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Building the Big Chief: Charles Garnier and the Paris of his time

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BUILDING THE BIG CHIEF:
CHARLES GARNIER AND THE PARIS
OF HIS TIME

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

In

The Department of History

By

Paige Bowers

B.A., Louisiana State University, 1995

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have worked as a journalist for almost two decades and during that time I have been told that I have committed nothing more than first drafts of history to print. A rainy day in an old Parisian opera house changed my willingness to be a first draft hack, and before I knew it I was corresponding with a professor who tried – and failed – to convince me to pursue advanced studies in history in 1995. Dr. Benjamin F. Martin did not have to respond to my 2009 email requesting a recommendation letter to Emory University’s graduate school, but he did. Before I knew it, he had convinced me to apply to Louisiana State University too. Less than a year later, and all within the span of a month, I sold my house in Atlanta, moved back to my native Louisiana, put my daughter on a bus for her first day of kindergarten and immediately hopped in a car for my first day of school in fifteen years. There I was in Himes Hall again, sitting in Dr. Martin’s office, wondering what I had done just like I used to do as an undergraduate.

The Kleenex was right where it used to be.

I would like to thank Dr. Martin for seeing the potential not only in me, but in a project that began as a pet curiosity of mine. I had covered the American South for more than a decade and then found myself smitten by a gilt-loving Frenchman named Charles Garnier. Why? No one understood it, least of all me. But Dr. Martin offered me an indispensable independent study and countless insights that helped me nibble away at part of this enigma. For that I am eternally grateful.

Dr. David F. Lindenfeld, in my first semester here, plunged me into the nineteenth century intellectual history that courses through this thesis. From Marx to Monet, nationalism to liberalism and more, he gave me a crash course on the things I needed to consider as I delved deeper and deeper into Charles Garnier’s Paris. He was kind, patient and thoughtful, always

prodding me to think a little deeper and be a little more critical as I pushed through readings that both excited and challenged me. I hope that I have done his teachings some justice in these pages.

Dr. Suzanne L. Marchand has been amazing in so many ways, whether it was referring me to classical readings that helped me understand Garnier's architecture or encouraging me to travel to Paris earlier this year to sift through the architect's many papers. She reminded me how to write academic essays, reassured me that her door was always open, cracked open a part of my brain that had long since grown rusty. Her kindnesses kept me going at times when my *sitzfleisch* (a term I learned from her) waned.

Dr. Victor Stater and the Department of History generously supported my trip to Paris in January 2012, and Ms. Darlene Albritton patiently steered me through the process of booking a flight through the university's travel provider. Dr. Steven K. Ross was invaluable in helping me draw links between Second Empire Paris and Augustan Rome. In Paris, the incredible archives staff at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra and the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts shared their treasures, answered my questions and directed me toward the papers that shed new light on the wild-haired architect that has bedeviled me so.

Dr. Martin likes to talk about how far I have come in two years. Such journeys are impossible without the love and understanding of friends and family. Among the friends and colleagues who have cheered me on, poured me drinks and made me laugh are: Julie Baggenstoss, Matt and Kathryn Bedette, Andrea Billups, Gaedig Bonabesse, Hamilton Cain, Melinda Deslatte, Ben and Kristi Ellis, Darren Gauthier, Richard C. Gross, Michelle M. Havich, Emily and Larry Hubbard, David W. Jones, Wendy Grossman Kantor, Shannon and Bret Lane, Rich and Wendy Loup, Nancy Millar, Heather and Paul Miller, Sharla Myers, Daphne

Nikolopoulos, Doug Ortego, Tim Padgett, Pat Parish, Karen Pery, Donna Reichmann, Kenna Simmons, Keith Smith, Warren and Lisa Strobel, Wade Trosclair, Jason Viso and Jason Wolfe.

My mother, Patricia N. Bowers, gave me my love of reading, writing and well-told history. Normally, you can find her curled up with books about Ancient Egypt or watching programs with Egyptologist Zahi Hawass. During her recuperation from knee replacement surgery this spring, she curled up with various incarnations of this thesis. I am grateful for her feedback, her constant love and encouragement, and her willingness to be drawn into the shimmering world of Second Empire France.

My gorgeous and talented younger sister, Katherine Warren, met me at Dulles Airport on the day I left for Paris. We caught up over drinks, had plenty of laughs, and had so much fun I almost missed my flight. Ever faithful, she rushed me out of the restaurant to the security line where she shouted “Vive la France” at me as soon as I cleared the scanner. If my brother-in-law Tony had been there too, there is no doubt in my mind that I would have missed my plane to Charles de Gaulle.

Few husbands would allow their wives to become as interested in another man as I have these past two years, but Jeffrey M. Diecks is secure enough with himself and supportive of me to allow me to become tangled in the mane of a nineteenth-century Frenchman. Along with the Department of History, his support – and most importantly his love – made this Paris trip and this thesis possible. I cannot thank him enough for all the thesis drafts he has suffered through, all the stories he has heard about this interesting tidbit I found here or there, all the times he reminded me that I can do it because I have done some smaller version of something like it before. He has the patience of a saint, the eye of an eagle and a heart of gold. We will celebrate our tenth anniversary this year.

My daughter Avery stood with me in the Palais Garnier for the first time when she was four years old. It was September 2009, the day was rainy and cold and it is safe to say that she had never seen such a spectacle in all her brief life. When I told her that this was where all the great ballerinas danced, she stood there, her eyes wide, and told me in a hushed voice “I want to dance here someday too, Mama. I want to dance here someday too.” Mama decided she wanted to join you, and this thesis is the result. I dedicate it to you, sweet Avery, my whole entire heart. Keep dreaming big dreams, baby girl, and working hard. You can accomplish anything you want.

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ABSTRACT

The Paris Opera House, or Palais Garnier, is known as the backdrop for the Broadway musical *Phantom of the Opera*, which has been seen by more than 100 million people worldwide since its debut a quarter-century ago. Outside of France, more people know about the fictional phantom Erik and his white mask than they do Charles Garnier, the building's real life architect. Based on substantial archival research at Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra and the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, this study presents a rare biographical portrait of Garnier, whose rags-to-riches tale was emblematic of a nineteenth-century Paris where opportunities abounded for men of talent and drive.

Born the son of a blacksmith, Garnier was too sickly to follow in his father's professional footsteps. He took advantage of new educational opportunities that taught him first how to read and write, then to draw, then to be an architect. The award of a Prix de Rome in 1848 granted him five years to study, sketch and travel throughout Italy, Greece and Turkey. Away from Paris, he stoked his ambitions, refined his sensibilities and gained an appreciation for classical buildings and art. Sifting through rubble with his bare hands at the Temple of Aegina, the power of ancients seized his imagination. On his return to Paris, his newly developed expertise enabled him to win the commission to build the new Opera house which Napoleon III wanted to be the crown jewel of his refurbished and modernized Paris. Garnier needed thirteen years to complete the work, but when it was done, it stood magnificent. Born in obscurity and poverty, Garnier was now wealthy and the most famous architect in Europe.



Image 1: Charles Garnier, architect of the Paris Opéra.
Bibliothèque Musée de l'Opéra, Paris.

INTRODUCTION

“ONE COMES HERE FOR THE CHARM”



Image 2: The Palais Garnier, December 30, 2011. Photograph taken by the author.

Climb into the ninth arrondissement from the Paris Métro’s Opéra stop and you will be greeted by gold, grinning theatrical masks that glisten from the rooftop of the Palais Garnier, the nineteenth-century opera house where art and architecture are as much a spectacle as the performances that still grace its stage. A dizzying symphony of ornate Corinthian columns, elegant arches, multicolored marble and painstakingly carved stone flutter across the building’s main façade, which is emblazoned with winged statues and gilded busts of musical composers.¹ Cupid-encircled crests embedded with Napoleonic “Ns” are a part of this performance, a none-too-subtle reminder of the man who commissioned the building in 1860 as a monument to arts and empire. Piercing the ink-black evening sky is a statue of Apollo, god of music, who stands atop the building, his golden lyre raised high above the surrounding high-end department stores,

¹ Left to right, the composers set in circular niches along the front of the building are Gioachino Rossini, Daniel Auber, Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Gaspard Spontini, Giacomo Meyerbeer and Fromental Halévy.

cafés and bon-bon shops. He is flanked by Poetry and Music and winged horses whose angry hooves slice through the night.

Inside this jewel box, ballet aficionados climb a grand marble staircase to find their seats as a sing-song plea to buy programs echoes through the alcoves. There are mosaics from another place and time here, electrical lighting that was advanced for its era, sculpture everywhere you look. And there is *always* somewhere to look. When your eye is not drawn to the eight-ton chandelier surrounded by a Mark Chagall mural, or to the gilded angels adorning the edges of the auditorium's ceiling, you look at ladies in their fur coats, gentlemen in their smart black suits, tourists posing for pictures in front of the stage's faux red velvet curtain. You take it all in from a cramped red velvet seat designed more than a century ago for smaller people with different cares. "One does not come to the Garnier to be comfortable, my dear," an exasperated Parisian lady huffs at her stiff-backed husband. "One comes here for the charm." The lights go down.

The author of this thesis came to the Palais Garnier for the first time on a rainy afternoon in September 2009. Yes, she found charm. After all, the Garnier resides in the popular consciousness as the backdrop for the Tony award-winning musical *The Phantom of the Opera*, a show seen by more than 100 million people around the world since it premiered at Her Majesty's Theater in London a little more than 25 years ago. Based on the critically panned novel of the same name by Gaston Leroux, the musical introduced audiences to a stunning music hall with a grand marble staircase, a chandelier that once plummeted from the ceiling, and an eerie underground lake where a phantom in a white mask lurks. Audiences have learned that the building was masterminded by an architect named Charles Garnier, but nothing beyond that. Who would not wonder about Garnier, a man with kaleidoscopic dreams that shimmer to this day in the pale Parisian moonlight? Who would not want to dig past Leroux's elaborate fiction to

unearth a real-life tale about the most famous architect working in the latter half of the 1800s? And why not strip away the phantom's white mask to find out why a man like Garnier could be so famous, but such an apparition in the pages of history books?

What began as a charm-filled afternoon out of the rain became something else – a quest to answer some of these bothersome little questions. Bothersome little questions, after all, have served as the basis for many a story idea throughout the author's career as a freelance journalist. But do such musings make for good history? Perhaps it depends on the subject. Perhaps it depends on the writer, as well. Although a historian's mission is to advance new arguments in her field of study, the idealistic among them hope to introduce interesting worlds and people to a broad readership in the hopes of educating and maybe even entertaining them. The journalist that resides in this particular author's heart understands that *Phantom* is the so-called popular hook that leads readers down a path toward Garnier, just as the biographer Stacy Schiff understood that Elizabeth Taylor could shepherd her readers down a winding road toward Cleopatra VII. Beyond that gateway of modern popular culture, an extraordinary amount of research is required to transform a fluffy character sketch into a deeper and more resonant tale. Our interests become academic, our story more complex, our subject more compelling. This thesis will fuse the popular and profound. After all, there is no *Phantom* without Garnier.

