

## Atlantes and caryatids

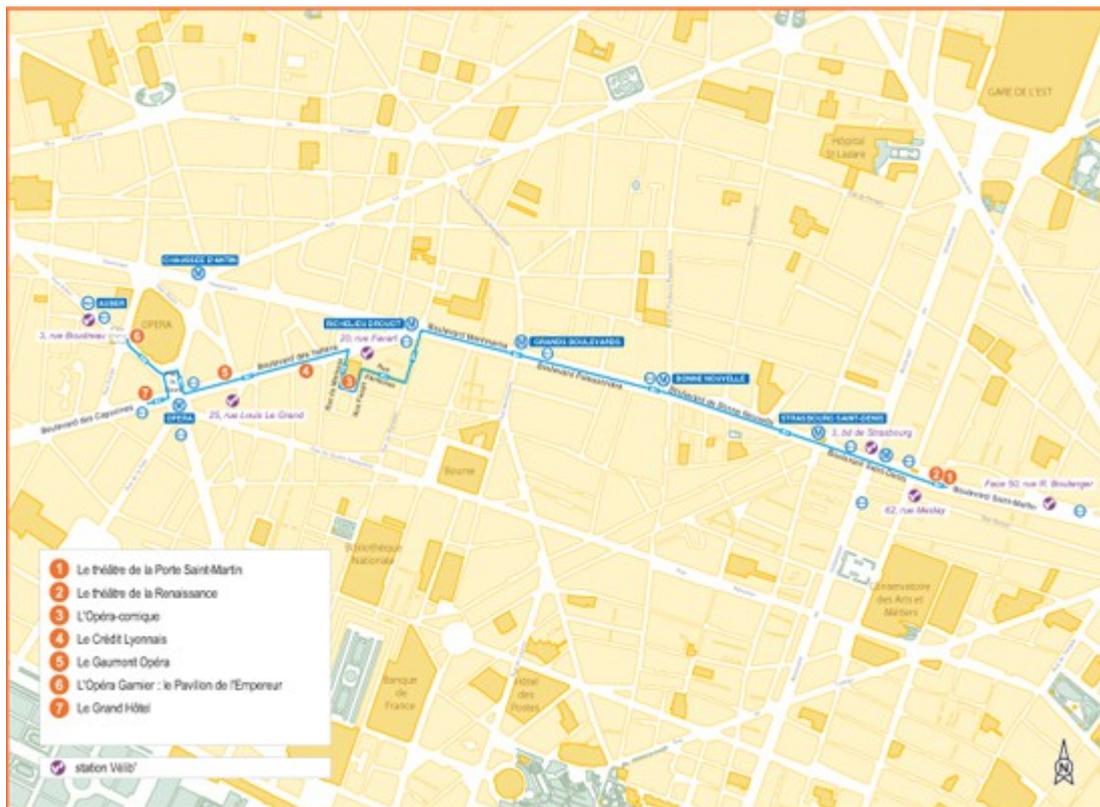
### OF THE GRANDS BOULEVARDS FROM PORTE SAINT-MARTIN (10TH) TO OPERA (2ND)

It seems that it was only after the end of the 18th century that the figures of atlantes(1) and caryatids(2) were placed on some of the façades of the Grands Boulevards, as the theatre and business worlds moved in along the route. They had many uses and welcomed visitors at the door to the theatre or occupied the attic level(3), adorning performance halls and deposit banks equally.

On theatre façades, their outlines serve as talking signs or cause the building to stand out. The best example of this was the Historic Theatre, which no longer exists, on Boulevard du Temple. The building pediment was supported by two groups of matching figures, one group representing Hamlet and Ophelia and the other El Cid and Jimena. Even today, a stone's throw from the Boulevards and next to the Square des Arts-et-Métiers, the Gaîté Lyrique Theatre, which is devoted to contemporary music and the visual arts, inconspicuously shows Comedy as Scapin and Drama as Hamlet.

