

III.2 Case Study 2

III.2.1 Snapshot Opera National de Paris

'I make my programme not for the way the audience is, but for the kind of audience I want them to be. I will never compromise on this, because I do not believe in underestimating the public. Why do I want to convince people?, because if I only did Tosca there would be no state subsidy. I get money from the government to put on something artistic, to teach people about their cultural heritage' Gerard Mortier, General Manager Opéra National de Paris in *The Financial Times*, 12 April 2005



Photo 4 Théâtre Garnier
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Photo 5 Opéra Bastille
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Two theatres One house

PALAIS-GARNIER (5.1.1875)
Main Auditorium 1991 seats

1467 employees

OPERA- EASTILLE (13.7.1989)
Main auditorium 2703 seats
Amphitheatre 450 seats
Studio 237 seats

The history of opera in France starts in 1669 when Louis XVI granted poet and abbot Pierre Perrin the privilege to found the Royal Academy of Music *pour y représenter et faire chanter en public des opéras et représentations en musique et en vers français pareilles et semblables à celles d’Italie* (to represent and sing in public operas and representations in music and in French verses similar to those of Italy) (Parouty 2005: 480). The Academy opened its doors on 3 March 1671 with the pastoral *Pomone* (revived by Grabu in London in 1674) composed by Robert Cambert, which ran for 146 performances (Carter 1996: 26). In 1672 Jean Baptiste Lully became head of the Academy. The Florentine-born composer effectively proved that French verse was translatable to sung recitation (Carter 1996: 26). Thus 1672 can be seen as the birth of French opera. The *Tragédies en musique* as conceived by Lully and his librettist Philippe Quinault is a synthesis of elements arranged and expanded from the spoken *Tragédies* by Corneille and Racine. All-sung opera was inseparably linked with the court and with the Academy, while opera with spoken texts was associated with the Opéra-Comique, a division that only broke down in the 19th century (Robinson 1995: 568; Bossuyt 1990: 62). Since then opera developed in France and all main provincial cities started a lyrical stage. Table 7 offers an overview of these theatres within the French lyrical field.

Table 7: Classification French Opera Houses (source: Doublet, rapport RTLTF 2001)

French Houses			
Maisons de Paris	Grandes maisons	Maisons moyennes	Petites maisons
16%	22%	26%	36%
Opéra comique	Bordeaux	Avignon	Caen
Châtelet	Lyon	Metz	Limoges
Bastille	O.N du Rhin	Montpellier	Rennes
Garnier	Toulouse	Nancy	Saint Etienne
		Nantes	Tours

Opera and music in France are successful and show dynamism and a creativity, which can compete with what happens in the cultural centre of the country and the capital Paris (Doucelin 2004). Today the Réunion des théâtres lyriques de France comprises nineteen opera houses spread over the entire country. As presented in table 7 Paris

has three Opera Houses; the Opéra-Comique, the Théâtre Musical de Paris-Châtelet, and the Opéra National de Paris (Garnier-Bastille). And from the south to the north one finds the Opéra de Marseille, the Opéra national de Montpellier, the Opéra de Nice, the Théâtre du Capitole de Toulouse, the Opéra-Théâtre d'Avignon, the Opéra National de Bordeaux, the Esplanade Opéra de Saint-Etienne, the Opéra National de Lyon, the Grand-Théâtre de Limoges, the Opéra de Nantes, the Grand-Théâtre de Tours, the Opéra de Rennes, the Opéra de Nancy, the Opéra de Lorraine, the Opéra National du Rhin, the Opéra-Théâtre de Metz, the Théâtre de Caen (Doublet 2001, Saint-Cyr 2004). Most of these are highly regionally (city) funded except the Opéra National de Paris, the Opéra Comique and the Opéra National de Lyon. In fact the opera is at the forefront of the cities' cultural budgets. State-wise the Opéra National de Paris receives about six times more than all lyrical theatres in the provinces. (Doublet 2001; Saint-Cyr 2004:17-18, 61-66)

