place. Further details, see: Egidio Ivetic, *Oltremare. L'Istria nell'ultimo dominio veneto* (Venezia: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2000), 76, 300. According to a document from 1785, Buzet had 7,367 inhabitants and was the administrative centre of Venetian Istria, which at that time had 99,383 inhabitants. In other words, according to a recent survey, 98.29% lived in the countryside, while only 1.71% represented citizens. See in: Mirto Etonti, *A proposito dell'Istria veneta: aspetti demografici e amministrativi*, Studi veneziani n.s. XXIII (1992), pp. 282, 286. Thrown out of the epicentre of the cultural life of the Republic of Venice in such an isolated environment, the amplifier in Marco Foscari was interested in monitoring the events that related to social life in the city of Venice.

12 Fabris eventually entered the service of a British resident in Naples. He spent years in the Kingdom of Naples, immersing her natural beauty. During 1790–91, Fabris stayed in Venice.

13 Thierry Beauvert, Jacques Moatti, Florian Kleinfenn, *Opera houses of the world* (Paris: Vendome Press, 1996), 34–40; Anna Laura Bellina and Michele Girardi, *La Fenice 1792–1996: Theatre, Music and History* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2004); Giandomenico Romanelli and Graziano Arici, *Gran Teatro La Fenice* (Köln: Evergreen, 1999).

14 From Italian word *sestiere* which mean one part of Venice. It was actually six Venetian's *sestieri*, three from the one and three from the other side of the Great Canal.

November 1 in 1789 on the construction of the theatre in the San Fantino,¹⁵ who would later become known as La Fenice as a metaphor of rising from the ashes like mythical bird phoenix. Works on the construction of La Fenice began in 1791 and ended in April 1792. La Fenice was officially opened on May 16, 1792 by opera of Giovanni Paisiello (1740–1816) *I giuochi d'Agrigento*.¹⁶ Soon the news on building of theatre was released through the press, Benedetto Buratti, Somasco priest with knowledge in architecture, was indicated for the person most responsible in the selection of the construction project. Buratti spoke and consults with Simone Stratico, an expert in naval and civic architecture, teacher of physics from Padua, and with knight Fontanes – all of them were elected by authorities as certain judging committee to examine all the theatre projects on its construction.¹⁷ They, in fact, should examine the projects submitted and notify the Company (*Società*). The projects must be presented within four months (later extended to six). The winning architect would receive 'a gold medallion weighing three-hundred sequins (*zecchini*)' for the construction of 'a decorous theatre which would at last be worthy of a capital where Palladio, Sansovino, Sammicheli, Scamozzi and other artists of the Great Century have left such noble monuments', stated in *Manifesto*.

Competition on building of the theatre in San Fantino launched lively public debate, with competitors fighting with illustrative pamphlets and other weapons, building rival factions in Venetian public. On this competition, twenty-eight competitors took part, from Treviso Count Ricati, Count Ricetti and certain Bonn; from Padua were competed Danielletto, Cerato and nobleman Oddo. In addition, one project came from Vicenza, one from Rovinj, and one signed *certain cavaliere* Morelli from Imola, experienced architect who had previously built the eight theatres. The projects are submitted and Cavaliere Pistocchi from Faenza, another of pilgrimage, while from the Venice in the competition of construction of theatre in San Fantino took part: Selva, Checchia, Bianchi, Fossati, Codognato, certain Lulli, trader from Chioggia, and Vienelli which has previously been accused of fabricating the machine for making counterfeit money. Among them, we must singled out Pietro Checchia, renowned theatrical architect, experienced specially in reconstructing and renovating Venetian theatres, who had rebuilt the San Benedetto Theatre, considered the best in Venice.¹⁸ The young architect Sante Baseggio should also be mentioned; although strongly supported by his fellow-citizens, he had to wait until 1817 to see one of his projects realized, with the Theatre Sociale in Rovigo. Nor must one forget the elderly Abbot, Antonio Marchetti, a diocesan architect, who had planned the Ridotto in Brescia as a hall equipped with small boxes. The Paduan school of architecture was represented by Daniele Danieletti, who ignored the stipulations of the competition and proposed a main entrance into

15 The Theatre of San Benedetto, leading opera house in Venice was burned to the ground in 1774.

16 Further details in: Karyl Charna Lynn, *Italian Opera Houses and Festivals* (Laham/Toronto/Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2005), 109.

