

The Grand Tour of Europe: The Impact of Artistic Travels on Nineteenth- century Danish Scenography

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the artistic Grand Tour of the nineteenth-century Danish theatre painter C.F. Christensen made between the spring of 1838 and the fall of 1839, and how it influenced his later scenographic work at the Royal Danish Theatre. Using a variety of archival sources, his Grand Tour is reconstructed. His travels through Germany, Bohemia, Moravia, Switzerland, France, Italy, and the Tyrol exposed him to some of the greatest art and most innovative theatre Europe had to offer. Through the sketches done on his trip, it is possible to see the seeds of inspiration that took root in his scenography upon his return to Copenhagen. Scenography for two August Bournonville ballets that Christensen created after his return will be analyzed: *The Festival in Albano* and Acts 2 and 3 of *Napoli*.

KEYWORDS

Historic scenography, nineteenth-century theatre, C. F. Christensen, Royal Danish Theatre, *Napoli*, Grand Tour, Bournonville scenography.

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Introduction

Christian Ferdinand Christensen's (1805–1883) education as a theatre painter differed from the other Danish theatre painters working at the Royal Theatre in the first half of the nineteenth century. Royal Theatre Painters Arnold Wallick (1779–1845) and Troels Lund (1802–1867) decided to focus on theatre painting after completing their Art Academy education as architectural painters and their Grand Tours. However, from nearly the beginning of his artistic training, C. F. Christensen chose the path of theatre painter. As the son of a twice widowed mother, C. F. Christensen needed to begin earning money as quickly as possible. Unlike other forms of painting that required finding commissions to make a living, once he was trained, theatre painting would afford him an immediate income.

Christensen started his artistic training at the Art Academy in 1819 with Prof. Christian August Lorentzen and began apprenticing under Wallick in the Royal Theatre's atelier in 1822.¹ The date of Christensen's completion of his formal education is unknown. It was, however, sometime between September 1828 and the spring of 1830 when he left Denmark to travel with the Russian Minister Baron Paul von Nicolay to Sweden, Finland and Russia. Baron Nicolay hired Christensen to paint a series of watercolors of his Monrepos estate in Vyborg, Russia and to educate the Baron's children in drawing and painting. The library of Monrepos is famous, and includes many volumes on art and architecture.²

Christensen returned to Denmark in the fall of 1830. Regarding this trip Christensen wrote, "Overall I received, with Baron Nicolay's help, good

1 The information surrounding Christensen's early education comes from a variety of sources, some of which are contradictory. In Byrn 2008, 16–19, there is a lengthy explanation of how these dates were established.

2 Paul Ernst von Nicolay (the Baron's grandson) donated the library to the University of Helsinki in the early 1900s. Today, it is possible to see the books to which Christensen could have been exposed. These books include works by Aeschylus, Euripides, Shakespeare, Pierre Corneille, Molière, Jean Racine, Ludvig Holberg, Carlo Goldoni, Denis Diderot, Richard Sheridan, Adam Oehlenschläger, and the Italian theatre painter, Pietro di Gottardo Gonzago, to name but a few. Artists and architects represented in these volumes include Vitruvius, Albrecht Dürer, Rafael, Giorgio Vasari, and the three Giovanni Battistas: Passeri, Piranesi and Tieopolo. Havu & Pitkäranta 2006.

opportunity to familiarize myself with everything that could interest an artist and especially in my subject.”³ Although his formal education had ended, Christensen had not taken the Grand Tour. A Grand Tour would open avenues for career advancement; not taking a Grand Tour would block it.

The concept of the Grand Tour developed in the seventeenth century and was considered an important component of completing a young gentlemen’s education. The tour generally included the great European towns and cities of the Renaissance and places containing vestiges of ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. During their travels, young men were exposed to different customs, cultures, and an aesthetic education meant to prepare them for the life of the landed gentry. It served as a rite of passage. Over time, the Grand Tour became essential for budding artists as well. It exposed them to paintings, classical sculptures and architecture, and through this exposure and practice, they learned proper artistic techniques. They traveled to become better artists and hone their skills. The usual destinations for the Grand Tour of artists from the Danish Art Academy included France and Italy and may have also included Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Greece, among others; so Christensen’s tour with the Baron to Sweden, Finland and Russia could not be considered the Grand Tour because it had not taken him to the places that the Art Academy deemed the most valuable and relevant.