When Charles Garnier died in 1898 at the height of his profession, his sweet-natured widow Louise laid the foundation for how – and whether – he would be remembered beyond the nineteenth century. She was protective of her husband, and as a well-educated woman from a middle-class family she would take an active role in ensuring that history did not demolish him in the way that Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann demolished parts of Paris during its mid-nineteenth-century reconstruction. After sifting through and organizing countless newspaper

clippings, official and personal letters, sketches, photography and other items in Charles' possession, Louise, the granddaughter of a Napoleonic-era archivist, donated his papers to the Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra and École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (ENSBA). Without question, these archival holdings attest to the architect's influence in the Paris of his time, provide insight into how he developed his architectural style and breathe life into an often contradictory and complicated man who was inspired -- and occasionally tormented -- by the world that surrounded him. The papers also shed light on his private life, which was that of a middle-class – or bourgeois – Left Bank Parisian, who traveled frequently, had varied hobbies, and surrounded himself with a wide array of political, artistic, entrepreneurial and literary individuals. Louise's hand in these insights becomes especially evident in the 50 years of correspondence between herself, Charles, and the painter Paul Baudry, a family friend who worked with Garnier on the opera. Interspersed with the letters are Louise's own journal entries and annotations that provide relevant background material about the names, places and subjects mentioned in each note.² “There was a time when I wrote every day about what I saw, what I thought, what I heard throughout the day,” Louise Garnier wrote in 1914. “But for a good number of years, I wrote nothing. I had nothing but sad things to note!”³

When Louise reflected on her life with Charles, she picked up her pen again, bringing her spouse to life in a warm-hearted biographical sketch for *L'Architecture* that described him as a singular figure in Paris, someone who overcame humble beginnings to achieve artistic greatness. With scant documentation of her husband's early life, Louise crafted a story about a sickly boy born to working-class parents who eked out a hardscrabble existence in one of Paris' worst

² École Normale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (hereinafter ENSBA), Louise Garnier, ms 742.

³ Charles and her son Christian died within a month of each other in 1898. ENSBA, Louise Garnier, journal entry, November 1, 1914, ms. 742.

slums. The story is based on her spouse's recollections about his youth, memories that were no doubt embellished over the years to enhance an operatic, rags-to-riches tale that made Garnier's social ascent seem all the more remarkable. One cannot discount the role of a mourning wife's heart in such a story; she painted a loving portrait of a complicated and sometimes publicly vilified figure who occasionally crumbled under the political pressure that went hand in hand with crafting an everlasting monument out of stone and steel. Those reminiscences, captured in the 1925 article "Charles Garnier, par Mme. Garnier," were published after her death in 1919 and served as the foundation for future biographical sketches about the architect.⁴

According to historians such as Jean-Michel Leniaud, the challenge in crafting a definitive biographical treatment of Charles Garnier comes from both the sheer volume of documents available to researchers and the fact that some of the documents written by the architect are simply difficult to read. When writers have tackled Garnier, it has been in a celebratory speech, an article or as a component of larger studies about his architecture. Architecture historian Christopher Curtis Mead has written the only treatment of Garnier's work in English.⁵ Louise, as eager to provide clarity about her husband in widowhood as she was during her marriage, admits to copying some of Charles' letters in her own script to make them more decipherable.⁶ During his lifetime, she often wrote to Charles' friends to make sure they

⁴ Louise Garnier, "Charles Garnier," *L'Architecture*, XXXVIII (1925), 385.

⁵ The two main studies of Charles Garnier's work are as follows: Jean Michel Leniaud, *Charles Garnier* (Paris: Monum, 2003) and Christopher Curtis Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera: Architectural Empathy and the Renaissance of French Classicism* (New York: The Architectural History Foundation, 1991). Included in those studies are brief treatments of his life and times. ENSBA released a book of recent French scholarship that included studies about Garnier's social networks, his education and his architectural influences. That book is *Charles Garnier: Un architecte pour un empire* (Paris: Beaux-arts de Paris les éditions, 2010).

There are also several Italian-language studies of Garnier's years as a Prix de Rome laureate. One of them is Massimiliano Savorra, *Charles Garnier in Italia, un viaggio attraverso le arti 1848-1854* (Padua: Il poligrafo, 2003).

⁶ "As my dear husband wrote very poorly, I copied his letter so that you could read it better." Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra (hereinafter BMO), Fonds Garnier, Louise Garnier to unknown recipient, June 1, 1903, Letters from Louise Garnier, pièce 204, letter 2; ENSBA, Louise Garnier, introductory note, undated, ms 742.

understood his “frightful handwriting,” which flew across the page in an effort to keep up with his racing thoughts.⁷ In recent years, French researchers have begun to wade through the volumes of paper resting in the Fonds Garnier; in 2010, their efforts resulted in a first-of-its-kind exhibition about the architect at ENSBA.⁸

None of this work would have been possible without Louise Garnier’s foresight. A rosy-cheeked beauty full of womanly curves and quiet assurance, Louise was Baudry’s “little protector and cherished sister” because of her knack for quietly smoothing over his disagreements with Charles.⁹ In turn, she called Baudry and other family friends her “little lambs.”¹⁰ Perhaps Louise approached her marriage to Garnier, 11 years her senior, in that same spirit, shepherding him gently through his life.



Image 3: Louise Garnier by Paul Baudry.
www.repro-tableaux.com

Her Charles did not always sparkle with the intensity of his storied creation, in part because of a lifelong struggle with depression that occasionally rendered him melancholy and a

⁷ ENSBA, Louise Garnier, journal entry, August, 1869, ms. 742.

⁸ “Charles Garnier: un architecte pour un empire,” featured Garnier’s drawings and architectural plans, but also profiled him as a man of varied interests and talents who kept interesting company and designed villas, a casino, an observatory and tombs for prominent figures after he completed the opera.

⁹ ENSBA, Louise Garnier, journal entry, October 10, 1866, ms. 742.

¹⁰ ENSBA, Letter from Louise Garnier to Paul and Ambroise Baudry, undated, ms. 742.

bit of a hypochondriac, as well as nervous, exasperating and uncommonly stubborn. Throughout their 40-year marriage, Louise remained by his side with an affection that steadied her spouse and occasionally shielded him from the emotional rigors of his very public life. When Charles was ill, Louise drafted correspondence for him, sent excuse notes on his behalf and nursed him through his many bouts of blues, all the while patiently calling him her “nervosissimo,” or little nervous one.¹¹ “Charles is getting better, but he would like to be cured immediately and he is making me very sorry with his unfair impatience,” Louise wrote Baudry in 1871, the faint signs of her exasperation bleeding onto the page. “I try to help him, but find I must use my strength to help him battle these imaginary illnesses, like Don Quixote against the windmills [a reference to the fictional character’s fight with windmills he believes to be monsters].” In an accompanying letter, Charles wrote Baudry, either out of genuine anxiety or a desire to poke fun at his long-suffering wife, “But I want to see them, these things that upset me so!”¹²

Can a bundle of nerves like Garnier serve as a trustworthy guide to nineteenth-century Paris? Yes, if you are looking for certain things. Born in 1825 during the last five years of King Charles X’s reign, Garnier, son of a poor blacksmith, was probably too young to remember the 1830 revolution that forced the last Bourbon king from the throne. Furthermore, the future architect may not have thought too much about the July Monarchy of King Louis-Philippe. This thesis will argue that the period’s social, economic and political changes laid the foundation for the man he would become. Although historians such as Frederick B. Artz, M.D.R. Leys and Sébastien Charléty believe this era was a dull period of little consequence, others such as Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny and David Pinkney claim that it was, in fact, vital to the transformation of post-revolutionary France, a country that was still mired in the ways of the Old

¹¹ BMO, Louise Garnier to Doctor Firmin, March 25, 1871, pièce 115.

¹² ENSBA, Letters from Louise and Charles Garnier to Paul Baudry, March 11, 1871, ms. 741.

Regime it had struggled to overthrow. Peace and relative prosperity were restored, education became available to more and more Frenchmen, industrialization slowly blossomed, roads and rail lines began connecting Paris to the outlying provinces. People flocked to Paris in search of opportunity. They discovered that their hopes would carry them only so far.¹³ Determination was the key to success, as men like Garnier would demonstrate. Many studies of Garnier gloss over this early period and begin in 1848 when he won the Prix de Rome as a 22-year-old student at the École des Beaux-Arts. This is because of the scant documentary evidence on the architect between 1825 and 1848. Even though documents are few and far between, it is possible to get a sense of the life Garnier may have led, a feel for the forces that may have shaped him, by turning to Louise Garnier's recollections and fusing them, as this thesis does, with stories about people from similar working-class backgrounds to explore how the political, economic and social factors of the period may have empowered these people to work their way out of poverty. Such an exploration may shed light on how a person with Garnier's background could succeed in a public role usually given to men with titles and old money. We cannot build Garnier without laying this foundation first.

As the revolutions of 1848 rumbled across the European continent, Garnier won the Prix de Rome for architecture, which required him to leave Paris for Rome to study classical monuments and ruins for five years. Garnier, who had never been out of France or away from his parents for long, was transported into a world of opulence when he moved into the Villa Medici with almost twenty other art students at the beginning of 1849. From his perch on the Pincian Hill he could see all of Rome and the architecture that would influence his later work. Here,

¹³ Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny, *The Bourbon Restoration* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966); Alistair Horne, *Seven Ages of Paris* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 211-217; David H. Pinkney, *The Decisive Years in France, 1840-1847* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, Inc., 1995), 196-201.

Garnier comes into focus as “Carlo,” a bon vivant and restless soul who raced through Italy in search of inspiration, before growing bored and running off to study Greek ruins in Athens. There, Garnier lost himself and a bit of his mind in the rubble of a temple he excavated with the help of an older Greek man, a borrowed pickaxe, and his own two hands. By then, his mind sparkled with images – Corinthian columns, sweeping domes, rich mosaics, embedded sculptures, intricate details – that would emerge a decade later in the opera hall that he crafted on a marshy site in the ninth arrondissement. His Prix de Rome foray would not be complete until he went to Constantinople, where he soaked up the color and costume, patterns and promise of the Byzantine world. In 1854, these images and lessons are what a tired, emotionally fragile Garnier brought back to Paris, which was dusty with the rubble of a city-wide reconstruction that had just begun.