17 In judging Committee of this project was also Francesco Fontanesi (1751–1795), painter and scenery-designer famous for his scenery with Pietro Gonzaga for the opera *I giuochi d'Agrigento* by Giovanni Paisiello premiered on inauguration of Theatre La Fenice.

18 As cited on theatre official website, and through consulting of documents from 1789, 'Checchia's project for San Fantino was not without its merits on the mechanical side. The reason it was considered weak, apart from a few mistakes, was its lack of "tone", so that the project did not meet the desire of the Committee for an example of civil architecture that would impose its image on the city.'

Rio Menuo, instead of Campo San Fantino. In doing so, Danieletti, a collaborator of Abbot Domenico Cerato, rejected the double entrance by land and water and opted for an egalitarian solution, with just one entrance. This ran directly contrary to the Committee's intentions, who wanted a balance struck between the aristocratic water-entrance and the democratic and republican land-entrance.

To summarize, as Angelo Muttoni in his letter to Marco Foscari stated, ideas of applicants were grandiose, and did not match the planned funds, which could be allocated for construction.¹⁹ Finally, the Commission decided to choose a project submitted by Pietro Bianchi,²⁰ and then officially started work on the reorganization of the theatre of San Fenice.

Debates and rumours surrounding the construction of this Venetian theatre did not stop during the spring of 1790, especially after the poor performance of the *opera buffa* in Mestre. Three persons from judging committee, Buratti, Stratiko and Cavaliere Farnesi continued every morning to examining all projects related to the construction of La Fenice.²¹ As Giovanni Pedrana in his letter to Marco Foscari pointed out, there were many proposed projects, while each day a new set arrived.²² However, according to correspondence of M. Foscari, for the next few months the construction of Le Fenice was not the only one topic that attracted public attention in city of Saint Marco, especially attention of citizens regarded as its elite.

Venetian opera public and their preoccupation at the end of eighteenth century

Beside theatre construction, during the late summer and early autumn of 1790, Venice had other concerns. Senate and all citizens, with a touch of uncertainty and fear, followed the developments in France. The government was only able to respond to the ideas and rebellion that spread through the Revolution by introducing control in a public assembly. It seems that in the city, famous for its theatres and opera, only few performances took part during those months. One of the reasons for that was illness of renowned Portuguese mezzo-soprano prima donna Luisa Todi (Luisa Rosa de Aguilar Todi, 1753–1833),²³ by that period overwhelmed by an eye disease, while the rest of the population

19 Sartori, *Lettere*, doc 18, 21–22; Venice, 10. IV 1790.

20 Loredana Olivato, "Progetti di teatri, in Le Venezia possibili," in *Da Palladio a Le Corbusier*, edited by Lionello Puppi and Gian Domenico (Venezia: 1985), 122–133; Manlio Brusatin, "Il teatro per Venezia," in *Il Teatro La Fenice. I progetti, l'architettura, le decorazioni*, by Manlio Brusatin and Giuseppe Pavanello (Venezia: Albrizzi, 1987), 47–90.

21 Sartori, *Lettere*, doc. 20, 26; Venice, 14. IV 1790.

22 *Ibid.*, doc. 21, 27; Venice, 18. IV 1790.

23 According to Stevenson: "She married the Italian Francesco Saverio Todi (*d* 1803), leader of the Bairro Alto theatre orchestra in Lisbon; the next year she made her opera debut in Lisbon in Scolari's *Il viaggiatore ridicolo*. In 1777–8 she was engaged for comic opera at the King's Theatre, London, making her first appearance in Paisiello's *Le due contesse*. Her international fame was established at the Concert Spirituel, Paris, in 1778 and confirmed by her change to serious parts; in the following years she sang in Germany and Austria, at Turin, and at the Berlin Opera. In 1784 she joined a brilliant company at St Petersburg headed by Sarti, in whose *Armida e Rinaldo* and *Castore e Polluce* she sang with enormous success in 1786. She made her last Russian appearance at Moscow in her own *fiesta teatrale, Pollinia*, in 1787. She sang in Berlin, Mainz and Hanover, 1788–9, and at the Teatro S Samuele, Venice, 1790–91, where the season was declared 'anno Todi'. In 1791–2 she appeared in Padua, Bergamo, Prague, Turin and Parma, then sang at the Madrid Opera (1792–3 and 1794–5, including comic roles) and at Lisbon in Leal Moreira's *Il natale agosto* (1793). Her last major engagement was at S Carlo, Naples, 1797–9; from 1803 she lived in retirement in Portugal. According to Choron and Fayolle, Todi's voice was 'large, noble, sonore, intéressante', with an extensive lower