In 1838, C. F. Christensen faced a major obstacle in his career advancement. He had not had the opportunity to take the Grand Tour when he was younger. In 1838 at the age of 33 with a wife and family to support, he would not be granted membership into the Art Academy unless he took the Grand Tour. An Art Academy education and membership were prerequisites for obtaining an appointment as Royal Theatre Painter.⁴ Christensen sought money from the Royal Fund *ad usus publicos* to finance his trip. Both Wallick and Lund had received travel grants for their Grand Tours from the fund. In May 1837, Christensen received a grant of 600 *Rigsbankdaler* (Rdl) yearly, in silver, for two years.⁵ Instead of accepting, Christensen sought additional support from the Theatre Direction.⁶ Christensen was not prepared to travel abroad until his wife and child’s financial stability was assured during his absence. The Theatre Direction sent a request to the King seeking additional funds for Christensen,⁷ and by Royal Resolution, Christensen received an additional 300 Rdl per year for two years to be paid by the Theatre’s cashier. Christensen left for his Grand

3 All translations from the Danish were done by the author unless otherwise indicated. C. F. Christensen letters 1869 and 27.6.1877.

4 The theatre painter Ander Poulsen (1759/60–1821) who had apprenticed under Thomas Bruun (1742–1800) and acted as the Royal Danish Theatre’s painter from Bruun’s death in 1800 until Wallick’s appointment as Royal Theatre Painter in 1814 was denied the appointment of Royal Theatre Painter because of his lack of Art Academy education and Art Academy membership.

5 Royal Resolution 503, 6.6.1837. Glarbo 1947, 448–449. I have chosen a literal translation of the Danish Teater Direktion to Theatre Direction rather than Theater Management that is too heavily laden with a contemporary understanding.

6 C. F. Christensen, letter 1837.

7 Direktionens Deliberationer. Danish National Archives.

Tour on 21 May 1838.⁸

Christensen's Grand Tour throughout Europe exposed him to some of the greatest art and most innovative theatre Europe had to offer. This article will firstly reconstruct Christensen's Grand Tour, and secondly, through an examination of the sketches he did while on the tour, it will investigate how these experiences abroad became the seeds of inspiration that took root in his later scenography⁹ at the Royal Danish Theatre specifically through an analysis of the scenography for the ballets *The Festival in Albano* and *Napoli*.

The Grand Tour

Little is known about the beginning of Christensen's trip from his own hand, but he had two traveling companions who both kept diaries. His travelling companions were the architects Theophilus Hansen (1813–1891) and Laurits Albert Winstrup (1815–1889). Christensen was known as a landscape painter, but as a theatre painter, he also needed to be proficient with architectural painting. Visiting famous architectural sites and traveling with architects on his trip undoubtedly helped him in this pursuit. They visited some of the greatest theatres and art collections in Europe including the Linden Opera¹⁰ and the new National Theatre¹¹ both in Berlin; Gottfried Semper's Opera House in Dresden;¹² in Prague, Theatre of the Estates built in 1787; Albrecht Dürer's house in Nuremberg; and the National Theatre in Munich. In their diaries, both architects discussed theatre architecture, stage technology and theatre scenography with various comparisons to the Royal Danish Theatre. It is not hard to imagine that Christensen was a spirited part of the debate with his specialized knowledge of theatre.

France and Italy: Immersion in His Art

Christensen continued his journey traveling to Paris via Switzerland. Nothing is known about this portion of his trip, other than his route and a couple of sketches.¹³ By December 1838, Christensen was in Paris.¹⁴ In a letter to Jørgen Hansen Koch, Court Architect and a professor at the Art Academy, Christensen gave

8 Villadsen 1979, 90.

9 I use the term scenography as it is used in Scandinavia. Having spent many years researching and analyzing Christensen's work and working in the theatre myself, there is little difference between what Christensen was doing in the nineteenth century and what scenographers do today. Christensen did not just create decorations in front of which actors stood. He created three-dimensional stage spaces that actors and dancers inhabited. His work with the Ballet Master August Bournonville attained the ideal of the total artwork and the level of Wagner's *gesamtkunstwerk* several years before Wagner wrote about this aesthetic ideal.

10 Here they saw Carl Maria von Weber's opera *Der Freischütz*. Christensen created new sets for *Der Freischütz* [Jægerbruden] in 1849, when The Royal Theatre mounted a new production.

11 Winstrup 1838.

12 Hansen tried unsuccessfully to make contact with Semper to visit the building site. Christensen was more successful. He made contact with the opera's theatre painter Arigoni who gave them a tour of the present theatre and the building site for the new Opera. Villadsen 1979, 94.

13 Christensen letter, 1877. Elements of some of these sketches appear in Christensen's scenography as much as 21 years after he sketched them. See Byrn 2008, 42.