Napoleon III had become emperor while Garnier was in Italy, and the ruler was eager to resurrect his uncle’s glory. On the surface, Second Empire Paris was a carnival-like time characterized by a growing middle class and the music of Jacques Offenbach, an era when an emperor hungered to build a modern city worthy of the world’s attention and turned to new men full of energy and talent to make his dreams a reality. It did not matter where those men came from. Charles Garnier was proof of that. In 1861 he won an open competition to build an opulent opera hall that honored a proud imperial regime. Until that victory, Garnier was an unknown who had been paying his dues in the state’s growing architectural bureaucracy. Tasked with the creation of a bold new temple for the performing arts, Garnier became known as “The Big Chief,” a man in charge of a prominent artistic enterprise that was closely monitored by the state. Before the French Revolution, his achievement would have been impossible, given France’s social stratification. During the Second Empire, however, careers like these were open to men of

talent, making it possible for the dogged Garnier to climb into Paris' growing bourgeois society and become internationally renowned at the age of 36. His family trips graced the front pages of newspapers, his masterpiece inspired conversation and controversy, and his colorful circle of intimates included the mentalist Stuart Cumberland, composer Giuseppe Verdi, financier Raphael Bischoffsheim and army colonel Jérôme Bonaparte II.

Although historians such as Brison D. Gooch, Lewis Namier and Theodore Zeldin have viewed Napoleon III as a power-hungry autocrat or policy cretin, recent work by Roger L. Williams and Sudhir Hazareesingh demonstrates that he was a farsighted proponent of Saint-Simonian economic reforms and domestic public works who was burdened by grievous health problems. His rebuilding project gutted the dark, tangled streets of Garnier's youth, replacing them with broad avenues, public parks and grand monuments. Garnier's opera was one of the focal points in the plan. The building would become a stage for opera and ballet performances. It also would become a stage for the French capital's growing bourgeoisie, which gained profit and power during the Second Empire. Prosperity was the new show in the French capital and the emperor was directing the performance, embracing an economic policy in which industry would lead the way to a better – and new -- society. But what did this better society look like? For whom would it be better? Why did having a new opera matter? Better yet, why did Garnier matter? In historical accounts of the reconstruction of Paris, Garnier emerges as a minor player in the reconstruction story when he does emerge at all.¹⁴ This bit part comes in spite of the fact that by the mid-1860s, Parisian newspapers had branded Garnier as the young upstart who won the Opéra commission, a fact which made most of his doings big-city news. Why did Paris care? For some, Garnier was the wild-haired genius behind a gilded cultural building emblematic of

¹⁴ Michel Carmona, *Haussmann: His Life and Times and the Making of Modern Paris* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002); David H. Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958).

France's glory. For others, he was the *arriviste* who got the job they felt was rightfully theirs. For others still, Garnier was proof that the underdog could win in post-revolutionary France. By the time Garnier's Opera debuted in 1875, he was a fixture in bourgeois Paris, the owner of an Italian villa, a professional whose services were in demand. The prominent newspaper *Le Figaro* declared in an October 11, 1890 article that Garnier was "an integral part of the capital. He completes it, explains it, interprets it, colors it . . . governments and ministers may go, but Garnier remains and we ask with anxiety how Paris will get by when this devil of a man disappears."¹⁵



Image 4: Caricature of Charles Garnier. Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, Paris.

Louise Garnier never stopped battling windmills on her husband's behalf because she did not want her husband – that devil of a man – to disappear from the city that built him as much as he built it. Her effort has drawn some researchers into Garnier's world. Those who came anticipated charm, but discovered that Charles Garnier's story is the story of nineteenth-century Paris. To understand the architect, it is necessary to illustrate the period in all its richness – the kings of his youth, the empire of his young manhood, the republic of his elderly days – to show

¹⁵ BMO, Fonds Garnier, press clippings, microfilm 4240, "Croquis d'architectes," *Le Figaro*, October 11, 1890.

how his successes were a product of a rapidly changing time. It is a tale full of profound miseries and glorious personal triumphs, best comprehended after a journey that begins in the bowels of a nineteenth-century Paris slum.

CHAPTER ONE
“A VALLEY OF REAL SUFFERING AND OFTEN DECEPTIVE JOYS.”
--Honoré de Balzac

The Rue Mouffetard is an old Roman road that slopes gently upward from the Church of Saint-Médard, known briefly in the eighteenth century as the site of miracles. There, at the tomb of Jansenist deacon François de Paris, a young consumptive named Anne Le Franc was said to be cured of her disease. Charles Gaspard Guillaume de Vintmille du Luc, archbishop of Paris, declared Le Franc’s story impossible, but various curés came forth with similar tales of parishioners who visited the tomb and were cured of paralysis, cancer, blindness and various other ailments.¹⁶ In a test of the burial site’s reputed magic, legend had it that a young woman visited the grave in 1731 pretending to be paralytic but was then mysteriously crippled on her right side.¹⁷ Something was happening in St.-Médard’s cemetery, and whatever it was, it was drawing large crowds, some of whom rented chairs just to watch the strange spectacles.¹⁸ Civil and ecclesiastical authorities viewed the swarm of humanity with suspicion, and by January 1732 King Louis XV ordered the cemetery closed. When he did, a protester posted a sign that read: “By order of the King, God is forbidden from performing any more miracles in this vicinity.”¹⁹

¹⁶ David Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 142-144; Brian E Strayer, *Suffering Saints: Jansenists and Convulsionnaires in France, 1640-1799* (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 242-244; William Henry Jervis, *History of the Church of France from the Concordat of Bologna, A.D. 1516 to the Revolution* (London: John Murray, 1872), 283.

¹⁷ Jervis, *History of the Church of France*, 285.

¹⁸ Strayer, *Suffering Saints*, 245.

¹⁹ Dale Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 130; Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris*, 145-6.

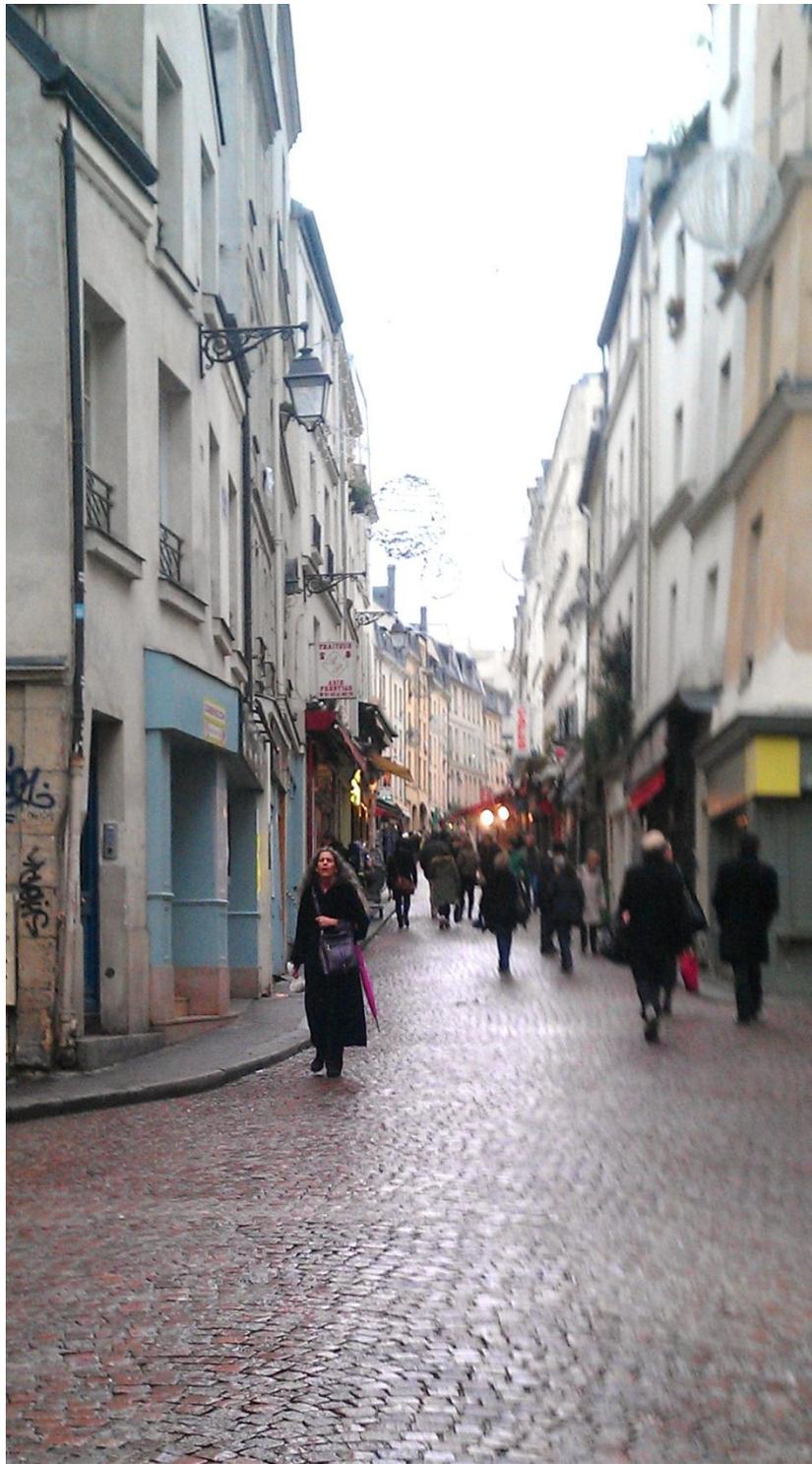


Image 5: Rue Mouffetard, January 1, 2012. Photograph taken by the author.

By the early 1800s, St-Médard sat in the middle of the Paris neighborhood most in need of a miracle. Honoré de Balzac, one of the great French realist authors of the nineteenth century, described the quarter as the grimmest in the city:

They live in a valley of crumbling stucco and gutters black with mud, a valley of real suffering and often deceptive joys, and they are so used to sensation that it takes something outrageous to produce a lasting impression The absence of wheeled traffic deepens the stillness which prevails in these streets cramped between the domes of the Val-de-Grâce and the Panthéon, two buildings that overshadow them and darken the air with the leaden hue of their dull cupolas. In this district, the pavements are dry, the gutters have neither mud nor water, grass grows along the walls. The most carefree passer-by feels depressed where even the sound of wheels is unusual, the houses are gloomy, the walls like a prison. A Parisian straying here would see nothing around him but lodging-houses or institutions, misery or lassitude, the old sinking into the grave or the cheerful young doomed to the treadmill Who can decide which is more horrifying, the sight of empty skulls or of withered hearts?²⁰

This was the world into which Jean-Louis Charles Garnier was born on November 6, 1825. There are scant details of Garnier's early years. Much of what is known about the architect's youth was recounted during his adulthood by himself, his loved ones and press accounts that stressed his humble origins to a degree that may have involved some ornate embroidery, given his later successes. No pictures exist from this period. No journals or letters survive from it either. There are only a birth certificate and baptism record. Through those documents, one learns that Garnier's father, Jean-André, was 30 years old at the time his son was born and baptized at Saint-Médard Church, that site of so many wonders.²¹ Garnier's father was a struggling blacksmith who moved to the French capital from Le Mans in search of better job opportunities. His wife, Félicité, was the 23-year-old daughter of a Napoleonic army captain and

²⁰ The fictional boardinghouse run by Madame Vauquer in Balzac's *Père Goriot* is located "at the lower end of the Rue-Neuve-Sainte-Genève" (which is now the Rue Tournefort) "where it slopes so abruptly towards the Rue de l'Arbalète that carriages rarely use it." Garnier was born at 264 Rue Mouffetard, an address that is no longer in existence, but which would have been about a ten minute walk east of that location. Honoré de Balzac, *Old Goriot* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1951), 28.; Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opéra*, 9.