massively has been contracted by some unknown fever.

Figure of lethargic city was changed by the announcement of the arrival of the viceroy of Naples. Viceroy who on 12 November 1790 due to arrival in Venice, planned to enjoy the show organized in a Theatre in San Benedetto, as well as the vocal skills of prima donna Todi who performed in the theatre San Samuel. In the theatre of San Lucca performed “new lady”, who was said to be very brave. Theatre San Moise at a time when Piero Fabris sent its report on 5 October has not worked, as in this point, would be uncertain whether to run the show even in the theatre San Martino.²⁴ This was a short summary of theatre season in 1790 of the world famous city through the centuries by every kind of spectacle, where the theatre tradition was long before other parts of Europe has become an integral part of everyday life, not only its elite, but also the wider masses. In general, winter in nineteenth-century Venice was a time when people are withdrawn in accordance with the time when nobility had more free time to spend at the theatre. In mid-December 1790, release of Venice is eagerly anticipated premieres of two operas, which are, at the same time, heralded as a true spectacle. One of them was *Ercole's Death* (*Morte di Ercole*), which was planned to be performed in the Theatre of San Benedetto, and the second was *Alexander in India* (*Alessandro nell'Indie*) in the Theatre of San Samuel.²⁵ It seems that this was a major reason for castrato Luigi Marchesi (1754–1829) to return from London to Venice. According to many respective authors, Marchesi was probably one of the finest male soprano castrato of the XVIII century.²⁶ The long-awaited arrival of the Neapolitan viceroy, King Ferdinand IV was postponed for several weeks. Fear of potential unrest rebels inspired revolutions and the difficult situation in the city did not prevent the Senate to vote 50,000 sequins for spectacle prepared in honour of the distinguished guest.²⁷ Judging by the notes of M. Foscari, Venetian nobility was more concerned about disease of world famous prima donna Luisa Todi. For leisure of nobility remaining opera performances only in the second significant theatre in Venice, San Benedetto.²⁸

Winter announced weak opera season in Venice, because it is a disease that has suffered Todi no end in sight.²⁹ Due to this, only one opera house has working. How, in his letter addressed to Marco Foscari said Giovanni Pedrana »news circulating [the city] are theatres, theatres, and nothing more«. About overall city theatre or the opera, including Venetian sources of the law do not make significant differences, evidenced by the fact that in the city there was a rivalry between “Samuelist» or supporters and visitors of theatre San Samuel, who were affected by the disease to their dive Todi. On the other hand, were “Benedetinis” (Benedettini), drew the most benefit out of this situation.³⁰

register. She was best known for her sensibility and ability to evoke tears in pathetic roles, but also acquired considerable skill in the bravura style.” Richard Stevenson, “Todi [née d’Aguiar], Luisa,” in *Grove Music Online*. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-5000905109?rskey=bgr6hy&result=1>.

24 Ibid., doc. 60, 74–75; Venice, 5. X 1790.

25 Ibid., doc. 73, 89; Venice, 19. XII 1790.

26 Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, *Biographical Dictionary of Actors: Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 90.

27 Arrival of Viceroy of Naples to Venice, scheduled for January 2 1791, again been postponed due to the illness of his wife.

28 Ibid., doc. 78, 98.

29 The disease Luisa Todi her husband, violinist Saverio Todi from Naples not prevented acquaintances works cheerfully. Ibid., doc. 80, 102.