During the 19th century, caryatids took on more pleasant and even seductive form when the Boulevard's stages were turned over to operettas, musical reviews and variety shows as a means of encouraging imagination and enjoyment. The Belle Epoque had scarcely ended and cinema was claiming atlantes and caryatids for its own purposes. Their traditional silhouettes lent an architectural dignity to the new cinemas built on the Boulevards distancing cinema from its carnival origins and convincing a more bourgeois public to visit these new shrines to performance.

**enlarge and download the plan in pdf format (292,4 Ko)**



**1**

(10th) 18, Boulevard Saint-Martin  
**Porte Saint-Martin theatre**

The Porte Saint-Martin theatre was constructed in 1781 in accordance with the plans of the architect Nicolas

Lenoir (1726 – 1810), known as Lenoir the Roman, to house the Opera then located at the Royal Palace and which had been destroyed by fire. The theatre only really became important in 1830, when it became one of the main settings for romantic theatre. *Mary Tudor*, *Lucrezia Borgia* and *Nestlé's Tower* signalled the glory days of this theatre, which was also famous for its magnificent stage decors painted by Séchan (1803 – 1874), Dieterle (1811 – 1889) and Desplechin (1802 – 1870). The building had a protruding west-work façade decorated with eight caryatids leaning against the pillars which framed the theatre entrance doors and on the upper part, crossing the façade, was a bas-relief representing the Triumph of the arts and four busts of musicians and librettists (Quinault, Rameau, Lully and Glück), evoking the theatre's link with music. The theatre, which was burned down during the Commune, was rebuilt in 1873 by the architect Oscar de la Chardonnière (died in 1881), who asked the sculptor Jacques-Hyacinthe Chevalier (1825 – 1895) to create the new decor for the façade. Throughout his career, the artist created a large number of works for Parisian theatres (Châtelet theatre, Opera and Vaudeville theatres). Here, he produced a series of masks, heads, medallion portraits and pediment figures symbolising in turn Tragedy, Drama and Comedy, while four solid atlantes placed on the ground floor lent a solemn note to the theatre entrance. H. Chevalier also created the proscenium caryatids inside the theatre.



(10th) 20, Boulevard Saint-Martin

### The Renaissance theatre

Constructed in 1838 on the initiative of Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas, the Renaissance theatre, formerly in the Ventadour theatre (Rue Méhul), was the first theatre in the capital to be entirely dedicated to romantic drama. *Ruy Blas* was performed here, as were several dramas by Frédéric Soulié, performed brilliantly by Marie Dorval and Frédéric Lemaître.

The current theatre, constructed in the location of the Deffieux restaurant which burned down during the Commune, was entrusted to Charles de Lalande (died in 1887), who later created a new façade for the Gymnase theatre (38, Boulevard de Bonne Nouvelle). The architect seems to have recalled certain Palladian models, such as the Loggia del Capitano in Vicenza, which is built on a narrow plot of land and whose verticality is highlighted by the use of a colossal order.

Four pairs of caryatids with naked torsos, an apparent introduction to the pleasures of the theatre, support the first floor balcony. They were sculpted by Carrier-Belleuse (1824 – 1887) and demonstrate the talent of an artist made famous by the candelabras of the great staircase of the Opéra. The artist became a master in the art of decor and increased the number of these architectural figures in his own personal style, avoiding uniformity, as can be seen in the twenty-four sheathed caryatids in the inner courtyard of the Commercial Court (Boulevard du Palais). The female pairs on the Renaissance theatre break with tradition and seem to anticipate the changing genre of a theatre which soon distanced itself from drama to devote itself to the operettas of Charles Lecocq.



(2nd) 1, Place Boieldieu

### The Opéra Comique

The Opéra Comique constructed by the architect Jean-François Heurtier (1739 – 1822) just before the Revolution and destroyed once by fire in 1838, was again consumed by flames in 1887. When it was first built, the theatre had an Ionic peristyle façade with six columns lengthways and two projecting into the wall. The sole adornments on this severe architecture next to the Odeon were the pattern joints of the back wall.