²¹ BMO Fonds Garnier, Birth certificate, Baptism record; "Papiers officiels et personnels concernant Garnier," piece 144.

worked as a lacemaker who may have supplemented the family's income by selling vegetables and flowers in the streets.²² Making ends meet was the least of this couple's worries. Their neighborhood was home to the greatest number of paupers (one out of every six people), the highest number of illegitimate births (one out of 1.45) and the second-highest death rate (one out of 53) in the city.²³ Furthermore, their Charles was born a sickly boy. Although there is no record of the specific ailments he suffered in his youth, there is evidence that pregnant women in poor neighborhoods were underfed and overworked, giving birth to babies with low birth weights and little resistance to infection. These mothers, many of whom worked in the textile trades, went back to work soon after their babies were born. Relatives often cared for the newborns, feeding them poor-quality milk from dirty bottles that, in turn, caused digestive illnesses.²⁴ Undaunted, the Garniers continued to work hard and eventually they moved to a marginally nicer neighborhood near the Odéon and Luxembourg Palace.

Hard work inspired hope, especially in a big city like Paris where opportunities abounded. This sense of the capital's possibilities led to an influx of working-class Frenchmen like Jean-André. The city's population blossomed from 500,000 at the dawn of the nineteenth century to 1.5 million in 1848, with about three-quarters of the growth coming from non-Parisians.²⁵ Those new arrivals -- both French and non-French -- came to the capital for the promise of higher salaries, better opportunities to find work, and the possibility of climbing the

²² Although it is certain that Félicité was a lacemaker, it is less certain that she sold vegetables in the streets, a fact that emerged in some British newspapers after Charles Garnier died. One of those articles also claimed that Félicité came into a fortune of some sort late in life. Although Garnier's parents are buried with him in the family crypt in Montparnasse Cemetery, we know little about them beyond what is documented prior to Garnier's departure for Rome in late 1848. "A Great Architect's Humble Origin," *Westminster Gazette*, August 5, 1898.

²³ Alfred Legoyt, "Statistique de la Ville de Paris," *Le Diable à Paris*, pp. 341-357.

²⁴ Roger Price, *A Social History of Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1987), 72.

²⁵ Francis Démier, "Paris, Capitale Populaire," *Le Peuple de Paris Au XIXe Siècle* (Paris: Musée Carnavalet – Histoire de Paris, 2011), 35.

social ladder. There was also better food (not to mention food with fairly well-regulated prices), better hospitals, more welfare agencies (one did not climb the social ladder overnight, after all), and a better chance to reinvent oneself.²⁶ People came from places like Tours, where in 1820 Alfred Velpeau, a 25-year-old blacksmith's son, decided to refine the medical knowledge he gleaned from two medical textbooks he purchased with money he earned selling chestnuts.²⁷ They came from the Creuse in craggy central France, where in March 1830 14-year-old Martin Nadaud left on foot with his father and uncle to find stonemasonry work on the construction of public buildings.²⁸ They ventured in by stagecoach from Cologne, Prussia, as 14-year-old cello virtuoso Jakob Offenbach did in 1833; his father, a struggling musician with ten children, wanted him to make a name for himself in a city that did not ostracize people of the Jewish faith.²⁹ They sailed in from as far away as Boston, Massachusetts, as the 21-year-old aspiring painter George P.A. Healy did in 1834; the son of an impoverished sea captain, Healy was armed with little more than "a great stock of courage, of inexperience – which is sometimes a great help – and a strong desire to be my very best."³⁰ They came from many places near and far, all of them driven by the desire to do better, earn more, be more than their ancestors had been before them.

What was the source of this optimism? Although France was enjoying a period of relative peace and stability under the reign of the Bourbon monarch Charles X, the author Stendhal [Marie-Henri Beyle] believed that Paris was "profoundly ill at ease with itself."³¹ According to Claude-Philibert Barthelot, Comte de Rambuteau, "Parisians are like children; one constantly has to fill their imagination, and if one cannot give them a victory in battle every month, or a new

²⁶ Demier, "Paris, Capitale Populaire," 35.

²⁷ P.M. Dunn, "Dr. Alfred Velpeau of Tours: the umbilical cord and birth asphyxia," *Archives of Disease in Childhood. Fetal and Neonatal Edition*, March 2005, 184.

²⁸ Josiane Garnotel, "Ébauche de Mémoires de Martin Nadaud" in *Le Peuple de Paris*, 45-50.

²⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach and the Paris of His Time* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 39.

³⁰ David McCullough, *The Greater Journey* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011), 8-9.

³¹ Horne, *Seven Ages of Paris*, 211.

constitution every year, then one has to offer them daily some new building sites to visit, projects that serve to beautify the city.”³² Charles X did little to inspire the imagination of his supposedly childlike masses. Although Napoleon was defeated and exiled by the European great powers in 1814, there was an undercurrent of nostalgia for the excitement the fallen emperor once inspired.³³ It was Napoleon, after all, who rose from obscurity from his birthplace on the island of Corsica to become emperor of the French, someone who lifted the country when it “lay prostrate in the gutter . . . and held her there with arms that had suddenly grown strong enough and proud enough to support [it].”³⁴ It was Napoleon who helped France become proud and secure for a time, with a new nobility created of the emperor’s former marshals and ex-revolutionaries, and a building program in Paris that spurred the economy. To Napoleon, it did not matter if you were well-born. You could have a job if you were talented and worked hard. “Come, come gentlemen, let’s wake up,” he once told his ministers at a late session. “It’s only two o’clock, we’ve got to earn the salaries the French people pay us.”³⁵

Charles X saw no need to earn his keep with the French citizenry. Furthermore, the king did not feel compelled to give the young and ambitious a voice in the state’s future. Frenchmen who were 20 years old at the start of the Revolution of 1789 represented one-ninth of France’s population in 1825. One-quarter of the people who had been alive during the First Empire had

³² Claude Philibert Barthelot, *Memoirs of the Comte de Rambuteau* (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1908), 269.

³³ Stanley Mellon, “The July Monarchy and the Napoleonic Myth,” *Yale French Studies*, No. 26, *The Myth of Napoleon* (1960), 70-71; Nathalie Jakobowicz, “Le Peuple: Mythe et Representations,” *Le Peuple de Paris*, 21; David H. Pinkney, *The French Revolution of 1830* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 292.

³⁴ O. Aubry, *Napoleon, Soldier and Emperor* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1938), 17. The strength of the Napoleonic legend was demonstrated by a poll of the French in 1969. When asked to name the most important individual in France’s history, 35 percent of respondents chose Napoleon. In the poll, no other historical figure came close to that level of support.

³⁵ Working class Frenchmen could romanticize the Napoleonic myth as long as the economy was good. But when a recession hit the country in 1810, even the supportive middle class began to lose enthusiasm for the emperor. Wright, *France in Modern Times*, 70.

died. Although these trends should have meant opportunity for a new generation of leaders, they led to further obstacles. The Constitutional Charter of 1814 was granted by Louis XVIII shortly after he was restored to the French throne, and it was used until the end of Charles X's reign in 1830. Article 38 of that charter set 40 as the minimum age for government deputies, sowing seeds for future discontent among the nation's young adults. According to James Fazy, a radical Swiss politician "They have reduced France down to seven thousand or eight thousand asthmatic, gouty, paralytic eligible candidates with enfeebled faculties . . . and do they think they can find steady decisions appropriate to the needs of the times out of these ruins of a stormy age in the past?"³⁶ Not that Charles X was willing to share power with graying politicians. Looking disdainfully at England's parliamentary system, the king explained to one government minister, "in England the houses have defined the role of the king, and here the king defined the role of the houses," an utterance that proved the Bourbons had returned to France, having "learned nothing [from 1789] and forgotten everything."³⁷ Perhaps it is little wonder that Napoleonic nostalgia ran so deep. Louis XVIII sensed this undercurrent of affection for the emperor and in 1818 removed a statue of him from the top of the Vendôme Column, replacing it with a fleur-de-lis.³⁸

In Stendhal's novel *The Red and the Black*, Julien Sorel was the fictional embodiment of this Napoleonic longing, which had less to do with politics than it did social aspirations. After

³⁶ It is worth noting that one could be appointed by the king to the Chamber of Peers at the age of 25, but could not have a deliberative voice until age 30. The king could appoint as many peers as he wanted and members of the royal family were peers by right of birth. Royals could have a deliberative voice at age 25. The king could appoint peers for life, or remove them from their duties. Deputies, on the other hand, were elected by electoral colleges for a five year term. Outside of their age requirement, they had to pay a direct tax of 1000 francs. Louis XIII, *The Constitutional Charter of 1814* quoted in Frank Maloy Anderson, *The Constitutions and other select documents illustrative of the History of France, 1789-1901* (Minneapolis: The H.W. Wilson Co., 1904). Bertier, *The Bourbon Restoration*, 238-239.

³⁷ The adage meant that the Bourbons returned to France, behaving in a way that suggested they had not learned that the French wanted liberty, equality and fraternity, and that they had forgotten everything that the French people had done after 1789 in an effort to achieve those gains. Horne, *The Seven Ages of Paris*, 212; Bertier, *The Bourbon Restoration*, 366.

³⁸ Horne, *Seven Ages of Paris*, 211.

all, the return of the Bourbons meant the return of a world where birth determined one's place in society. Sorel, the bookish son of a saw-mill owner, kept a portrait of Napoleon tucked away as an inspirational reminder that bold men of deeds could advance in French society. As an intelligent, ambitious man with no social standing, Sorel's only career options were the clergy or military. Through his charm, Sorel was hired to tutor the town mayor's children, then fired when he seduced the mayor's wife. Sorel moved on to Paris, where he joined a fashionable group of friends and nearly married the heiress of a great noble family. His successes were a threat to the well-born men he encountered:

The ordinary trend of the nineteenth century is that when a noble and powerful individual encounters a man of spirit, he kills him, exiles him and imprisons him, or so humiliates him that the other is foolish enough to die of grief. In this country it so happens that it is not merely the man of spirit who suffers. The great misfortunes of the little towns . . . find it impossible to forget the existence of [these men]. It is these men who make public opinion . . . and public opinion is terrible in a country which has a charter of liberty. A man . . . judges you by the public opinion of your town, which is made by those fools who have chanced to be born noble, rich and conservative. Unhappy is the man who distinguishes himself.³⁹

Unhappy, too, was the man whose king did not lend him his ear. On July 26, 1830, a front page report on the *Moniteur Universel* spoke of a government crackdown on the liberal opposition's press. The opposition had won resounding victories in the recent general elections and Charles X had issued royal ordinances that censored the press, dissolved the Chamber of Deputies, changed the electoral law to favor new candidates and ordered new elections.⁴⁰ Fearing for the monarchy's survival, Charles suspected a conspiracy to overthrow him. In 1827, the Ministry of the Interior compiled a report on "the maneuvers of the revolutionary faction." According to the report, the members of this faction included the influential diplomat Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, Gilbert du Motier the Marquis de Lafayette, François Guizot,

³⁹ Stendhal, *The Red and the Black* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2005), 162.