30 Ibid., doc. 81, 103; Venice, 9. I 1790. M. V. (1791).

In mid-January 1791, Count of Artois arrived in Venice. He was one of the main commanders of the anti-revolutionary current, that became strong and suggesting the establishment of a new terror in France. Welcomed with his wife, “the King’s sister”, On the first night, Count of Artois visited the theatre San Benedetto that for this occasion opened-up two podiums. The next evening, the Count of Artois went in the San Samuel Theater where they flocked many ladies to see up close the famous visitor.³¹ Afterall, according to public interest, visit of the Count of Artois remained in the shadow of the opera diva Todi and her illness, which is speculated to be unable to perform during the carnival.³² However, bad luck of San Samuel theatre with disease of prima donna, has not led a group called (*compagnia*) to crash, just as the company San Benedetto has not greatly benefited much from this situations. In letter to Marco Foscarelli, this equilibrium painter Pietro Fabris explained by the fact that the motto of the Venetians was their love for the night life: “This nation is strange, while she was busy during the day, continues to excel in the night”, with the conclusion that “there’s no power in Europe lovelier, more graceful, more satisfied and more awake than this”.³³ Pietro Fabris while reporting to Foscarelli on the current events in Venice from 23 January 1791, continues, “At this point everyone talks about the revolt of the opera due to competition Banti and Dela Mara”,³⁴ and that in San Samuel theatre except some new opera singers sought to compensate absence of Todi, there were no significant news.³⁵

In mid-January 1791, there was news in the nightlife of Venice, especially for its elite; Philharmonic acquired great importance for trying to attract new (mass) audience. On January 22 in Philharmonic was prepared a grand ceremony attended by the Count of Artois.³⁶ Opera circumstances have changed in just a few days when the Venice conveyed the news that the famous Todi invented her illness. As it was assumed this news was launched by her enemies, convincing Venetian public that nothing was left of her talent.³⁷ According to evil tongues, real cause of her illness was the alleged inability to learn the text of the new opera she supposed to perform.³⁸ While in the Theatre San Samuel on February 12 was held some grand show,³⁹ at the end of the same month Todi returned in the public life of Venice. In a letter to Pietro Fabris of 20 February stated that she managed to be brilliant bringing theater San Samuel above the San Benedetto. Venetians were retold rumors about her courage. However, contrary to the repeated triumph of the *opera seria*, there was no news in comedy genre.⁴⁰

31 Ibid., doc. 82, 104; Venice, 15. I 1790. M. V. (1791).

32 Ibid., doc. 82, 105.

33 Ibid., doc. 82, 105.

34 Ibid., doc. 84, 109; Venice, 23. I 1790. M. V. (1791).

35 Ibid., doc. 85, 111; Venice, 23. I 1790. M. V. (1791).

36 Ibid., doc. 86, 112; Venice, 23. I 1790. M. V. (1791).

37 Ibid., doc. 87, 113; Venice, 26. I 1790. M. V. (1791).

38 How is contemporary of these events came to notice, in the Teatro San Benedetto are all gossiping. Ibid., doc. 87, 113. During this time, Todi was treated by eminent doctors Pellegrini and Donald, however, expectations were high, but hope small. Ibid., doc. 88, 115; Venice, 30. I 1791.

39 Ibid., doc. 92, 120; Venice, 12. II 1791.

40 The following evening after performance of Todi, in convent San Giovanni Grisostomo was given a new comedy by royalty Pepoli called *Devil in a four (Diavolo a quattro)* which was created by the young Contarini di San Trovaso. Ibid., doc. 95, 124–125; Venice, 20. II 1791.

Venice repays infamous Todi by her reception in the Great Chamber (*Maggior Consiglio*). On the same time, the Great Chamber sent compliments and explained her importance for the Republic and the fairness of its laws.⁴¹

During that period, opera and other music performances have won complete dominance over the theater pieces. Quite rarely performed, Venetian theatre pieces usually had negative reception by audience, like comedy performed in the convent of San Giovanni Grisostomo we mentioned. By contrast, sonnets, lighter variant of artistic creativity in relation to the opera, which dominates the nightlife scene of the most important Venetian theaters, have become attractive for visitors of the San Benedetto theatre. It is interesting that this type of genre have great positive reception in the time when diva Todi caused conflict and competition of theaters and made appearance co in the political life of Venice too. Popular sonnets performed in San Benedetto theatre were dedicated in honor to doge of Venice Pietro Mocenigo (1406–1476). Nice weather that prevailed led many visitors to spend their evenings in one of the theaters.⁴²