The architect Louis Bernier chose a completely different design during the reconstruction in 1894 – 1898. Leaving plenty of room for statuary and sculpted decor, there were two statues on the façade, either side of the central west-work, in the side recesses on the first floor, one showing Music by Denys Puech (1854 – 1942) and the other Poetry by Ernest Guilbert (1848 – 1913). On the upper level, a series of caryatids inspired by the figures of the Pavillon de l'Horloge (Clock Pavilion) at the Louvre and returned to favour under the Second

Empire, particularly on the attic of the pavilions of the Pyramid courtyard (Louvre), support the heavy string course of the theatre's projecting cornice. Their dancing shapes are reminiscent of those of the young, golden bronze adolescents by Christofle which the architect perched on the west-work windows. Sculpted by André Allar (1845 – 1926), Henri Lombard (1855 – 1929), Gustave Michel (1851 – 1924) and Emile Peynot (1850 – 1932), these caryatids have a joyfulness and lack of concern which were gradually introduced, as the century progressed, into representations of caryatids to make them correspond to changes in the theatrical repertoire on the Boulevard.



(9th) 17-23 Boulevard des Italiens

## The Crédit Lyonnais

The considerable growth in deposit banks in the 19th century persuaded the main establishments in Paris to have a head office intended to demonstrate the company's strength and stability to its money-saving clientele. The principle models of the past were used for this, and architects were not afraid to use pastiches. The central part of the façade of the Crédit Lyonnais building, constructed in the early 1880s by the architect William Bouwens van der Boijen (1834 – 1907), of Dutch origin, were an almost exact replica of the design of Pavillon de l'Horloge (Louvre) and was topped with the pyramid trunk of the Pavillon de Flore (Flora Pavilion). A Serlian window(4) design highlighting the entrance axis is repeated on the upper level and a large space was allowed for allegorical sculpture. The pediment is supported by four groups of caryatids framing the clock on the central pavilion and symbolising the hours of the day. The creation was entrusted to the sculptors Henri Lombard (1855 – 1929), Edouard Pépin (born in 1853), Antonin Carlès (1851 – 1914) and Désiré-Maurice Ferrary (1852 – 1904). The statues, doubled in depth by low-relief silhouettes repeating this design, are freely inspired by the groups of Jacques Sarrazin (1592 – 1660) which dominate the square courtyard of the Louvre. On the pediment, the classical inspiration represents the Bank surrounded by Trade and Industry and flanked by the Rhône and the Seine distributing credits. The design for the eminent position occupied by this institution among French banks was created by the sculptor Camille Lefèvre (1853 – 1933), in accordance with the wishes of Henri Germain, the founder of the Crédit Lyonnais.



(9th) 2, Boulevard des Capucines

## The Opéra Gaumont

The caryatids at the top of the building recall the fact that the Opéra Gaumont (formerly Paramount) took up residence there in 1927, after the Vaudeville theatre constructed on the corner of the Boulevard des Capucines and the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin in 1868 by the architect Auguste Magne (1816 – 1885). In the early 1900s, cinema operators understood what they could gain by having caryatids or atlantes on their façades, seeing in them a means of broadening their audience by attracting a smarter clientele. This was the case for the Omnia-Pathé, which opened in 1906 at number 5 Boulevard Montmartre; it has since been destroyed and replaced by a large shopping centre. The building, following a renovation in 1913, was a magnificent example of this seduction policy, using the resources of sculpture (sheathed atlantes) to announce on the façade the luxury of the interior decor which evoked that of the greatest theatres on the Boulevard. The upper floor of the Vaudeville building originally had four caryatids dominating the street. They were the work of the sculptor Jules Salmson (1823 – 1902) and represented Folly, Comedy, Satire and Music. The building's cut-off corner was redesigned at a later date, with the addition of a corner cupola and the transformation of the upper windows, which were framed by six new anonymous caryatids designed from a single model.



