

The Sferisterio Arena in Macerata

Source: https://web.archive.org/web/*/sferisterio%20opera%20festival



HISTORY OF A CHARMING OPEN-AIR THEATRE, WHICH WAS ESTABLISHED AS PLAYGROUND FOR THE GAME OF THE BALL AND THE GAMBLE AND, TRAVELLING THROUGH TIME, HAS BECOME A TEMPLE DEVOTED TO THE OPERA

Sferisterio

The Sferisterio of Macerata stands out as one of the most prominent architectural features of the late European Neoclassical Style.

After the Napoleonic era and with the advent of the Restoration, a few wealthy gentlemen living in Macerata – a large inscription on the building façade still pays homage to their generosity – decided to have their city enriched by what was first conceived as a 'useful building': the Sferisterio was erected to host the game with the ball and bangle and, at the same time, to be used an arena for the 'steccato' and for bull hunting, which was very popular throughout the Papal State at the time.

The troubled construction of the Sferisterio began on 2 October 1820, based on a project by Salvatore Innocenzi, which was soon to be halted for three long years.



The wealthy citizens, who had engaged their own money in the construction of the building, could not come to an agreement on the solutions envisaged and, among a host of projects and ideas, they finally chose the drawings by Ireneo Aleandri, who was at the time a young and unknown architect from San Severino Marche (MC). The Sferisterio was inaugurated on 5 September 1829.

The building faces the square which leads to the grand town entrance called Porta Mercato. Its long, semi-circular side runs along Via Pantaleoni, following the city walls which were partly destroyed to be replaced by the Sferisterio walls.



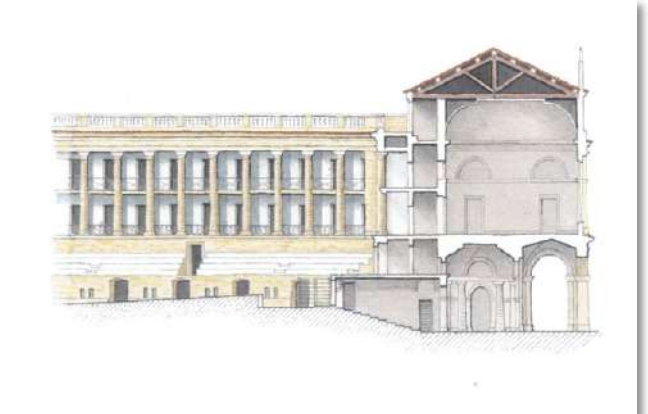
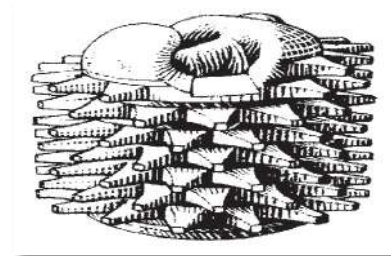
The inscription on the main façade of the *Sferisterio*:

Ad ornamento della città a diletto pubblico la generosità di cento consorti edificò. 1829

The generosity of a hundred co-owners built [this arena] to adorn the city and for the public delight.

The Sferisterio stands out among similar buildings which were erected in the same period throughout Italy (Bologna, Pisa, Roma) and generally had a semi-elliptical plan: Aleandri discarded this and other options which would have been inadequate for the game of the ball and bangle and would have spoiled the vision. He opted for a composite plan, which implied curved perimeter walls running all along a straight wall which was the main part of the building.

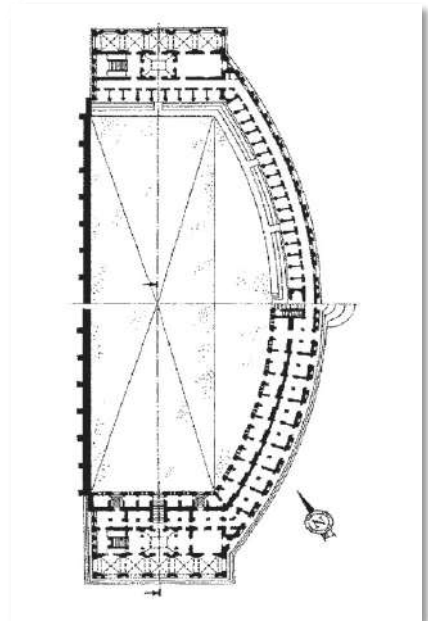
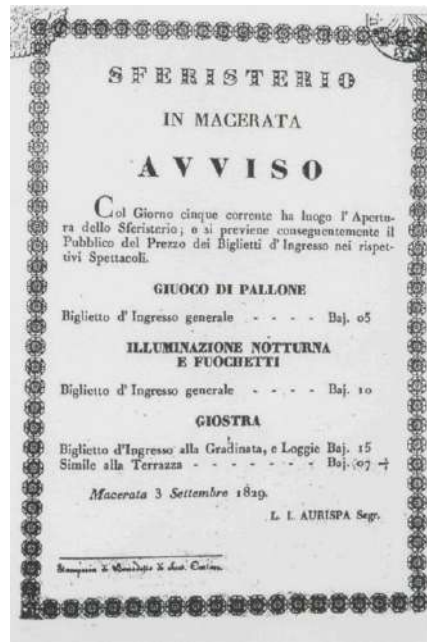
The very peculiar shape of the building –made up of a playing field, several premises to be used for various purposes, a sustaining wall, boxes and balconies – was carefully designed to encompass all the needs of the sport activities which were popular in the first half of the Eighteenth century.