Opera in those days had other problems. Renowned opera singers had to endure the criticism of the press, which is largely created by the public mood towards certain individuals, affecting their relationship. Marchesi renowned castrato has been criticized for performance of *Orazio* and *Vigilio*, and negative criticism has not bypassed even prima donna Todi.⁴³ However, negative criticism has not clouded glory of two great artists since they appeared on coins, which were minted in Venice. Description of the coin, which is expressed in his letter to Fabris, reveals with how much love and sort of fanaticism Venetian public respect these opera artists. Marchese was even equated with the ancient heroes. In addition to regular appearances in the San Samuel theatre Todi had concerts at the Philharmonic where she performed sonnets in front of the nobility and patricians.⁴⁴

The Chamber of Ten, or the Secret Chamber, which is usually always work when they reach an assessment of that vital national interests are at stake, or country threatens by danger, decided to renew the decision of 1699, after which prohibited the wearing of masks during Easter the post office. The same decision shows that it is still in the political scene of Venice, closely related to the mechanism of functioning of the state alone, opinion that in public events, which formed an integral part of city life St. Brand, are recognized the latent threat of an increase in criminal activities. In the worst case, the same feast could be converted under certain conditions in the event of dissatisfaction with the government, reinforced by French revolutionary ideas, which was familiar, not only the Venetian but also the Italian public.

On the other hand, the Easter holiday usually coincides with the duration of the famous Venetian Carnival when in the city of St. Mark gathered a large number of foreigners. Under the pressure of events in France and throughout Europe, the Senate and the Chamber of Ten acted with additional precautions. Foreigners were accused for several times of provoking riots in the streets of Venice, and other types of criminal activity were not strange to them. Beside prominent visitors, Venice Carnival was also

⁴¹ Ibid., doc. 95, 125.

⁴² Ibid., doc. 100, 133; Venice, 6. III 1791.

⁴³ Ibid., doc. 100, 134.

⁴⁴ Ibid., doc. 101, 135; Venice, 13. III 1791.

visiting by ordinary people, some of them driven by motives completely opposite of art consumption. During the Carnival Square of St. Mark was jammed with visitors, so that through it certainly could not pass. The influx of foreign visitors was the reason that all the opera and theater, including the Philharmonic, offers rich programs. Angelo Mouton in a letter dated 10 April 1791 mentioned that with the Philharmonic, casino was opened too.⁴⁵

The status of the theater in the circumstances in which Italy finds itself is demonstrated by the case of Reggio, in which there was almost a riot. Namely, in one of the theaters of this Italian city there was an *opera seria* performed whose title, unfortunately, was not mentioned in the report of Angel Mutton on April 15, 1791. As stated by Mutoni, no *opera buffo*, or comic opera was made in this town that year. Judging by the affinity of theater visitors, the gloomy public mood, implied by new ideas and upheavals across many parts of Europe, has also been reflected in affinity for some theater opera pieces. The (dominant) opera must have inspired a section of the population to openly express their views. Frightened by these social circumstances, Duke of Modena was sent 300 soldiers to Reggio for the sake of reunite the power in this city. The other 400 soldiers with 4 cannons joined them soon. They surrounded the theater, pointing to guns in all four directions that people came to this facility. The explanation of this Mutoni was summed up in the fact that “the theater serves as an excuse for rebellion”.⁴⁶ This development of the event was disturbed by the population of this duchy, while the duke did not have enough soldiers to oppose, if there was a riot. For this reason, he addressed the German troops stationed in Mantova and Milan, but they were not enough if the people decided to rebel.⁴⁷

The signals emitted by France to the rest of the Europe reached the Apennine Peninsula too, and were accepted in different ways in some of its governing structures. The attempt of Louis XVI's flight from Paris in the night between 20 and 21 June 1791 announced his end.⁴⁸ This, on the other hand, gave his impression to the impression of the late end. A growing number of European countries have suffered a mass of refugees from France, supporters of the “*ancient regime*”. This outcome did not even circumvent Italy.