(9th) Rue Auber

## The Opéra Garnier: le Pavillon de l'Empereur (Emperor's Pavilion)

The sumptuous spectacle of the main façade of the Opera should not make us forget to discover the round pavilions at the sides of the theatre; they are crowned with the cupolas which Charles Garnier (1825 – 1898), in his final project, created to fill the entire width of the plot.

The pavilion located on the west and visible from the Rue Auber below was intended to be the private entrance of Napoleon III and his relatives, who in this way could access the hall safely. We know that the sovereign narrowly escaped an assassination attempt on his way to see a performance a few years previously. The fall of the Empire put an end to the work, leaving the pavilion partly incomplete. Two rostral columns(6) marked the end of the access ramps leading to the pavilion. The lobby was accessed through a monumental double portico flanked with caryatids symbolising the glory of the sovereign. The work of the sculptors Elias Robert (1818 – 1899) (southern entrance) and Mathurin Moreau (1822 – 1912) (northern entrance), in one hand they are brandishing a bronze palm leaf towards the Imperial Eagle and in the other hand a laurel crown. Their severe beauty, tinged with a classical harshness, is reminiscent of their sister statues on the pavilions of the new Louvre, which are so perfectly integrated into the architecture, or those on the entrance portal of the Conservatory of Arts and Professions (Rue St-Martin), created by the same Elias Robert (Art and Science). Here, the idealised style of the figures, in direct relation to the pavilion's function, is a powerful reminder of political discourse.



(9th) 12, Boulevard des Capucines

## The Grand Hôtel

Buoyed by their success in constructing the Hôtel du Louvre in 1860, in 1862 the Pereire brothers had the Grand Hôtel built a stone's throw from the Opera, which at the time was still under construction; its construction was entrusted to Alfred Armand (1805 - 1888), who was assisted by Charles Rohault de Fleury (1801 – 1875) and Jacques-Ignace Hittorf (1792 – 1867).

The extraordinary luxury of the internal salons and the large dining room whose arches were framed by two levels of musician caryatids created by the sculptor Aimé Millet (1819 – 1891) was a direct response to the severe design of the external façades imposed by Prefect Haussmann for the buildings surrounding the new Opera.

The façade of the entrance onto the Boulevard des Capucines is punctuated by Corinthian columns showing young atlantes grouped in twos. They are the work of the sculptor Pierre- Jules Cavalier (1814 – 1894), the creator of several high relief caryatids in a much harsher style on the façades of the pavilions framing the Napoleon Courtyard of the Louvre (Pavillons Richelieu (Richelieu Pavillions)– sketch at the Orsay Museum – Turgot and Lesdiguières (Richelieu, Turgot and Lesdiguières Pavillions)).

## The Crédit Lyonnais



## GLOSSARY

**1. Altante:** figure of a man, sculpted in the round or in relief and used as a vertical support. The atlante evokes the giant Atlas, who was condemned by Zeus to carry the vault of heaven on his shoulders. He is shown standing, seated or crouching, his hands above his head, on his hips or on his knees and bearing an entablature on his neck and shoulders.

Atlantes whose lower halves are in the form of a plinth are known as sheathed.

**2. Caryatid** (from Kariatides, a maiden of Karyai): statue of a woman, with or without arms, wearing a long robe and used as a vertical support. Caryatids are used to hold up entablatures, with their heads serving directly as supports. Caryatids are said to be sheathed when their lower half is in the form of a plinth. (From *Principes d'analyse scientifique. La sculpture, méthode et vocabulaire* [Sculpture: Principles of scientific analysis, method and vocabulary], Paris, 1978)

**3. Attic:** decorative horizontal ridge or small top floor of a building, placed above a cornice or large frieze.

**4. Serlian window:** group of three openings; the side openings are topped with a lintel and are shorter than the central opening which is topped with a semi-circular arch.

**5. Rostral column:** column decorated with rams (rostrums), erected in memory of a naval victory.