The Opéra National de Paris

The Opéra National de Paris is the principal opera of Paris and of France; it is state funded, whereas the theatre du Châtelet is funded by the city of Paris. It often changed places and names. In 1861 Napoleon III started the construction of an extravagant auditorium. The architect was Charles Garnier. The Palais Garnier opened in 1875 in the presence of 2000 personalities coming from all parts of Europe. The opening night was a success and the success continued over the years (Anthony 1995:211; Fontaine 2005: 300; Perroux 2000:229). A century later, lyrical theatre in France remained the business of the politicians. Ideas for a second big auditorium in Paris existed since 1962, when Jean Vilar published plans for a Théâtre National Lyrique Populaire. Three years later Pierre Boulez and Maurice Béjart conceived a plan to reorganise the Réunion des Théâtres Lyriques Nationaux which reintroduced the idea of a new opera hall. In 1980 the Conseil Economique et Social shared the recommendation to construct an auditorium with 3000 seats in order to gain higher income and to combat exploitation costs. But it was under the impulse of François Mitterand, then President of the French Republic and with Jack Lang as Minister of Culture, that the idea finally took shape. Architect Carlos Ott

designed the winning concept. The inauguration of the new building took place in 1989. Amongst its objectives were to triple the lyrical provision in Paris, to reduce state subsidies by one-third, and above all to open up the theatrical artform that until now was practically reserved for the elite (Mathern 2005:6). For Hugues Gall the objective was very clear: to develop a programme for two theatres and make public money profitable (Doucelin 2004). After the opening the Palais-Garnier became the place to be for ballet, while the Opéra-Bastille housed the opera performances. But gradually this division changed and now Bastille presents the big opera and dance productions, while Garnier is the stage for lyrical works which need more intimacy and the major part of the Ballet-performances (Fontaine 2005:302).

Culture and education in France

The decree of 24 July 1959 by André Malraux, Minister of Cultural Affairs, stated clearly the importance of enlarging the accessibility of cultural masterpieces to a larger number of citizens: *Le ministère chargé des Affaires culturelles a pour mission de rendre accessibles les œuvres capitales de l'humanité et d'abord de la France au plus grand nombre possible de Français, d'assurer la plus vaste audience à notre patrimoine culturel et de favoriser la création des œuvres d'art et de l'esprit qui l'enrichissent* (It is the mission of the Ministry of Culture to open up the masterpieces of humanity but first of all those of France, to as many French citizens as possible, it is also its mission to secure a vast audience for our cultural heritage and to support the creation of art works and those that enrich the arts.) (Beaulieu and Dardy 2002:21-22). But this definition does not take artistic education into account; for that one has to wait until 1971 when the educational aspect enters the official documents. In 1982, the ministry formulates a new mission: *'Le ministère chargé de la culture a pour mission: de permettre à tous les Français de cultiver leur capacité d'inventer et de créer, d'exprimer librement leurs talents et de recevoir la formation artistique de leur choix; de préserver le patrimoine culturel national, régional ou des divers groupes sociaux pour le profit commun de la collectivité tout entière; de favoriser la création des œuvres de l'art et de l'esprit et de leur donner la plus vaste audience; de contribuer au rayonnement de la culture et de l'art français*

dans le libre dialogue des cultures du monde' (It is the mission of the Ministry of Culture to offer all the French the opportunity to cultivate their capacity to invent, create, and experiment with their talents freely as well as to receive the artistic training of their choice; to preserve the national, regional cultural heritage as well as that of diverse social groups in favour of the wider community; to support the creation of art works and those enriching the arts, and offer them a bigger audience; to contribute to the radiance of French culture and arts in the open dialogue with the cultures of the world) (ibid:18-19) and in 1983 a protocol was signed between the Ministry of National Education and the delegated Ministry of Culture. A second protocol followed in 1993 and a 'plan de relance' on arts and cultural education was put into place at the beginning of 2005 with the intention to train the people in charge of arts and cultural education and with the will to mobilize cultural institutions to implement educational activities and take the changes in society into account when working with young people.