In such circumstances in Venice, the question of the construction of the New Theater was once again becoming important, as La Felice most often called in sources. By that time, his construction had taken “a huge amount of money”.⁴⁹ As Pietro Fabris commented on, all theaters in the city worked, while for the autumn performing, they prepared the performances of two opera buffets; one in San Cassiano, and the other in San Moise.⁵⁰ However, the year that was eagerly awaited, proved not to be overly successful. As Fabris reported in mid-November to Marco Foscarei, pieces performed by theatres in Padua and Treviso (Venetian poses) were terrible. In San Benedetto opera *Semiramide* was not welcomed with pleasure, as was the case with

45 Ibid., doc. 109, 150; Venice, 10. IV 1791.

46 Ibid., doc. 111, 157–158; Venice, 15. IV 1791.

47 Ibid., doc. 111, 158.

48 Френклин Л. Форд, *Европа у доба Револуција 1780–1830* (Београд: Цлио, 2005), 137.

49 Sartori, *Lettere*, doc. 139, 197; Venice, 3. X 1791.

50 Ibid., doc. 139, 197.

their performances in the autumn of 1790 in Padua. According to Fabris, the balls that were given in the city of Saint Mark in the autumn of 1791 were bluntly said by the impressions of Fabris horrible. According to his correspondence, Pietro Fabris was no longer enjoying the opera, because as he himself stated, she celebrated the dead.⁵¹ The previously described process of transforming the artistic taste of the Venetian audience probably found a reflection in the letters of Fabris, who formed his attitude toward the opera and the taste at the time when Venice's music scene was dominated by opera *buffo*.

It seems that the situation did not change much when, at the beginning of 1792, a ballet was held in the San Benedetto Theater where a new ballerina which came to London especially from that performance, with beautiful figure appeared, and who managed to get a huge applause from the audience.⁵² As Pjero Fabris stated: "In theaters, they just said-they said nonsense." At some point, a ballerina fainted, in another, a singer has cancer, and the woman has a glandular disease.⁵³

In addition to all this, the construction of La Fenice did not go far, primarily for financial reasons.⁵⁴ However, this did not prevent persistent efforts to resume work. The expectations of Pierre Fabris in relation to La Fenice, however, were extremely positive. The key place in it should have been occupied by Giovanni Paisiello, renowned in the genre of comic opera.⁵⁵

Under the pretext of the trip to Petrograd (Russia), the nobleman Nicoletto Venier, in order to secure the interest of his San Benedetto theater, designed the lease project for the next ten years.⁵⁶ In all this, Fabris was most interested in what kind of artistic program she would perform with this shift. The heroic opera representing drama, which is not serious, and not even comical "without music and without laughter", is a recapitulation of the state of the outcome of negotiations on the transfer of San Benedetto to new tenants.⁵⁷

There's no better situation in the San Fantino Theater. This theatre was issued for a year by Michiel dal Agata with revenue of one hundred and thirty thousand lire. It was busy in it, but according to Fabris did not seem to have much progress. As he stated, without money, sales and cameras, the theater could not achieve expectations.⁵⁸ As already known at that time, ballerinas and music virtuosos were supposed to appear on the Carnival in the autumn, and Angelo Mutoni hinted at a great spectacle. As one can conclude from a Mutonian letter, it is the San Fantino theatre, that is, La Felice, that appears as the main among the tenants of San Benedetto.⁵⁹ This is precisely one of the reasons investors urged to speed up the restoration of La Felice Theater. According to the description of Angel Muti, La Felice's theater should have three scenes.⁶⁰ Efforts to

51 Ibid., doc. 157, 227; Venice, 19. XI 1791.

52 Ibid., doc. 176, 253; Venice, 15. I 1792.

53 Ibid., doc. 182, 261; Venice, 5. II 1792.

54 Ibid., doc. 182, 262.

55 Ibid., doc. 188, 269; Venice, 4. III 1792.

56 Ibid., doc. 199, 283; Venice, 7. IV 1792.

57 Ibid., doc. 199, 283.

58 Ibid., doc. 204, 293; Venice, 22. IV 1792.

59 Ibid., doc. 206, 296; Venice, 29. IV 1792.

60 Ibid., doc. 212, 306; Venice, 20. V 1792.

reconstruct it proved to be successful. From the spring of 1792, La Felice becomes the most beautiful theater in Venice, where spectacular operas were performed.⁶¹