14 C. F. Christensen letter 1838.

an account of the theatre painters he visited in Paris and their reception of him. Pierre-Luc-Charles Ciceri (1782–1868), *peintre en chef* at the Paris Opera, received him most amicably and upon seeing Christensen's drawings done on the trip "he assured me of his satisfaction."¹⁵ Ciceri was a central figure in the development of scenography in France during the nineteenth century and because of his association with the Paris Opera, his influence resonated throughout Europe. His great success with the ballet *Alfred le Grand* in 1822 was due in part to his collaboration with Louis-Jacque-Mandé Daguerre but also due to the newly installed gas lighting which allowed never before seen lighting effects. The same year, he opened the first independent scenic studio to cope with the growing demand for his sets. It was here that the succeeding generation of theatre painters was trained.¹⁶

According to Marvin Carlson, Ciceri was a master of romantic settings dealing with mass and sweeping effects.¹⁷ For Ciceri, the strength of the scenographic effects were in landscapes and not in architecture. The predilection for landscapes was something Ciceri and Christensen shared. Ciceri often allowed the proscenium to "cut off" the tops and sides of the wings and set pieces to give the illusion that they continued beyond the frame, thus further accenting the monumental aspects. Allowing the stage picture to extend past the proscenium was a clear departure from the earlier neoclassic stage tradition where everything was symmetrical and contained within the frame of the proscenium. This neoclassic tradition was the predominant one at the Royal Danish Theatre under Royal Theatre Painter Wallick and one in which Christensen was well versed.¹⁸ Ciceri did not use details, but looked for the effect of mass, color, and light.

The effect of gaslight was something new to Christensen as well. Gas lighting on stage had been in use at the Paris Opera since 1822. The Royal Danish Theater did not get gaslight until 1857. Gas lighting was substantially brighter than candles or oil lamps and burned more cleanly. It was delivered through pipes that could be controlled through a gas table, essentially creating dimmers that allowed light levels to be raised or lowered selectively, which was not the case with earlier forms of lighting. These pipes also allowed light to be projected from new and different positions on the stage. Gas lighting allowed the scenery to be much more visible to the audience than it had been before. With earlier, less luminous forms of lighting, actors tended to act from the apron, but with gas lighting actors began to move upstage behind the proscenium. The actors became more linked to the scenic environments upstage of the proscenium with the advent of gas lighting.

15 Ibid.

16 Join-Dièterle 1988, 133 and 214.

17 Carlson 1972, 75. *Robert le Diable* with the Danish title *Robert af Normandiet* opened at the Royal Theatre on 28.10.1833 with sets by Wallick and Christensen assisting.

18 The neoclassic, Italianate tradition was the preferred style of Arnold Wallick, Royal Theatre Painter from 1814–1842. Although Wallick had specifically been sent to the Paris Opera to learn theatre painting and production in 1809–1810, he felt the neoclassic style was more appropriate for the much smaller proportions and less technically complex stage of the Royal Danish Theatre. A more in depth discussion of the transition away from the neoclassic stage tradition at the Royal Danish Theatre from 1785–1724 can be found in Byrn 2008, 58–96.

Christensen further related in his letter to Hansen Koch that most of the work being done at the theatre had essentially been taken over by Ciceri's oldest and most capable students Humanité-René Philastre (1794–1848) and Charles-Antoine Cambon (1802–1875). Christensen was not overly impressed by Philastre, writing, "The first [Philastre] does not resemble his master at all in courtesy or politeness."¹⁹ But once he saw Christensen's work in full format, Philastre offered to let him visit and work in the paint shop whenever he wanted. According to Christensen, Cambon was more amiable. Christensen also mentioned that in addition to these painters, there were another score, who were just as capable. "Should I nevertheless not manage to work with or under some of these artists – which I have hope – I am convinced that I will learn a part by often frequenting the paint shop and being an attentive observer."²⁰ He seemingly got the opportunity to do it all.

In the Theatre Museum in Copenhagen, there are loose sketches in a sketchbook attributed to C. F. Christensen. These sketches show that Christensen worked on or saw at least three productions in Paris that were worthy of sketching. The first was the ballet *La Gypsy*, the second the opera *Le Lac des Fées*, the third entitled *Le Géant* is not identifiable. *La Gypsy* opened in January 1839 and *Le Lac des Fées* opened in April 1839. Philastre and Cambon were responsible for both productions. *La Gypsy* consisted of five sets, and Christensen sketched them all; *Le Lac des Fées* consisted of seven sets, and Christensen sketched five of them.

His sketches for *La Gypsy* are far more complete than the ones for *Le Lac des Fées* and show shadows and highlights, but also include specific notes about each scene. (See Figure 1.)



FIGURE 1. C. F. Christensen's sketch for the ballet *La Gypsy* Act Two, scene 1 at the Paris Opera. The Theatre Museum.

