

THE TREASURES OF THE GARDEN OF WONDERS

1 - Diana's Theater

From Sunday 21 June, with immense pleasure and a touch of emotion, we have reopened the gates of the Garden of Wonders of Villa Arconati FAR to our Visitors.

After so many days, weeks, months locked in the house, we went back to see that there is a world outside! Every Sunday our wonderful garden offers the public the opportunity to spend a day between history, art, nature, charm, to live in complete safety.

In recent months we have told you about the treasures of the Castellazzo palace, now we will tell you about the treasures of its garden, which you can admire in person every Sunday!

SINCE THE 17TH CENTURY THE GODDESS PROTECTOR OF THE WOODS HAS PROTECTED THE GARDEN OF CASTELLAZZO

The Diana Theater is the oldest of all those present in the Villa and has preserved the forests of Castellazzo since the seventeenth century. It is also the most imposing and majestic theater of all those in the garden and is located on the main axis of the garden, so that it is immediately visible from the entrance located to the west, on the road to Varese.

The size and location of the theater were not chosen at random: the villa, in fact, was a place for recreation and hunting was one of the favorite pastimes of the aristocracy.

Since the end of the seventeenth century the Arconati garden has been characterized by the presence of environments and sculptures reproducing divinities of classical mythology, all the rage at the time.

Diana, goddess of the hunt, is depicted as an imposing figure in her own theater. The sculpture is in plaster, as are the two dogs (a greyhound and a hound) placed on the sides of the goddess. Two other sandstone dogs are positioned at the foot of the base that supports the sculpture.

Thanks to some documents of the early eighteenth century, it was possible to find the two inscriptions with mottoes related to the divinity, which are located respectively on the scroll placed in the upper part of the tympanum «PRAESIDET HIC NEMORUM CUSTOS, CUSTOSQ; PUDORIS », which also refers to the fact that Diana is the patron goddess of chastity; and on the pedestal that holds the large statue: «IPSA SIBI | SEDEM | FORMAVIT | DIVA | TRIFORMIS». This motto names the goddess as "triform" because Diana watched over the sky, the earth and the underworld.

On the side of the large statue of the divinity, there are two caves in which the two handmaids of the goddess are softly placed. These beautiful sculptures are in white marble.



Diana's Theater in an engraving by Marc'Antonio Dal Re, 1743

THE SPECTACULAR WATER GAMES OF THE THEATER

Diana's Theater was spectacular not only for its size, but also and above all for its daring water games: communicating vessels on the two sides of the theater, which cause jets of water to descend to the ground; a central fountain with water that gushed from the jaws of the little dragon wrapped around a nice cupid; a joke of water operated by a fountain from the back of the theater, positioned between the paws of the sandstone dog to the right of the pedestal of the goddess. And finally the most spectacular game, namely the drop of water drop by drop to simulate the flow of water in the caves of the two nymphs.

Given the complexity of the theater's water features, on the back of the theater there was a water tower with mechanisms similar to those placed in the one on the back of the Limonaia: a cistern for collecting water was located in the upper part of the theater, while at his feet there was a very deep well from which the water was made to rise upwards through the noria, a large wheel moved by a horse. The water, falling from above, received the necessary thrust to operate all the water features of the imposing structure.



Diana theater, pre-restoration

THE RESTORATION

The restoration project of the Diana Theater, carried out between the beginning of 2019 and May 2020, was among the most complex to date built on the garden structures.

The works were carried out under the aegis of the Arch. Antonella Ranaldi of the Superintendency of Archeology, Fine Arts and Landscape for the metropolitan city of Milan.

The stratigraphic investigations carried out for the in-depth study of the structure, before the start of the intervention, revealed under the most recent pictorial layer - made in the twentieth century and very deteriorated - which had a chromatic finish in shades of yellow and orange, a previous layer of plaster with a better preserved pictorial finish and made with more valuable materials: this is the decorative intervention of the first half of the nineteenth century probably coeval with that made at the Andromeda Theater.

The nineteenth-century intervention aimed to reproduce through painting the different types of stone used in some parts of the theater: serizzo, pink granite and sandstone.

Obviously it would have been too expensive to build the entire theater with these materials, therefore painting was used to reproduce the most precious materials. For the guest who watched

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the theater from a distance, therefore, the view of this colossal stone theater, which emerged from the vegetation scenes, must have aroused great amazement (and envy).



Diana's theater after the restoration completed in spring 2020

The niche that frames the head of the goddess in the twentieth century portrayed a shell in orange, red and yellow tones - the colors used throughout the theater - whose design probably echoed that proposed by Marc'Antonio Dal Re in his eighteenth-century engravings, perhaps with the intent to give a rococo appearance to the structure.