⁴⁰ Pinkney, *The French Revolution of 1830*, 3.

the journalist Adolphe Thiers and several Napoleonic generals.⁴¹ Liberals sided with Bonapartists against the crown because they liked the emperor's popular appeal, explaining, "France is immensely indebted to a man who was everything in his time."⁴² Some of the opposition believed the next best successor was Charles' cousin, Louis-Philippe, Duc d'Orléans, son of "Philippe Egalité," who voted during the revolution to execute another cousin, Louis XVI. Louis-Philippe had never been forgiven by royalists for his father's support of the revolution, but prominent bankers and bourgeois found him appealing because of his interest in liberal ideas, such as limited government, *laissez-faire* economics and freedom of the individual.⁴³ Although Charles suspected a plot to put Louis-Phillipe on the throne, he believed that the hubbub was "a straw fire that will only make smoke."⁴⁴ Three days later, the king was proven wrong, as the army fled Paris, leaving it to the insurgents who would fulfill his very fears.⁴⁵ Martin Nadaud reveled in the excitement:

What a picture! For a boy fresh from his village it was indescribably impressive – to see so many people out in the streets, proud of their victory over a king and ministers who had tried to deprive them of the last scraps of liberty they had retained . . . The final shots had been fired the evening before, but the whole population, both the participants and the rest, were outside roaring "Long live the Charter! Down with the Bourbons!"⁴⁶

The change was even exciting for writers such as Victor Hugo. "Yesterday you were nothing but a mob," he told Parisians. "Today you are a people." But Charles de Rémusat had a more telling take on what had come to pass: "We did not know the population of Paris," he wrote. "We did not know what she could do and she did not know herself. To this ignorance we

⁴¹ Guizot was a proponent of a constitutional monarchy and because of this had fallen out of favor with Charles X's regime. His university lectures were forbidden, and he spent his time writing histories. Pinkney, *The French Revolution of 1830*, 45.

⁴² Pinkney, *The French Revolution of 1830*, 52.

⁴³ H.A.C. Collingham, *The July Monarchy: A Political History of France, 1830-1848* (New York: Longman Group, 1988), 3.

⁴⁴ Pinkney, *The French Revolution of 1830*, 108.

⁴⁵ Pinkney, *The French Revolution of 1830*, 143.

⁴⁶ Gillian Tindall, *The Journey of Martin Nadaud* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 60.

can add another: We were unaware of the depths of the dark patriotic passion that much of the population harbored against the Bourbons.”⁴⁷ On the morning of July 30, copies of a manifesto that hailed Louis-Philippe as a prince devoted to the revolutionary cause were scattered through the streets, and the newspaper *National* ran an article celebrating the duke’s patriotism, courage, liberalism and anticlericalism.⁴⁸ The feeling among a hastily arranged meeting of deputies at the Palais Bourbon was that Louis-Philippe should be named lieutenant-general of the country, not king, and that the tricolor flag should be restored.⁴⁹

When Louis-Phillipe agreed to become lieutenant-general, he understood what Louis XVIII and Charles X could not – he would only succeed by allying himself with the people. The proclamation that announced his new role said “he will respect our rights, because he will take his from us.”⁵⁰ After this nod to the French populace, the duke rode on horseback to the Hôtel de Ville, smiling and shaking hands with the crowd along the route. “In my opinion, the prince fraternizes a little too much with a crowd of individuals of the lowest class of people,” wrote Auguste Bérard, a government deputy. Some Parisians watching the convoy cried “Long live the Republic!” Others yelled “Down with the Duc d’Orléans.” Most wondered who the man on horseback was. “Is he a general? Is he a prince? I hope he’s not another Bourbon.” Upon his arrival at the Hôtel de Ville, Louis-Philippe was greeted by Lafayette. Holding a tricolor, the two men stood before a cheering crowd and embraced. “The republican kiss of Lafayette made a king,” the writer Chateaubriand mused.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Both Hugo and Remusat are quoted in Francis Demier, “Paris Capitale Populaire,” *Le Peuple De Paris*, 33.

⁴⁸ Collingham, *The July Monarchy*, 13.

⁴⁹ Charles X still lived in France, and some of the people engaged in this argument hoped that the Bourbon line could be continued by Charles’ infant grandson. Some wanted a republic to be declared. Collingham, *The July Monarchy*, 14.

⁵⁰ Collingham, *The July Monarchy*, 16.

⁵¹ Collingham, *The July Monarchy*, 17.

The coronation would not come for another week. Charles X, who had left Paris for his chateau in Rambouillet, signed his abdication on August 2, 1830. The following day, Louis-Philippe wrote Charles and told him that he and his family needed to leave France immediately. Charles refused, the National Guard was sent to hasten his departure and by August 16 the former king and his sister left for exile in England.⁵² As this drama played out, Louis-Philippe convened a session of parliament on August 3. The session was poorly attended, reflecting a disapproval of Louis-Philippe's handling of Charles. But the duke appealed to the ministers who did attend, asking them to help him re-establish liberty and the rule of law. Claiming that the Charter of 1814 had been violated by Charles X, the parliament on August 7 drew up a new contract that declared Louis-Philippe King of the French. Through his title and his inauguration in the Chamber of Deputies, Louis-Philippe sent the unmistakable signal that he would be a citizen-king and not an absolute monarch.⁵³ Dressing in well-tailored suits like the bourgeoisie with whom he was allied, he rose early, shaved himself and put in long hours at the office. Unlike any royal before him, he sent his sons to a public *lycée* founded by Napoleon, invited businessmen and their wives to palace functions and became an investor in the British bond market.⁵⁴ This was not aristocratic behavior, nor was assigning politicians such as Thiers and Guizot to prominent roles in the government ministry. Neither man was nobly born, but both embodied the country's new mantra "*Enrichissez vous*" or to go ahead and get rich.

The newcomers tried to follow orders. Velpeau, with his meager starting physician's salary, could afford a seven-francs-a-month garret and food scraps that he purchased from desperate soldiers. But by the age of 29, Velpeau earned his way onto the junior surgical staff of

⁵² Collingham, *The July Monarchy*, 18-19.

⁵³ Collingham, *The July Monarchy*, 25-28.

⁵⁴ Wright, *France in Modern Times*, 107.

various hospitals.⁵⁵ The Nadaud family lived in a guest house where, as Martin recalled in his memoirs, “when we went up to our rooms, it was to breathe in stale and impure air. In addition, the only closet in the house, which was used by more than sixty people, was on our landing, and I admit it wasn’t easy to force oneself to go in there . . . When the men in our dormitory took their boots off to go to bed, what with their sweaty feet or their old stockings that they didn’t always change every week, you had to be well accustomed to that way of life not to hold your nose.”⁵⁶ Within a decade of his arrival in Paris, Nadaud was dabbling in the entrepreneurial spirit of the times, building up reserves of men to start a career as a *tacheron*, or subcontractor. Subcontracting was one of the ways people in the building trades could escape the usual cattle call for daily construction work in the Place de Grève, where many laborers sought jobs. Nadaud and his charges sought out large and small jobs over the course of two years, at one point reworking a façade on the Rue de l’Observatoire. The effort ultimately came to an end, as Nadaud tired of being a *singe*, a pejorative term meaning a monkey who performs for tips.⁵⁷ He returned to work as a mason after learning that subcontractors fell victim to dishonest speculators; the work was cyclical and involved an unsavory practice called *marchandage*, which involved profiting off of cheap labor.⁵⁸ As a mason, Nadaud still earned enough to enjoy an evening drink with co-workers. On one such evening, he encountered Napoleonic generals who remembered the day in 1793 when Louis XVI was guillotined. “This was the first time I heard talk of republicanism,” Nadaud wrote in his memoirs. “And as the speakers spoke with

⁵⁵ Dunn, “Dr. Alfred Velpeau,” 184.

⁵⁶ Tindall, *The Journey of Martin Nadaud*, 67.

⁵⁷ Casey Harrison, “An Organization of Labor: Laissez Faire and Marchandage in the Paris Building Trades through 1848,” *French Historical Studies*, 20 (Summer 1997): 357-380.

⁵⁸ Martin Nadaud, *Leonard: Maçon de la Creuse* (Paris: La Découverte, 1976), 142, 177-182.

fire, we became followers of this great and noble cause, to which we later devoted our whole lives.”⁵⁹

Offenbach, meanwhile, shared a garret in Montmartre with two other roommates. As the youngest of the three men, he was sent off to gather an affordable diet of salad and potatoes, carrying home his groceries in an empty violin case to prevent possible public humiliation.⁶⁰ So many people strolling his beloved boulevards dined on delicacies such as truffles, briny oysters and cold partridge.⁶¹ The shame made Offenbach homesick and at the age of 16, he wrote of the comfort he felt thinking of one of his mother’s lullabies:

When [the song] came into my mind, I saw my father’s house and heard the voices of my dear ones at home, for whom I longed . . . I was carefree about the future, but yearned for the past. Often I found the loneliness very bitter, and that waltz ended by taking on quite extraordinary dimensions in my life. It ceased to be an ordinary waltz and became almost a prayer, which I hummed to myself from morning to night, not as a prayer addressed to heaven, but because, when I played it, it seemed to me that my dear ones heard me, and then, when it returned to my mind later, I could have sworn that they were answering me.⁶²

Offenbach kept looking for his lucky break. Upon hearing about a scheduled concert, he would hustle to the performance, his cello in tow, and ask to play with the orchestra. He did so, oftentimes for no pay, but he was expected to be grateful for the experience.⁶³ Healy, meanwhile, who learned how to speak French as he took rigorous art lessons from Baron Antoine-Jean Gros, fought through his despair after his mentor committed suicide on June 25, 1835:

My life at this time was a life of extreme sobriety and very hard work. I was full of respect for the dollars I had brought with me, and my noonday meal often consisted of a

⁵⁹ Tindall, *The Journey of Martin Nadaud*, 77.

⁶⁰ Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach*, 45.

⁶¹ Renee and her stepson Maxime dined on this meal in a private room at Café Riche. Emile Zola, *The Kill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 127-129.

⁶² Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach*, 62.

⁶³ Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach*, 89.

small loaf with fruit, or cheese when there was no fruit. But I had good health, high spirits, and immense pleasure in the progress I felt I was making day by day.⁶⁴

Two years later, his determination earned him an invitation to London to paint portraits. Two years after that, he was commissioned to paint a portrait of Louis-Philippe. Soon, the king commissioned Healy to paint a picture of his foreign minister Guizot, as well as portraits of American notables such as George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams.⁶⁵ Healy was proof positive that men could overcome their less-privileged backgrounds through determination, hard work and education.