The sketches show the influence of Ciceri's style on his students: the

¹⁹ Christensen letter 1838.

²⁰ Ibid.

monumentality and mass, using the proscenium to crop the stage picture, and multiple point perspective. It is difficult to tell how much the Act Two, scene 1 set (Figure 1) relied on details because it is just a sketch. The description of the set from the libretto follows: "In a street in Edinburgh, a large tent is raised. Here Mab, the queen of the gypsies lives. The tent is lit by a lamp and the street lies in the light of the full moon. Everything breathes peace and stillness; one hears only the intoxicated guests in the inn."²¹

Christensen wrote notes on the sketch. The one to the left says, *lange lys*, long light and the one on the right says *Maanskin*, moonlight. It is not clear what he meant with long light, but the meaning of moonlight is clear. Painting the downstage wings and borders darker than the upstage portions of the stage enhanced the effect of the moonlight. Unfortunately, Christensen did not elaborate on the lighting practicalities, but lighting would have been of interest as he would also be responsible for it in Copenhagen. Using lighting effects to enhance the painting technique was one that Christensen employed in his own work after he returned to Copenhagen and will be discussed later.

The Act Three set for *La Gypsy* is also noteworthy. The libretto reads, "A dining room in Lord Campbell's residence. A window in the background looks out to a park. To the right a door to the library."²² Christensen's first note is significant: "Everything practical." (See Figure 2.) Using practical stage elements for everything was an enormous departure for Christensen compared to the norm at The Royal Theatre. A practical stage element is any object which appears to do onstage the same job it would do in life. So in the case of *La Gypsy*, the window in the background would be a real window, as would the door. Before Christensen traveled to Paris, the use of practical stage elements at the Royal Danish Theatre was limited. Practical elements were used occasionally, but to compose the entire stage picture using practical elements was something new to him.



FIGURE 2. C. F. Christensen's sketch for the ballet *La Gypsy* Act Three at the Paris Opera. The Theatre Museum.

21 Neiiendam 1989, 53.

22 Ibid., 58.

When Christensen left Paris after 1 April 1839, he traveled south to Lyon through Marseille to Nice. From Nice he traveled to Florence and further to Rome, where he spent the summer. Rome was still an obligatory stopping point for artists on their Grand Tour. Certainly the culture and the antiquities in Rome had their drawing power, but it was also an extremely important destination for artists from the north because it had been the home of the Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen for over forty years. Unfortunately for Christensen, Thorvaldsen had left Rome in September 1838 to return to Copenhagen. From Rome, Christensen made longer and shorter journeys in the area. His exact itinerary is not known, although based on the scenography he created after his return from Italy, he most likely visited Albano, Naples, and Capri. Late in the fall of 1839, he began heading north through Italy to Milan and the Tyrol. From the Tyrol, he made his way through Germany and up the Rhine.

Return to Copenhagen

Before returning to Denmark, Christensen also stopped in Hamburg where he met with the theatre painter Francesco Cocchi. Through Cocchi, Christensen became acquainted with the work of the Italian Theatre painter Antonio Basoli (1774–1848).



FIGURE 3. Antonio Basoli's *Sala di un Tribunale*, Etching XIV *Collezione di Varie Scene Teatrali*, 1821.

FIGURE 4. C. F. Christensen's Copy of Basoli's *Sala di un Tribunale*, 1838–1839. *The Theatre Museum*.

Basoli succeeded Antonio Sanquirico at La Scala in Milan in 1832. Basoli created numerous designs for the stage which were engraved in two different publications. Cocchi had been Basoli's student and was responsible for doing the etchings for Basoli's first book *Raccolta di prospettive serie, rustiche, e di paesaggio* (1810). Christensen copied twelve drawings from Basoli's second book, *Collezione di varie scene teatrali* (1821).²³ The twelve drawings Christensen made were taken solely from the architectural subjects. Christensen was best known for his landscapes, so in copying Basoli's architectural scenography perhaps he was attempting to strengthen his architectural prowess in order to be a more "all around" theatre painter. These

²³ These sketches are placed with the Paris Opera sketches in the Theatre Museum Copenhagen.

drawings inspired Christensen on some level in his own work when he returned to Copenhagen.

Return to Copenhagen

The complexity of Christensen's stage spaces took a leap forward after he returned from his Grand Tour. Prior to his Grand Tour, Christensen created both traditional and nontraditional stage spaces. In this case, traditional means a stage layout that harked back to an earlier scenographic tradition, consisting of wings, often symmetrical, and drops and the use of set pieces was minimal. It is a style that relied heavily on the skill of the theatre painter to create three-dimensional illusion out of two-dimensional scenic elements. Nontraditional stage spaces refers to scenography that broke from this paradigm, where the stage space was more dynamic. Wings and drops were still used, but they were not the focus. Set pieces were used, and plasticity and levels began to play a more important roll.