III.2.2 Company mission statement

The basic mission is defined by decree as mentioned in the previous paragraph, but in order to analyse the more specific objectives of the House, I examined internal policy documents, annual reports and interviews with the two general managers in charge during the seasons 2003 to 2005. 2004 was a transition year. Hugues Gall left the opera after 9 years as general manager and Gerard Mortier did his first year as the new director. Mr. Gall was a real manager, whereas Mr. Mortier took a different point of view as mentioned in an interview at the beginning of 2005 that *'If you want to remain creative, you have to be careful not to let yourself become just a corporate boss. Our staff, the budget and also the artistic mission that we have from the state, all make us a business. Every day, you have to be both a CEO and the head of an artistic institution. You have to play both roles and, naturally, if your grip on the laws controlling that business is weak, you can't carry through the artistic project* (Mallet 2005: 32). As mentioned earlier the Opéra National de Paris has to provide a broad lyrical provision and has 'to open up the artform'. The audience has to be able to come in for a visit just as it attends the Hermitage or the Louvre, in

order to discover certain works of their cultural heritage. These have to stay accessible to new generations. What interests the current general manager is the question of the actuality of opera. The question is whether this artform of the past is still relevant today. Every single day he tries to find ‘readable signs’ for the audience of today, for those who know the codes as well as for those that discover opera for the first time, if not, the opera risks becoming a dead language. So programming an opera season depends on the choices of what the management thinks might help to ‘decode’ the emotions that emerge today (Ligne 8 2004).

III.2.3 General view on performances and audiences

The Opéra National de Paris performs on two main stages with the emphasis on opera and ballet, the two core activities of the house (Table 8a). More intimate performances and many dance performances take place at the 19th century Palais-Garnier. The grand operas are staged at Bastille.

Table 8a : Performance numbers per genre and per auditorium
Opéra National de Paris 2003 –2005.

Number of performances per genre and per auditorium Opéra National de Paris				
		Opéra Bastille	Théâtre Garnier	Total
Season 2003-2004	Lyrique	149	43	192
	Chorégraphique	38	127	165
	Autres	2	8	10
	Total	189	178	367
		Opéra Bastille	Théâtre Garnier	
Season 2004-2005	Lyrique	122	47	169
	Chorégraphique	45	108	153
	Frontières		16	16
	Autres	6	6	12
	Total	173	177	350

The Amphitheatre and the Studio (Table 8b) are used for performances with a small audience. The ‘jeune public/tout public’ are staged there as are also a mix of music, dance and music theatre. With 66 performances each season the opera reached about 20,437 in 2003-2004 and 19,680 in 2004-2005. These smaller halls are suitable for experimental work, for performances that need more intimacy between the artists and the audience, and they offer an extra provision for visitors to attend a

performance at the Opera House. The latter is not unimportant when one wants to give the wider audience the chance to discover the artforms present at the ONP.

Although capacity had been tripled when the Opéra – Bastille opened, both theatres are almost always fully booked, as can be read from the figures in the overview below (Table 8b). About 700,000 visitors a year attend a performance at the Opéra National de Paris, which is about 86% of the capacity of both houses. Compared to ‘other activities’ (including concerts) the two core businesses of the ONP are highly frequented. When looking at the frequentation per genre and per auditorium one recognizes that both Bastille and Garnier are almost always playing to a full house when opera is concerned. The second core activity ‘dance’ reaches a audience capacity of more than 80%. ‘Frontières’ (frontiers) is a new category installed by the new management and includes music theatre projects, which explore the artform.

Table 8b: Audience numbers per genre and per auditorium and percentage of frequentation at ONP 2003-2005

Number of audiences per genre and per auditorium and percentage of frequentation at the Opéra National de Paris							
		Opéra Bastille	frequentation	Théâtre Garnier	*frequentation	Total	frequentation
2003-2004	Lyrique	372,719	93%	75,300	89%	448,019	92%
	Chorégraphique	84,145	82%	191,562	77%	275,707	80%
	Autres	4,998	92%	6,851	43%	11,849	56%
	Total	461,862	90%	273,713	80%	735,575	86%
		Opéra Bastille	frequentation	Théâtre Garnier	*frequentation	Total	frequentation
2004-2005	Lyrique	301,708	90%	79,963	86%	381,671	90%
	Chorégraphique	113,350	92%	166,584	78%	279,934	84%
	Frontières			23,551	75%	23,551	75%
	Autres	12,381	75%	5,199	53%	17,580	68%
	Total	427,439	91%	275,297	80%	702,736	86%

* measured on 1971. places with visibility at Garnier : 1539.