Conclusion

By the decision to execute Louis XVI, the Revolutionary regime took the final and definitive step on the road to break with the old regime. New relationships have been staged in a war-torn Europe. The coalition against revolutionary France has already been formed. Venice with the first indications of the late end (1797) could only observe further developments, hoping that it would be the worst bypass. The fate of events in France, which was first unveiled by Corsican soldier, Napoleon Bonaparte, announced the end of the independent Venetian Republic at the same time. However, the French and later Italian authorities and their culture had a lot to thank the Venetian Republic for centuries in the field of the development of opera and other forms of artistic creativity.

Only five years after construction of La Fenice and eight after the French Revolution, the Republic of Venice "La Serrenisima", according to Byzantines to symbolize this city as indicator of sovereignty, collapsed in the wake of French revolutionary expansion. Only eleven days after, on 23 May in 1797 Napoleon believed that French "liberated" Venice. Weakened city paradoxically, as Baricelli observed, "Experience first foreign domination in its thousand-year history."⁶² Opera, which will raise critical approach to Serenissima, was created later, when Giuseppe Verdi composed *Il due Foscari* (1844), about some other members of famous Foscari family. This opera was unsuitable for premiere in La Fenice, because there were thinking that this piece will be offending on Venetian history and famous family Foscari, so it was premiered in Rome. Therefore, even later, Venice is trying to stay politically and ideologically "serene" and untouchable by any kind of critique in field of opera, or to construct and preserve positive picture of her history.

In this paper, we examined local theatrical context through construction of the Theater La Fenice in the shadow of the French Revolution, and also in search for an answer on this significant question: Did and how French Revolution challenges Italian or even Venetian hegemony in opera? For this purpose, we singled out interesting and controversial years after the French Revolution and before Napoleon conquest of Venice, when famous theatre La Fenice was constructed. Construction of theatre in San Fantino was obvious example of opposition to ruling law on limiting of number of theatres in Venice that we mentioned earlier as a reflection of French revolutionary context. The operatic life in Venice according to correspondence of Fabris and Foscari proved to be hard and strong to resist the influences of French spectacular operas, as well as all other elements of the opera. Venetian opera theatres keep with their traditional attitude towards singers as the leading stars of opera and Venice too.

61 Ibid., doc. 213, 309; Venice, 20. V. 1792.

62 Baricelli, Franca R. "Making a People What It Once Was": Regenerating Civic Identity in the Revolutionary Theatre of Venice." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 23/3 (1999): 38.

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POVZETEK

Francoska revolucija je izbruhnila leta 1789 in se bliskovito širila iz Pariza v vse dele države, odmevala pa je skoraj po celi Evropi. Množice izseljencev, ki so začeli zapuščati Francijo, so predstavljale nosilce izumirajočega »starega režima«. Istočasno so se revolucionarne ideje širile med drugimi narodi, ki so njene dosežke prepoznali kot priložnost, da pridobijo lastno neodvisnost. Na apeninskem polotoku, ki je bil razdrobljen na več neodvisnih držav, vsaka s svojo zunanjo politiko, so se le-te na dogodke odzvale različno. Benetke, katerih odnosi s Francijo so skozi stoletja nihali med naklonjenostjo in sovražnostjo, so ta prevrat

doživele v drugačnem družbenem okolju, večina Apeninskega polotoka je namreč ostala zvesta tradiciji katoliške dogme s togim pogledom na svobodo ljudi in vse oblike človeške ustvarjalnosti. Prispevek temelji v prvi vrsti na korespondenci Marca Foscarija IV., člana ugledne patricijske družine, ki je med letoma 1789 in 1792 služil kot kapitan Raspa, majhne trdnjave v Istri. Njegovo dopisovanje in obvestila, ki jih je prejemal od dobrih prijateljev, neposredno razkrivajo različne priložnosti v Benetkah, kot tudi dogodke iz beneškega nočnega življenja, v katerem je imelo gledališče, skupaj z opero, glavno vlogo. Prispevek se osredotoča na raziskovanje vpliva francoske revolucije na beneško gledališče in opero.