From his return to Copenhagen in 1839 until the opening of the ballet *Napoli* in 1842, Christensen created scenography for all or part of twelve different productions. Lack of supporting source material makes analysis of all the works impossible. Of the works that can be analyzed, all show a departure from his earlier work in both style and content. All the sets he created before his Grand Tour were landscapes; after his return, he also created architectural scenes. The two productions that show the direct influence of his Grand Tour on his scenography are the ballets *The Festival in Albano*,²⁴ 1839 and *Napoli*, 1842, both choreographed by Ballet Master August Bournonville.

The Festival in Albano

Upon his return, the Theatre Direction contacted Christensen about creating the scenography for a new Bournonville one-act ballet entitled *The Festival in Albano*. The ballet was conceived as a tribute to Bertil Thorvaldsen after his return to Copenhagen. At this point, Bournonville had never travelled to Italy, so he relied on Christensen's knowledge. The ballet's plot revolves around a group of Northern artists who are visiting Albano on the day that the most beautiful maiden in the village is to marry. They are disappointed she is marrying a peasant, but to console themselves, they hide and draw pictures of her. One of these pictures later causes a ruckus. Eventually harmony is restored, and the festivities continue. Christensen created one set for this ballet. The description of the stage in the libretto reads: "An elevated open square from which, through the town and some pieces of luxuriant vegetation, one looks out over the Campagna to Rome. To the right, Vincenza's house; to the left, the Inn. Between the two houses, a flight of stairs [leads] from the terrace down into the valley. In the right foreground, a picture of the Madonna is fastened to an old evergreen oak."²⁵

24 A more complete analysis of Christensen's scenography for *The Festival in Albano* appears in Byrn 2012, 39–42.

25 Bournonville 1979 "The Festival in Albano", 306.



FIGURE 5. Christensen's scenographic sketch for the ballet *The Festival in Albano*, 1839. The Theatre Museum.

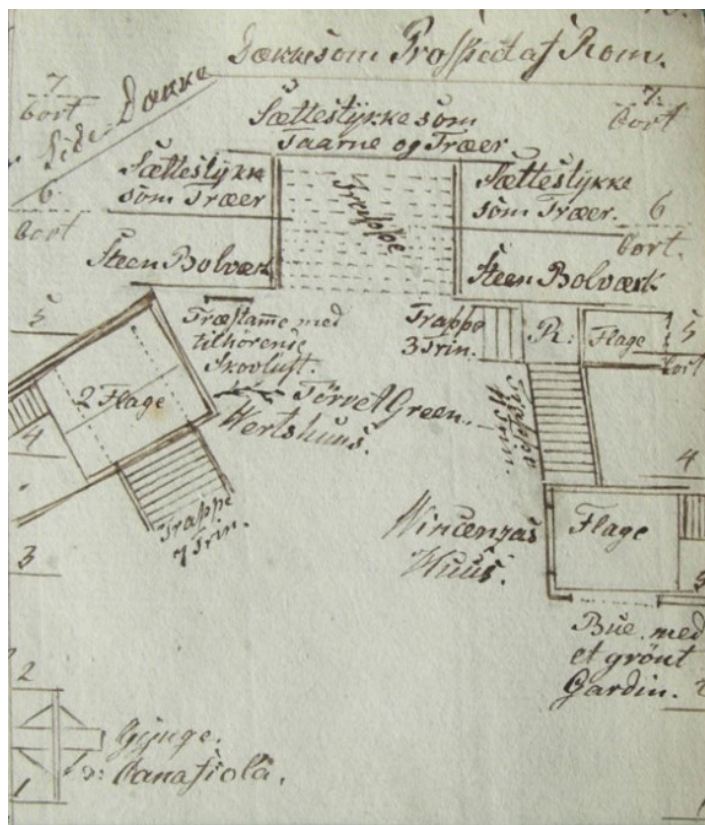


FIGURE 6. C. F. Christensen's floor plan for the ballet *The Festival in Albano*, 1839 from *Machine Master Protocol*. Danish National Archives.