Education in France was an uneven business. One-third of the population was unable to read or write in 1828, and four million children between the ages of 6 and 15 did not attend any school at all. In 1830, out of 294,975 men reporting for military duty, 153,635 could not read or write and 12,801 could read. When France looked to compare itself to other countries, it found that one out of four children was educated in the United States, one out of every six children was educated in Prussia and one out of 11 children was educated in England. In France, one out of 20 children was educated.⁶⁶

Education of the working classes was determined to be vital for “the advancement of industry and agriculture which . . . are still backward in many ways.”⁶⁷ Some Frenchmen believed that education needed to focus less on classics and more on teaching useful skills to a wider range of people.⁶⁸ Political instability complicated bringing the matter to law, but when François Guizot was named minister of public instruction in October 1832, he aimed to create a

⁶⁴ McCullough, *The Greater Journey*, 142.

⁶⁵ McCullough, *The Greater Journey*, 145-147.

⁶⁶ Taken from a variety of French sources, these figures are quoted in the *Quarterly Journal of Education*, 1831, 2: 382; 5, 173.

⁶⁷ Jomard, *Rapport fait a la Societe pour l'instruction elementaire*, quoted in Douglas Johnson, *Guizot: Aspects of French History 1784-1874* (Westport: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1963), 124.

⁶⁸ Ternaux, *Discours prononcé a la séance du mardi 23 juin a la Chambre des députés*, quoted in Johnson, *Guizot*, 124.

primary education system that would offer the working class an education appropriate to their station in society. The system would be similar to the Prussian *Bürgerschule*, which taught useful trades to students who did not aim to enter college. The government's role, according to Victor Cousin, a watchmaker's son who became a university professor, was not to "furnish facilities for everybody to quit the track in which his fathers have trod."⁶⁹

In 1833, Guizot crafted an educational reform act that required every commune to set up a public primary school and provide for teaching training facilities. The law did not guarantee free or mandatory education, and it was not implemented everywhere, but it was a step toward educating more of the country.⁷⁰ The law mandated that primary schools teach reading, writing, arithmetic, French, weights and measures, and provide religious and moral instruction. When primary students progressed to higher grades, they could add drawing, geometry, physical science, natural history, some history and geography to their course of study.⁷¹ Secondary schools, synonymous with the well-to-do, taught the classics and theory and were considered good preparation for careers such as government administration or business. "Thanks to this fine educational system," historian Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny writes, "[France] was bulging with lawyers without cases, doctors without patients, sons of workers and peasants whose studies had incapacitated them for manual labor without opening the way to their preferred careers, bourgeois young men furious at having to mark time in waiting rooms or seeing themselves hopelessly relegated to subordinate administrative positions."⁷² The rare primary school student with ability and luck could overcome the social shackles prevalent among the lower classes if he

⁶⁹ Victor Cousin, *Report on the State of Public Instruction in Prussia*, *op. cit.*, quoted in Johnson, *Guizot*, 129.

⁷⁰ Wright, *France in Modern Times*, 113-114.

⁷¹ On the subject of religious and moral instruction, it was stated that fathers could have some say over what their sons could pursue. But it was unclear whether that meant children did not need any religious instruction if their fathers said so, or whether a father could choose which aspects of schooling their children could pursue. Johnson, *Guizot*, 128.

⁷² Bertier, *The Bourbon Restoration*, 239-240.

applied himself. Still, such a student was rare; only 51 out of every 1,000 Parisian children attended primary school with any regularity, in part because so many of them were required to work.⁷³

In 1837, Nicolas Martin du Nord, minister of public works, agriculture and commerce, asked industrial and political leaders across the country for their insights about various child labor law practices and sought ideas for reforms. Although not every department responded to Martin du Nord's query, those that did found child workers received little or no education. July Monarchy officials were surprised by the finding and determined to do something about it, but none of them could agree on what needed to be done to solve the problem.⁷⁴ If children went to school, then they could not work in the factories. By the same token, if they went to work, then they could not go to school. Although Parisian manufacturers did not respond to the inquest, a representative from the department of Louviers reported that of 145 child workers, aged 7 to 12, only four of them could read and write, while 13 of them could read and 128 of them could do neither. Only five child workers between the ages of 12 and 16 could read out of a total 84 possible.⁷⁵ In at least 12 departments, child workers received religious education, and employers gave them time off for that. But of the 55 departments that responded, only seven asserted that they were content with the education their child workers received.⁷⁶ Perhaps, Martin du Nord mused, the solution would be to enact a law like Britain did in 1833, requiring manufacturers to give all child workers two hours off each day for their schooling. The schools would be financed by small deductions from each child's wages, and in some cases supplemented by manufacturers

⁷³ Price, *A Social History*, 307.

⁷⁴ Robert Louis Koepke, "Educating Child Laborers in France: The Enquete of 1837," *French Historical Studies*, 15 (Autumn, 1988): 646-672.

⁷⁵ Report, December 1, 1837, Archives Nationales (hereinafter AN), F 12, 4705

⁷⁶ Koepke, "Educating Child Laborers," 650-651.

and town councils.⁷⁷ Industrialization was not the root of the problem, per se. It was more a case of how far education had spread throughout the country since the Guizot Law was enacted.⁷⁸ Although July Monarchy notables knew that education remained problematic, they could only agree that a successful educational system was necessary to preserve order and social stability. Other than that, it was a subject to which they had not given much thought.⁷⁹

But the ruling class was thinking about Napoleon, and little by little they knitted his image back into the capital's landscape. In 1833, they restored a statue of Napoleon to the top of the Vendome column; in 1836, they enlisted Abel Blouet, a locksmith's son and Prix de Rome winner, to complete the decorations on the Arc de Triomphe. They hired Horace Vernet to create imperial-themed paintings. When the Versailles palace complex was opened as a museum in 1837, this realm of kings contained a room of Napoleonic art. It seemed that the people wanted another Napoleon. Seizing on this sentiment, the fallen emperor's nephew, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, tried on October 30, 1836 to overthrow Louis-Philippe, only to be arrested and shipped off to New York. Louis-Napoleon did not remain in the United States for long. He returned to Europe to be with his dying mother in Switzerland before moving to London to plot his next steps. One of his English friends said: "Nothing can dissuade him that he will one day be Emperor of the French He constantly thinks of what he will do when he is on the throne."⁸⁰ The exile attempted another overthrow on August 5, 1840. It was also unsuccessful and this time he was sentenced to life imprisonment at the fortress at Ham. "*Monsieur*, in France nothing is for life," Louis-Napoleon told the clerk who read the sentence. The words were prescient, and the former emperor's nephew would remain at the fortress only six years, during which he read,

⁷⁷ Circulaire of the minister of public works, agriculture and commerce, July 31, 1837, AN, F12, 4709.

⁷⁸ Koepke, "Educating Child Laborers," 652.

⁷⁹ Koepke, "Educating Child Laborers," 672.

⁸⁰ Carmona, *Hausmann*, 6.

wrote and developed ideas about the France he envisioned – one with poverty abolished, universal suffrage restored and a leader who ruled from the top with wide-ranging powers. “Today,” he wrote, “caste rule is finished; it is possible to govern only with the masses.”⁸¹ When Louis-Philippe refused Louis-Napoleon’s request to visit his ailing father in Tuscany, he escaped after shaving off his beard and mustache, dressing in a workman’s clothes, and calmly walking out of the fort with a wooden plank on his shoulder. From there, he caught a train to Brussels before sailing to London, where he waited to make his next move.

In Paris, the population increase worsened the city’s health and sanitation problems. There was no organized manner of collecting the garbage that some 224,000 households left out in the streets each day, and dirt would:

remain lying there for an indeterminate time . . . hardly has half of it been swept up when the rest is scattered in the gutters, blocking the water from draining away; it only disappears when strong rains flood the drains . . . Bad gases and pestilential miasmas rise up the place where the trash collects, not to mention that the sludge gets stuck between the paving stones. But that is not all. A far worse and unhealthier stench streams from the underground sewers that benumbs passers-by, and forces residents to leave their houses.⁸²

The filth would prove deadly; it contributed to a cholera epidemic in 1832 that claimed a disproportionate number of lives in poor, crowded neighborhoods. A new prefect of the Seine, Claude-Philibert Barthelot, Comte de Rambuteau, was appointed in 1833, but he spent more money on embellishments than sanitation. Barthelot prided himself on his thrift; during his 15 years in office, he spent only 15 percent of his budget on maintaining and improving infrastructure. The people wanted more. In 1837, Balzac dreamed of the day “we shall no longer

⁸¹ Napoleon quoted in Carmona, *Hausmann*, 7.

⁸² Horne, *Seven Ages of Paris*, 217-218.

talk of the mud of Paris, and then we shall be so magnificent that Paris will truly be seen as a lady of the world, the first among queens, wreathed in walls.”⁸³

In the meantime, the Garniers worked to build up their frail son. In August 1837, they sent him to stay with relatives in northwestern France, where it was hoped the country air would improve his health. A year later, Charles returned to the capital, only to find his family living closer to the Seine in a new home. Jean-André ran a small but thriving carriage-making and repair business out of that domicile, creating rickety vehicles called “coucous” for a public transportation line that ran between Paris and the suburbs. Jean-André hoped his son would work with him in the family trade, but his son’s continued ill-health made that impossible.⁸⁴ Instead, Charles helped his mother after he got home from school each day by cooking, washing, mending clothes and becoming “handy as a sailor.”⁸⁵ Often at odds with his parents, he was nicknamed *le braqué*, a breed of bird dog known for its intensity, energy and focus.⁸⁶

It is unknown whether Charles demonstrated a talent for drawing before his mother learned that architects could make respectable salaries. What is certain is that the architecture profession was revamped during the July Monarchy to become a regulated, middle-class vocation similar to medicine, law and engineering. The state’s architectural service, the Bâtiments Civils, was reorganized in 1832 and 1841, and in 1840 the Société Centrale des Architectes was founded. By reorganizing the state service and creating a professional society, architects hoped to change the old system of patronage that was prevalent during the Empire and

⁸³ Horne, *Seven Ages of Paris*, 217-219.

⁸⁴ Mead, *Charles Garnier’s Paris Opera*, 9.

⁸⁵ BMO, Fonds Garnier, press clippings, “Notes from Paris: An Architect of his Own Fortune,” *Truth*, August 11, 1898, microfilm 4251.

⁸⁶ It is unknown why Garnier and his parents fought. Perhaps it could be because he was unable -- or unwilling -- to work with his father, a fact that could have made life economically challenging for the family. Louise Garnier, “Charles Garnier, vie d’une artiste (1825-1898)” *La Revue Musicale*, no 6, troisième année, June 15, 1903, p. 200.