Walking through the main entrance, one may be struck by the surprisingly wide space to be found inside: the huge 90 x 36 mt. arena is marked by two straight edges and a long, wide curve facing the huge background wall which is 18 metres high and almost 90 metres wide.

This high wall, nowadays so widely praised, was part of the requirements for the game of the ball and the bangle, whose rules foresaw a wall for the ball to bounce against.

The wide stalls are set among the grass and surrounded by a grand tier rising up above the stalls, under which animals to be used in bull hunting were kept.



The main entrance is located on the front and two additional entrances are to be found along the wide curved wall.

The Sferisterio has a maximum capacity of 3000 people, with seats being distributed over the three rows on the tier running all along the sides and the two rows of boxes (104) which stand above the tier. On top of the building is a wide terrace which reveals an amazing view. The harmonious structure, marked by beautiful columns, ensures perfect vision and wonderful acoustics.



56 Doric columns with Attic base stretch over the royal stage, supporting the boxes and ending in the stone terrace which beautifully crowns the whole structure. [Ireneo Aleandri](#) had the great merit of designing a Neoclassical structure with a clear Palladian influence which is not only magnificent and harmonious per se, but beautifully and perfectly blends in with the city landscape.

Sferisterio: the monument

Source: <https://www.sferisterio.it/en/sferisterio-macerata>

Pdf to download:

<https://www.macerataculture.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/inglese.pdf>

The Sferisterio of Macerata stands out as one of the most prominent architectural structures of the late European Neoclassical Style.

In the first half of the Nineteenth century, a few wealthy gentlemen living in Macerata decided to enrich their city with a permanent structure used to host the game with ball and bangle and, at the same time, as an arena for the 'steccato' and for bull fighting, which was very popular at the time of the Papal State. Construction began on 2 October, 1820, according to the drawings provided by Salvatore Innocenzi. However, these were soon replaced by a project designed by Ireneo Aleandri, a young architect from San Severino Marche (MC). The Sferisterio was inaugurated on 5 September, 1829. The very special shape of the building – which includes a playing field, a series of rooms for various purposes, a supporting wall, boxes and balconies – was carefully designed to encompass the needs of the sports activities which were popular in the first half of the Nineteenth century. The building, which is in line with the best Neoclassical taste and betrays a Palladian influence, is not only magnificent per se, but it perfectly blends with the city landscape. The harmonious structure ensures perfect visibility and wonderful acoustics.

The Aida of 1921

Over the years the Sferisterio, which had been conceived for sports activities, turned into a venue for opera performances. The first opera to be staged at the Sferisterio was Aida, in 1921, under the auspices of the Society of Citizens led by count Pieralberto Conti.

Thus, in those years the arena was turned into an open-air theatre. A huge, curved stage was built and the orchestra was placed just below it, while numbered seats for the audience were arranged all around the stage area. A large opening was made at the centre of the background wall, so as to provide a grand entrance for the triumphant victory of the Egyptian conqueror. The town authorities put their best effort into increasing accommodations as well as hospital facilities and, on the whole, everything was done to make people's stay in this town as pleasant and long as possible. Aida was performed 17 times for an overall amount of more 70,000 viewers, a record which has never been broken since. The following year La Gioconda was staged, this time with no great success. In the wake of this failure, opera performances at the Sferisterio were halted.

The Macerata Opera Festival

After World War II, the Marche had very few occasions to listen to "bel canto". **In 1967, Carlo Perucci** from San Benedetto del Tronto set up the "Opera circuit of the Marche", in the hope to give life to a solid organization. When he reached Macerata, he proposed to set up a performance at the Sf. Within a short time, a new stage was built and three arched entrances were carved out of the background wall, while the whole theatre was equipped with a good lighting system.

Perucci also did his best to bring to Macerata a number of outstanding performers: **Del Monaco** and Protti for Verdi's Otello but also Antonietta Stella and Nicola Ruggeri for Giacomo Puccini's Madama Butterfly. Members of the orchestra came from every corner of the region, while the settings were so well-constructed that they almost seemed to be a natural backdrop. On 3 August, the lights went down and the notes of Verdi's opera began to play: it was an incredible success.

At the end of the Eighties, the Municipality of Macerata, the Province administration and the civil society named "Eredi dei Cento Consorti" joined their efforts to give life to Associazione Arena Sferisterio, which was to organize and manage the summer opera seasons. Since then, **a summer festival called 'Macerata Opera'** has been taking place each year, drawing audiences from all parts