Fortunately, two sources allow an extensive analysis of Christensen's scenography. First, Christensen's rendering for the scene is preserved in the collection of the Theatre Museum (Figure 5) and second, the *Machine Master*

Protocol (MMP) for *Ballet* started in 1824/25 contains a detailed floor plan (Figure 6) and description of the scenography. The description in the libretto matches Christensen's rendering very well: Vincenza's house, the Inn, the "luxuriant vegetation," the Madonna on the tree and stairs in the middle leading down. Christensen uses the proscenium to "cut off" the tops and sides of the trees giving the impression they continue beyond the frame, which is a technique for which Ciceri was known. In this floor plan, one sees many interesting developments in Christensen's style. The *MMP* describes the scene as the first 3 wings stage right and the first 2 wings stage left being painted like a forest "in a Southern character."²⁶ The down stage wings representing the "luxuriant vegetation" created a framing element through which the rest of the scene could be viewed. It is the same framing effect the tent in the ballet *La Gypsy* Act Two, scene 1 created (See Figure 1).

Another element directly transmitted from the Paris Opera was the use of practical stage elements. Christensen's Act 3 *La Gypsy* sketch noted "Everything Practical." For *The Festival in Albano*, Christensen made both Vincenza's house and the Inn three-dimensional practical buildings: not just a painting of a building, not just the front of a building, but buildings. It was a step forward in the development of scenography with real plastic structures on the stage. In addition to the three-dimensionality, both buildings had various levels and stairs, which gave more possibilities for performers entering and exiting the stage.

All the commentary on *The Festival in Albano* agreed that Christensen's scenography transported the audience to the hills surrounding Rome. In *My Theatre Life*, Bournonville called Christensen's work "enchanted". A review in *Portefeuillen* specifically credited Christensen: "As soon as the curtain goes up, we are carried away by Mr. Christensen's decoration, whose powerful local color, warm southern tone and excellent perspective exercise an irresistible effect. We stand on the Albano Mountain... Feelings are set in motion, thoughts are occupied, the imagination is full of life and activity. The illusion is already in place, and before life has yet begun rightly to develop on the stage, the most important thing is already achieved."²⁷

With this depiction of this village square, Christensen was able to transport the audience to Albano before anything ever happened on the stage. In a letter to his wife in 1841 after travelling to Albano for the first time, Bournonville wrote: "I walked around town for a couple of hours and from the lovely Villa Doria gazed out across the Campagna to Rome... Bravo, Christensen! Your scenery is worth its weight in gold; how splendidly the Campagna is depicted—this broad expanse whose undulating plain resembles an ocean. And how gloriously he has used the terrace, upon which the whole northern side of the town rests. Oh! How happy I was!"²⁸

Drawing on his experiences traveling in Italy and working at the Paris Opera, Christensen was able to infuse *The Festival in Albano* scenography with an

26 MMP, 43.

27 Carstensen 1839, 117–118.

28 Bournonville 2002, 399–400.

idealized reality never before seen on the Danish stage. Interestingly, this production was the first time Christensen was mentioned by name in the Danish press, although he had been independently creating scenography since 1833. After his Grand Tour, his art garnered him recognition.

Napoli

In 1842, Christensen created the scenography for Bournonville's three-act ballet *Napoli*. What Christensen did in one act for *The Festival in Albano*, he extended and refined into three acts for *Napoli*. All three acts were influenced by his Grand Tour in different ways, but only the second and third acts will be discussed. The second act of *Napoli* brought Christensen much acclaim. The stage represents the Blue Grotto on Capri, which is the only description in the libretto. There is a painting of the Blue Grotto by Christensen in the Music Museum in Stockholm that corresponds well to the scenography (Figure 7).



FIGURE 7. *The Blue Grotto* by C. F. Christensen, 1842. Music Museum Stockholm.

The description of the stage is as follows, “No. 1 and 2 wings on each side, together with the new border that hangs over the second wings, together with the a new cut out cave drop that hangs between the second and third wings, create a portrait of the dark part of the so called Blue Grotto in the island of Capri.”²⁹ Everything upstage of the third wing pair created a dark frame through which the audience saw the stark contrast to the brightness at the opening of the grotto. Scenographically, this technique can be directly linked to Christensen's Grand Tour because he uses the same technique in the Blue Grotto that Philastre and Cambon used in *La Gypsy*, Act two, scene

29 MMP, 49.

1 at the Paris Opera. (See Figure 1). The downstage elements are much darker, which draws attention to and enhances the lighter upstage portions. This same technique can also be seen in six of the sketches Christensen copied from Basoli. (See Figures 3 and 4.)