Restoration to make training and talent the criteria for hiring and promotions.⁸⁷ It is unknown whether Félicité knew about these changes, but she directed Charles toward an apprenticeship with an architect who verified architectural bids. “His mother was extremely shrewd,” according to an August 11, 1898 account in *Truth*. “She was always inquiring what was the best business for a bright and brainy lad. Paris was then being torn down . . . to be rebuilt. Architects were in a way to make great fortunes.”⁸⁸ One week after Félicité marched her son off to work, she yanked him from the job after learning that he spent his days running errands, filling wine bottles and learning how to smoke. Charles returned to primary school, finishing his studies while taking night classes at *École de Dessin*, a design school that was free for the working classes. His mother reportedly “gave him mathematical instruments, pencils, colors – everything he wanted – and a suit of decent clothes so that he should not suffer in his self-respect.”⁸⁹

Garnier did not fare well academically at first, possibly because he was completing his primary studies at the same time. Records show that from mid-1839 he attended classes three times a week and excelled in arithmetic and geometry. His classmates were Jules Thomas and Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, two aspiring sculptors who would later work with him on the Paris Opera House. Garnier proved himself to be a good carpenter who was skilled with ornamentation and architectural design. “His zeal to master his art consumed him,” according to one posthumous account of his life, “He was an ardent, open-hearted person, all flame and intuition and a bundle of nerves.”⁹⁰ Given his academic strengths, Garnier was off to an auspicious start,

⁸⁷ Annie Jacques, *La Carrière de l'architecte au XIXe siècle* (Dossier du Musée D'Orsay 3; Paris, 1986).

⁸⁸ BMO, Fonds Garnier, press accounts, microfilm 4250, “Notes from Paris: An Architect of his Own Fortune,” *Truth*, August 11, 1898.

⁸⁹ It is possible that Louise was able to provide for her son on that level because the Garnier's fortunes had changed by that time, but it is also possible that this rose-colored tale was altered over the years after numerous retellings from the architect and members of his inner circle, if in fact it was true at all. BMO, Fonds Garnier, “Notes from Paris,” *Truth*, August 11, 1898.

⁹⁰ BMO, Fonds Garnier, “Notes from Paris,” *Truth*, August 11, 1898

made even more so by the fact that he would be mentored by Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, a teaching assistant and architect who hailed from a well-connected middle-class family. Viollet-le-Duc's father was a civil servant in Paris who collected books. His mother ran a salon attended by the author Stendhal and the literary critic Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve. Viollet-le-Duc was developing a reputation as a rebellious but gifted architectural theorist who was skilled at historic renovations. Unlike many of his colleagues, he did not study at the prestigious École des Beaux-Arts, an internationally competitive design school that guaranteed its graduates success in any creative endeavor. Furthermore, he was controversial because he believed that renovated buildings should have modern flourishes, such as the gargoyles he added to Notre Dame Cathedral in 1844.⁹¹ Viollet-le-Duc had been appointed to many prominent jobs, but two decades later he would watch in shock as his opportunity-seizing protégé sketched his way into a commission he believed should have been his.⁹²

Jean-André, like any concerned parent, feared that Charles would not be able to earn a respectable living drafting buildings and sketching architectural details. Paris of the 1840s was beginning to evolve as a result of industrialization, which counted among its innovations the railway, the credit system and factories. Among the first to recognize the potential of these changes were the Saint-Simonians, followers of Henri de Saint-Simon, a count and socialist theorist who believed that society should be focused on industrial production and led by captains of finance and industry. Industry was a social good under Saint-Simonian doctrine because it would improve the lives of the “most numerous and poorest class.”⁹³ Although it is unlikely that

⁹¹ Pinkney, *Decisive Years in France*, 108-110.

⁹² Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera*, 10.

⁹³ Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach*, 91-92.

Jean-André Garnier was privy to Saint-Simon's writings, it is certain that he understood the trials and tribulations of the workers of that time. One foreign observer noted

In the midst of this hum of seemingly smooth and orderly activity four thousand workers who gather early every morning in the Place de la Grève, not knowing how they will be able to live through the day if they find no work, ten thousand who are uncertain of the morrow, twenty thousand who are uncertain of the following week, constitute the gangrene in the body politic that might rapidly spread from the extremities of this city, the barriers and the faubourgs and attack the vital parts, the alliance of power and wealth, honors and property.⁹⁴

Louis Blanc, a prominent economic and political socialist, believed that work was a fundamental human right and that the state should establish national workshops to provide people with employment. The bourgeoisie attacked Blanc's sentiments and, strangely enough, accused the working class of being too materialistic.



Image 6: Charles Garnier, age 17. ENSBA.

Where did an artist fit into this landscape, especially one as frail as Charles Garnier? Perhaps Jean-André had visions of his starving son freezing in a grungy Latin Quarter garret, suffering for his art like the so-called Bohemians of the time. Or, perhaps his anxiety was rooted in reality; he could not afford to do more than feed Charles, who was eager to continue his studies at the prestigious Beaux-Arts, which emphasized training in imperial Roman architecture

⁹⁴ Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach*, 104.

(specifically between Augustan and Severan dynasties), Italian Renaissance constructions and French and Italian baroque works. The style emphasized flat roofs, arched windows and doors, classical elements such as columns, statuary and mosaics and a subtle use of color. Architects in the program were taught to create quick concept sketches that led to future, well-detailed drawings of antique works. Their efforts were all part of a long competition that could win them a coveted spot at the Villa Medici in Rome, where they could spend up to five years studying classical architecture in depth as a Prix de Rome fellow.⁹⁵ The school was going through a transition in the 1840s. In spite of its emphasis on classical architecture, younger teachers such as Abel Blouet began to preach that old ideas were becoming as obsolete as the *Ancien Régime*. New materials, new structural methods and new styles such as Romanticism made building a progressive science, where imagination and experimentation were not only accepted, but quietly encouraged.⁹⁶

After Félicité gave birth to a son named Gustave in 1842, the family's finances were stretched thin. It is unclear how the Garniers afforded to send their son to Beaux-Arts when he was admitted in 1842 after meeting the minimum age requirement, passing entrance examinations, and finding an architect – Louis-Hippolyte Lebas, who had schooled 15 Prix de Rome winners -- who would mentor him in his studio. Perhaps Viollet-le-Duc eased some of the economic burden when he hired Garnier as a draughtsman to help him pay the monthly 20-franc studio fee to study with Lebas. It is possible that Garnier could have made supplemental income by designing patterns for cashmere shawls.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Robin Middleton, editor, *The Beaux-Arts and Nineteenth Century French Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982).

⁹⁶ Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera*, 12-13.

⁹⁷ BMO, Fonds Garnier, "Notes from Paris," *Truth*, August 11, 1898



Image 7: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (formerly École des Beaux-Arts) today. Photograph taken by the author.

At Beaux-Arts, students were not required to attend class, nor were they given tests. They could advance only if they won points from monthly competitions in architectural composition, construction, perspective, and mathematics. To excel at those competitions required countless hours sketching in studio.⁹⁸ Once again, Garnier did not get off to a good academic start, only making his mark six years later when he won the 1848 Prix de Rome for Architecture. One professor quipped, “It is a curious thing to note that he distinguished himself neither in mathematics, nor in construction, nor even in architecture, except for the one time he carried off the Grand Prix.”⁹⁹

The Prix de Rome was a three-part contest that took place in the spring of each year. In early March, the first part of the competition was open to all applicants from the First Class. The best projects created during that 12-hour sketching period were admitted to the next stage of the competition. The following week, the remaining students were given 24 hours to design a public building. The eight best students from that stage were given until the end of July to turn their sketches into a completed project or *projet rendu*. Garnier participated in the first stages in 1846,

⁹⁸ Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera*, 11.

⁹⁹ Constant Moyaux, *Notice Sur Garnier*, quoted in Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera*, 13.

1847 and 1848, but did not reach the final stage until 1848, when he won with final project for an arts and crafts school with exhibition galleries.¹⁰⁰

Garnier was under pressure to win. Exempted from military service in 1846 because of varicose veins in his left leg, he could either continue his schooling or drop out and find a way to earn money in the midst of a recession. Charles was too frail to be a blacksmith like his father, who was also looking for work that year; a rail line opened between Paris and the suburbs that put Jean-André's carriage-making company out of business. On the day that his Prix de Rome project was judged in 1848, an agitated Garnier stared out the window until he was announced as the winner. It was a year of revolution throughout Europe and for the 23-year-old Garnier, who left strife-torn Paris for strife-torn Rome determined to change his life.¹⁰¹ The overthrow of Louis Philippe on February 24, 1848 was greeted as a sign of new and better things to come. The journalist Philippe Faur wrote: "I am going to fight for Liberty, not for a party. From men and from parties I expect nothing. My hopes are in the action of Providence, in a religious transformation to regenerate society."¹⁰² The Republican socialist Louis Blanc, speaking from the Hôtel de Ville, said the new republic would provide jobs for the poor workers and create an environment where man would reap the benefits of his own labor.¹⁰³ The poet Charles Baudelaire wryly observed that during the revolution everyone built utopias "like castles in Spain."¹⁰⁴ Was a better world coming to Paris? Not without a good fight. A radical placard

¹⁰⁰ Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera*, 14.

¹⁰¹ Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera*, 18-20.

¹⁰² Quoted in T. J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France, 1848-1851* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 11.

¹⁰³ Jill Harsin, *Barricades: The War of the Streets in Revolutionary Paris, 1830-1848* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 273.

¹⁰⁴ Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 107.

outside the Collège de France declared, “As in 1830, the people are victorious; but this time they will not lay down their arms.”¹⁰⁵

The bourgeoisie believed that the radical socialism spurred by the working classes posed a threat to the new Republic. The rural peasantry also believed that socialism was a threat because the excessive taxes associated with it threatened them with poverty and foreclosure on what little they owned. Together, these Frenchmen could agree on one thing: The country needed a strong leader who could guarantee stability and prosperity. In London, awaiting his chance, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte believed he was the man for the job. “I am going to Paris,” he told his cousin after hearing about the February Revolution, “the Republic has been proclaimed. I must be its master.”¹⁰⁶ After declaring his candidacy for president, Louis-Napoleon drew broad support from conservatives, moderate republicans, and the peasantry. When the votes were counted, he won almost three-quarters of the electorate, a resounding victory.¹⁰⁷

Garnier said little about the changes that swept through Paris, although he would later express his admiration for similar republican movements in Rome.¹⁰⁸ Wherever his sympathies may have been, Garnier was not out to topple the system that had brought him this far in life. In fact, he wanted to join it, using the lessons of Rome to perfect skills that would change his life for the better. He would not pick up arms, as the radicals did, but he would pick up a sketchbook. A fellow Beaux-Arts student, the aspiring painter named Paul Baudry, viewed the unfolding revolution as a sign of the destiny that awaited working-class men like himself. The son of a shoemaker in the Vendée, he wrote his parents, “I must not curse this Republic for I am an example of its benefits. I am an example of the emancipation of the lower classes. Son of a

¹⁰⁵ Alfred Delvau, *Les Murailles révolutionnaires de 1848*, 17th Ed. (Paris: E. Picard, 1868), 1: 21.

¹⁰⁶ Roger Price, *The French Second Empire: An Anatomy of Political Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 15.