The nineteenth-century pictorial layer, however, as witnessed in a late nineteenth-century photograph, saw a decoration with a starry sky, of which pictorial fragments were found under the most superficial layer. This type of decoration was clearly detached from the typical rocailles of the eighteenth-century baroque; however, she went better to identify Diana as the "lunar" and night divinity.

During the restoration, not even the smallest details escaped: original traces of the gilding on the shoes, on the goddess' belt and on the arrows were found, and therefore re-proposed. Finally, the original arch of the goddess was found, which was hidden behind her back: it is a plaster arch, which is placed on the right shoulder of the goddess, behind the quiver with arrows.

The choice to reproduce the nineteenth-century colors was not only dictated by the discoveries in the course of the stratigraphies, but also by a structural stylistic reason: the top of the theater was, in fact, raised in the nineteenth century. From the comparison with the eighteenth-century

engraving by Marc'Antonio Dal Re, in fact, it is clear that the upper part of the tympanum has been raised and molded to place a painted sundial there.

The theme of the passage of time was evidently very dear to the ancient Masters of Castellazzo, so much so that they found themselves in the Teatro delle Quattro Stagioni, in the Sala dello Zodiaco and in the legend that the Villa had 365 windows.

Another sundial was placed, also in the nineteenth century, in the Corte del Cedro, which acts as a place of union between the noble part of the Villa and the Borgo.

On the front of the Theater is the Fontana dei Tritoni, built in the seventeenth century with a sandstone base carved with chimeric figures and an overhanging basin in Candoglia marble, in which two sea monsters spray water from the jaws facing each other. The design of this beautiful fountain, certainly one of the finest pieces in our garden, is attributed to Camillo Procaccini.

Fondazione Augusto Rancilio wishes to thank the restoration firm Magistri srl and SAEM-SMC for the commitment and passion lavished on the realization of the project which saw the Diana Theater return to its former glory.

EVERY SUNDAY COME VISIT THE WONDER GARDEN

To ensure the safety of our visitors, we have prepared some simple rules that will allow everyone to better enjoy their visit.

- Tickets that can be purchased online: entrance tickets to the Garden can be purchased exclusively online on our website <https://www.villaarconati-far.it/ita/visita-la-villa/stagione-aperture.aspx>. This will guarantee our audience to secure their entrance ticket from the comfort of their home, without waiting at the ticket office. Given the vastness of the site, we have the possibility to guarantee a large number of tickets every Sunday, which will be available for purchase until the day of the chosen entrance.
- Contingent entrances: entrances will be guaranteed every 30 minutes, so as to avoid queues and crowds. We ask our Visitors to show up at the entrance on time or up to 5 minutes in advance.
- Temperature measurement: before entering the Villa, visitors will be measured the temperature. In compliance with current legislation, access to the site will not be allowed in the event of temperatures equal to or greater than 37.5 °.
- Hand sanitization: FAR makes hand sanitizing solutions available to its public, so as to guarantee correct and constant hand sanitization.
- Use of masks: entry is allowed only by wearing the mask, which must always cover the nose and mouth. For the protection of all, access with masks with a filter valve is not allowed.
- Distance: we ask our kind visitors to always keep the interpersonal distance of at least 1 meter.

- Duration of the visit: the average visit time of our Garden is about 2 hours. To ensure the safety of all our visitors, only in the event of a risk of gatherings could the public be asked to leave the site after 2 hours of visit. (The entry time indicated on the ticket will prevail)

FAR staff and volunteers will always be available to visitors to answer any questions, meet any need and ensure a peaceful visit, in complete safety and in compliance with current regulations.

THE GOLDONI COFFEE

What "delightful villa" would our little Versailles be, without a moment to indulge in even the delights of the palate?

Our Caffè Goldoni moves in the magnificent setting of the Corte Nobile to give a break of taste before and after the walk in the garden with coffee, ice cream, snacks and sweet and savory delicacies.

It will also be possible to have lunch with toast, freshly prepared fresh sandwiches and cold dishes. As usual, in compliance with current hygiene and health standards, it is not possible to access the villa with food brought from outside.

THE FAR BOOKSHOP

The FAR Bookshop is open for you with new Italian artisan products, made exclusively for you. To bring home a memory of your day spent among the wonders of the enchanted Garden.

Villa Arconati-FAR

Garden opening to the public

every Sunday from 11.00 to 19.00

Tickets can only be purchased online:

<https://www.villaarconati-far.it/ita/visita-la-villa/stagione-apertura.aspx>

Dogs are allowed on a leash

Rates:

- Whole entrance: € 5.00 + presale rights
- Reduced admission: children aged 11 to 18 and people with disabilities: € 3.00 + presale rights
- Free admission: children up to 10 years and companion of disabled people