The last part of Christensen's Blue Grotto that deserves attention is the lighting. The Royal Danish Theatre did not have gas lighting in 1842, but Christensen had seen innovative lighting effects at the Paris Opera and tried to bring that innovation to the Royal Theatre. The Blue Grotto lighting was clearly more developed than anything done before his Grand Tour. He enhanced the painterly dark/light contrast in a number of ways. According to the *MMP*, the lamps in the draperies and behind the first wings had gray taffeta in front of them. The lamps behind the second wings were completely dark, but the footlights were "lit with the gray taffeta half up."³⁰ The taffeta acted like a filter allowing the dark part of the Grotto to be seen, without throwing too many foot candles on the downstage elements. Instead, the majority of the lighting was utilized upstage of the third wings. Behind the third, fourth and fifth wings the lamps were doubled, thus giving brighter illumination to Christensen's painterly brightness. To bring more illumination into the center part of the Grotto, he placed a bench behind the "rock pillar" just right of center, with another eight lamps on top. To heighten the illusion of the opening of the Grotto leading out to the bright sunshine, Christensen placed tables on either side of the opening in the backdrop. Each table had eight lamps: twenty-four lamps blazing like the morning sun. The critic for *Kjøbenhavnsposten* took note of the lighting and wrote: "Before we end this review, we could not fail to provide Mr. Christensen the praise due to him for the wonderful new decorations painted for this ballet, which give new proof of this young artist's ability and tastefulness. Mr. Christensen has solved the difficult job of producing an image of the famous Blue Grotto with great genius. And this decoration, whose lighting produces an especially magical effect, on both evenings, was greeted with strong and repeated cheers."³¹

The critic for *Dagen* wrote: "In the second act the public's enthusiasm for the artist was summoned by a magnificent and impressive decoration that was rewarded with lively rejoicing; one saw the known Blue Grotto, where the bay cuts in, with a view of the sea through the opening in the grotto's background; the entire [composition] delivered a lovely lifelike painting."³² Christensen was able to integrate what he had learned while on his Grand Tour to rousing effect. Although the lighting capabilities were still quite limited at the Royal Theatre in 1842, Christensen, nonetheless, supplied the production with a dynamic lighting design that greatly enhanced his Blue Grotto.

The third act of *Napoli* takes place outside of Naples at Monte Virgine where a pilgrimage to the *Madonna dell'Arco* takes place. The libretto describes the locale as, "Monte Virgine outside Naples. A bridge connects one hill to the other. A niche in the center pillar of the bridge contains a

30 MMP, 49.

31 s.n. *Københavnsposten* 1.4.1842.

32 s.n. *Dagen* 30.3.1842.

picture of the Madonna, and beneath the large arch can be seen the bay and the shore near Vesuvius. It is midday.³³ In terms of using painted wings, borders and drops, the third act of *Napoli* was reminiscent of Christensen's traditional stage spaces, which relied on painterly skill. However, these elements were not the focus, but instead created a frame for the very untraditional bridge running across the stage. (See Figure 8.) Bridges had been used at the Royal Theatre before: Wallick used a bridge in *Les deux familles*, 1833,³⁴ Troels Lund in *Fata Morgana*, 1838; and Christensen in *The Tyroleans*, 1835; however, the bridge in *Napoli* was massive compared to these others.

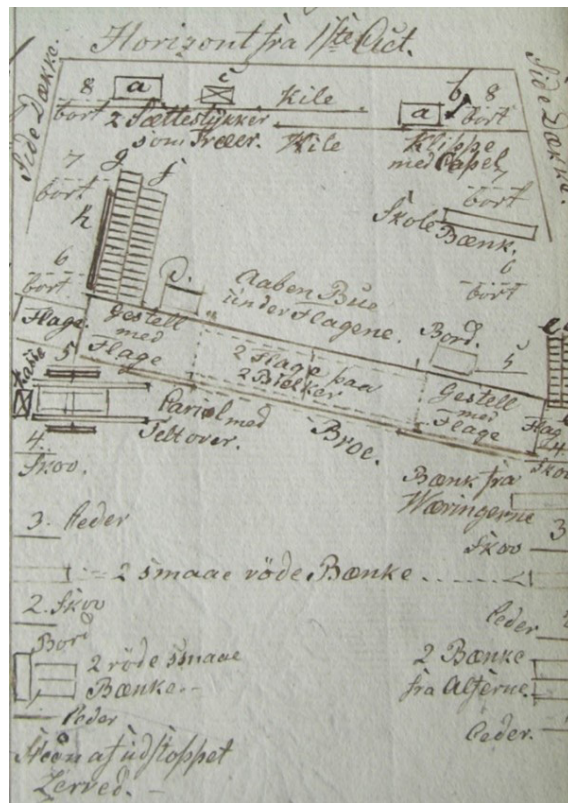


FIGURE 8. Christensen's floor plan for the ballet *Napoli*, Act Three, 1842 from Machine Master Protocol 1, Danish National Archives.

The pilgrims arriving to pay homage to the Madonna entered the stage in a solemn procession

over the bridge. The bridge Christensen created for *Napoli* was huge. The description of the third act in the *MMP* is comprised of forty lines of text. One third of those lines describe the bridge's structure. The bridge was so massive that the walls of the theatre were used to support its structure so the load from the weight of all the performers on it shifted outwardly. Five sets of stairs gave access to the bridge, marked e, f and g in the floor plan. (See Figure 8.)

The artistic inspiration for this bridge had not come from Denmark. The impetus for the bridge in *Napoli* came directly from Christensen's time at the Paris Opera and *La Gypsy* Act Two, scene 3. (See Figure 9.) The major component of this set was a large arched bridge crossing the stage at an angle: just like the bridge in *Napoli*. (See Figure 8 and 9.) *La Gypsy's* bridge had two arches and *Napoli's* only had one, but they are too similar to be a coincidence. There is a direct line of influence from Paris to Copenhagen.

The reason *Napoli* succeeded so well was the unity of the production and the totality of its reception. Bournonville and Christensen had created what Richard Wagner would later call a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but rather than it being the union of opera and drama, it was the union of ballet and drama. Another reviewer from the newspaper *Fædrelandet* was very appreciative of Christensen's individual contribution and recognized the significance of what he had seen on the stage.

33 Bournonville 1979–1980 "Napoli", 442.

34 Christensen assisted Wallick on this production.



FIGURE 9. C. F. Christensen's sketch for the ballet *La Gypsy Act Two*, scene 3, 1839 from the *Paris Opera*. The Theatre Museum.

He wrote: "And this content must be seen and enjoyed, for every single group, every single position, every mimetic movement is an essential part of this. The plastic beauty, this glowing dance, the many real poetic ideas, the genuine comic mood – all this, as said, can not be described, but only seen, and we encourage all those that have an open eye and heart for the impression of plastic artwork to do that. But because we wholeheartedly wish Mr. Bournonville the fresh laurels he has reaped; on the other hand, we dare not let pass with silence the artistic brothers with whom he must share them. To this category, first and foremost, belongs the decoration's painter Mr. Christensen, who has brought the part of the scenic arrangement that has been entrusted to him in this ballet to an as yet unknown height at our Theatre."³⁵

The critic for the newspaper *Dagen* wrote, "In this ballet, Mr. Theatre Painter Christensen has found the opportunity to reveal his great talent. At the moment, each of the three decorations bears witness to our Theatre possessing one of the most distinguished painters around."³⁶ Christensen's time away had made him a better theatre painter, and his talent did not go unnoticed by the audience or critics.

Conclusion

C. F. Christensen took his Grand Tour to enrich himself artistically and to advance

35 s.n. *Fædrelandet* 1.4.1842.

36 s.n. *Dagen* 30.3.1842.

his career. Based on the merit of the scenography for *The Festival in Albano* and a portfolio of drawings he sent to the Art Academy, Christensen qualified for Art Academy membership in November 1839. The process to become a member took another two years, due, in part, to the amount of work he had at the Theatre.³⁷ Once he became a member of the Art Academy, he was appointed Royal Theatre Painter in 1842.³⁸ During his Grand Tour, Christensen saw many productions at some of the finest theatres in Europe. The production *La Gypsy* at the Paris Opera and Basoli's etchings from La Scala impressed him enough that he made sketches. Today, with intellectual property rights and copyright infringement suits making headlines regularly, the idea that Christensen borrowed from Philastre, Cambon and Basoli may diminish his accomplishment to some; however, learning and seeking artistic inspiration from others was the point of the Grand Tour. Artists seek inspiration everywhere, scenographers included. They seek inspiration wherever and whenever they can, then imprint the new work with their own aesthetic. Christensen found his inspiration at the Paris Opera, but made it something wholly his own when he created the scenography for *The Festival in Albano* and *Napoli* in Copenhagen.

Napoli has been part of the Royal Danish Ballet's repertoire since 1842 with more than 950 performances to date. It remains the "calling card" of the Royal Danish Ballet. A few Bournonville ballets have remained in the repertoire since their introduction in the nineteenth century. The scenography for most of them has changed over the years; but looking at productions of *Napoli* over the years, one is struck by how similar they are to Christensen's original scenography including the most recent production from 2018. The costumes have been updated to the 1950s, but Christensen's three designs remain little changed. The effects of Christensen's Grand Tour and his scenographic legacy outlasted him, the nineteenth as well the twentieth centuries, and are still present today in the twenty-first century.

AUTHOR

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³⁷ C. F. Christensen letter 188[?].

³⁸ Troels Lund was also appointed Royal Theatre Painter at the same time as C. F. Christensen.

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