¹⁰⁷ Fenton Bresler, *Napoleon III: A Life* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1999), 222.

¹⁰⁸ BMO, Fonds Garnier, Charles Garnier, “Voyage en Grèce,” piece 92; 16, 25.

worker, in 1848 I can, God willing, climb to the first rank in society.” As a Prix de Rome winner, he would head to Rome with Garnier and become one of his closest, most trusted friends.¹⁰⁹

Before the two men left for Rome, a short man in middle-class dress arrived in Paris by train. His name was Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, and he had designs on restoring Paris to its old splendor.

In his suitcase was a map of the city annotated with red, green, blue and yellow. This was Louis-Napoleon’s dream for the capital. In a little more than a decade, Charles Garnier would play a pivotal role in that dream. But first, he had more to learn.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Baudry to his parents, March 9, 1848, Fondation Custodia, Paris, quoted in *Baudry 1828-1886*, p 37.

CHAPTER TWO ITALIE

Italy, Italy land so fertile

You, who have given birth to so many glorious sons

You, who were the light of the world for so long

Our masters have lived under your azure skies...

If the artist forgets the serious lessons

He learned nursing at your breast, then he slices his veins

And spills his own blood.

--Charles Garnier¹¹⁰

Charles Garnier was born on a Roman road that snaked through one of the worst slums in Paris. He grew up sickly and sensitive, torn between his father's desire for him to follow in his professional footsteps and his mother's desire for him to achieve more than his parents had before him. Architecture, as Garnier would come to find, was a profession where a creative soul like his could fulfill a worried mother's hopes. The aspiring architect could only follow such a career path by furthering his education. His budding talents, excavated in an École de Beaux-Arts studio, earned him the 1848 Prix de Rome for Architecture, which sent him on a path toward The Eternal City where he spent five years studying classical ruins in order to perfect his craft. Although it was well-known among architecture students that such a victory could ensure some measure of future success, it is unknown whether Garnier, then age 23, had any sense of the professional glories it would confer on him more than a decade later. It is also unknown whether he discussed any dreams or hopes for his future with fellow laureates who accompanied

¹¹⁰ BMO, Fonds Garnier, Charles Garnier, sonnet "Italie," 31 mai 1884 , piece 100-B3 (22).

him on the leisurely journey to the Italian peninsula.¹¹¹ What is certain is that when the budding architect arrived in Rome on January 16, 1849, he was exposed to a world that was so different from the life he had left behind in Paris that he would be not only forever changed, but well-prepared for the life that awaited him when he returned to his hometown in 1854.

Rome, like Paris and other European cities, was embroiled in political upheaval when Garnier arrived. Across the continent, it had been a year of revolution, where country to country, people expressed dissatisfaction with their leaders, demanded more say in politics and insisted upon better working conditions. Nationalism -- or a sense of uniting politically around a shared culture, ethnicity and set of beliefs -- surged, especially among the Italian provinces, many of which were ruled by inefficient princes. The two richest provinces in the region -- Lombardy and Venetia -- were ruled by the Austrian Empire, which occasionally put down uprisings in other parts of the peninsula. Although Vienna's political influence was deeply felt and often resented in this part of the Mediterranean, Italians did not seem to let outsiders dictate their habits and attitudes, which were some of the most enlightened in Europe.

Travelers often noted that the aristocracy treated the lower classes with a courtesy totally unknown among the Germans . . . and the earliest recollection of Marquis Massimo d'Azeglio, a Piedmontese aristocrat, was that his mother made him kneel down right in a public park to beg the pardon of a servant whom he had struck. The boy remembered that the servant drew back completely nonplussed by such a scene. Yet, in general, the workers responded with a kind of easy friendliness and self-respect which made them seem like real people, not, as in so much of Europe, set apart as "the brute part of the population."¹¹²

¹¹¹ The laureates who traveled to Rome with Garnier were the sculptor Gabriel-Jules Thomas, the engravers Jacques-Martial Deveaux and Louis-Félix Chabaud and the composer Jules Duprato. The trip began on December 4, 1848, winding south through Lyons, Marseilles, Genoa and Florence before arriving in Rome at the beginning of January, 1849. BMO, Fonds Garnier Charles Garnier, "Itinéraire d'un voyage de Paris à Rome dédié aux pensionnaires de l'Académie de France," 1849, pièce 89.

¹¹² Priscilla Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848: A Social History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 311.

Commoners as well as aristocrats owned property. Women were some of the fiercest patriots. There was a general sense among the locals that the Austrians needed to stop meddling in Italian affairs. One of the most vocal critics of their presence was the Genoese doctor's son Giuseppe Mazzini, a melancholy journalist who dreamed and wrote about a united Italian republic. Mazzini's vision of the future did not make him popular among the ruling set and so he left the country in the early 1830s for Marseilles, France. There, Mazzini started a pro-republican propaganda sheet that he stuffed into barrels before shipping them to Italian followers who would distribute his work. These acolytes organized a secret society known as Young Italy, a group of men who were younger than 40 and who pledged themselves to fight for a united country. Among Mazzini's followers was the merchant marine captain Giuseppe Garibaldi, who would later join the Carbonari revolutionary association, which resorted to assassinations and armed insurrections in the name of Italian unity. Although Young Italy's passions were fierce, its mission got off to a rocky start when Mazzini planned an unsuccessful armed expedition to recapture the province of Savoy. He was run out of France, then Switzerland before settling in England where he opened a school for Italian workers and their children in the late 1830s. Rather than teach workers to rise up against their bosses, Mazzini wanted workers to rise up with them so their demands for social reform would be viewed favorably by a community that was accustomed to seeing barricades and bloodshed. Through it all, he maintained a correspondence with Garibaldi, who had moved on to South America, where he fought on the side of separatist rebels in the Brazilian War of Independence in 1839 and on the side of the liberal Colorados in the 11-years-long Uruguayan Civil War. Mazzini kept encouraging Garibaldi to keep up the good fight, and he told his supporters in England and the Italian peninsula of the great hero

battling on the other side of the Atlantic. Inspired by Garibaldi's passion and charisma, many Young Italians kept a picture of the great freedom fighter in their vest pockets.¹¹³

Fighting a world away from home, Garibaldi's Italian Legion forces adopted a black flag with a volcano in its center, which signified a people mourning for a country that had yet to come to fruition. On the Italian mainland, the figurative volcano at the center of this grief was about to erupt. In the Roman states, republican-minded locals conspired to start a revolution as soon as Pope Gregory XVI, who was ailing, died. In 1845, moderate republicans sent Massimo d'Azeglio, a young marquis who had struggled as a starving artist, to network with Mazzini's followers and persuade them that outbreaks of this sort were just as dangerous to unity as foreign troops. Although the unassuming Azeglio convinced Mazzini's men not to revolt, he had a harder time convincing them that they should hang their hopes on Charles Albert, King of Piedmont, for help driving out the Austrians.¹¹⁴ But Azeglio was at least able to take some of the pressure off the volcano for the time being. Pope Gregory died in June 1846, and Pius IX replaced him, granting amnesty to political prisoners and gaining favor with the people and princes. Mazzini was furious because he felt the pope's move was a political ploy that doused revolutionary passions. Two years later, when Charles Albert went to war with Austria, Pius IX wrote the Austrian Emperor and asked him to give up his Italian provinces as a measure of humanity and justice. The request left the pope without supporters in Austria or within the Italian provinces. Pius enlisted Count Pellegrino Rossi to run the government in September, 1848, but Rossi was so hated that he was stabbed in the jugular that November and died. Rather than deal

¹¹³ Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848*, 314-317.

¹¹⁴ Charles Albert was a reactionary who would not give his people a constitution and who was married to an Austrian. He had the strongest army on the Italian peninsula, however, and it was thought that strong armies were the only way to drive out the Austrians. Although many people felt Charles Albert was untrustworthy, Azeglio was able to persuade them that siding with the king would be not only advantageous for them, but advantageous for the ruler, who would then have undisputed control of Lombardy. Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848*, 320.

with his angry flock, Pius disappeared from view. In his place, republican-minded men took charge of the angry Roman mobs who demanded bread. These men abolished the flour tax, put unemployed artists to work restoring church mosaics and gave out-of-work tailors commissions to create uniforms for army soldiers. They called for a constitutional assembly, federation with the rest of Italy and railroads that would knit the provinces together. Mazzini returned to the country to join a constitutional assembly that preached the new religion of Italian unity. A republic was declared in February 1849, but the French forces of President Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte entered the country that spring under the auspices of installing the pope back in the Vatican. Pius did not trust the French, the Romans vowed they would not be taken by an invader and Garibaldi returned to the country to defend the city, valiant though outmanned. As Garibaldi retreated from a turbulent Rome, French citizens in the city sought refuge from the madding crowds.¹¹⁵

Many sought refuge at the Villa Medici, a cream-colored Renaissance villa perched atop the city's picturesque Pincian Hill. Prix de Rome fellows like Garnier lived and studied there, and for centuries well-to-do families had built opulent homes amid the hill's lush gardens so they could escape the city's oppressive heat. The 13-year-old arts patron Ferdinando de' Medici sought real estate on the Pincio in 1576 to announce his family's arrival on the city's social scene with a grand residence. The sweeping complex he built was cushioned from the world by verdant stone pine, cypresses and ilex hedges, as well as fragrant magnolias and lemon trees. More than two centuries later, the villa became the property of France, when in 1803 Napoleon made it the headquarters for the French Academy in Rome. Passing through the heavy gates outside of the Villa Medici, one entered a splendid little cocoon that was technically in Rome but legally on

¹¹⁵ Robertson, *Revolutions of 1848*, 362-380; George Macaulay Trevelyan, *Garibaldi's Defence of the Roman Republic* (New York: Longmans Green and Co, 1910), 227.

French soil, in the present but laden with the treasures of the past. Original Roman walls flanked the villa's gardens to the East, a reminder of a time when the city was stormed by Goths who set it aflame in 537-538 A.D. Marble reliefs of draped garlands and fragments of the Altar of Peace were built into the villa's façade, hearkening back to the glories of the empire. Ancient sculptures of deities rested between Doric columns in the gardens, where fountains gently trickled in the sweet-scented air. One wonders what Charles Garnier thought about this comfort as he strolled toward the villa for the very first time past hedges that would sprout pink roses in the coming spring. Lean and wide-eyed, he must have been excited and even overwhelmed by his new surroundings, for he had never lived like a prince. Now he would have a private room and studio, two meals a day, an allowance for travel and supplies and access to a library full of sculptural and architectural casts. Garnier also had a view of Rome that was said to be as pleasing to the eye as it was tantalizing to the imagination:

Here St. Peter's [basilica] is framed in the sunset view, as a purple dome against a flaming sky . . . It is the [center] of a panorama of Rome, and from it almost every point of interest may be discerned – monuments, palaces and churches, the Colosseum in the distance, even the far-off aqueducts and the horizon line of mountains.

It was an ideal vantage point for someone who would infuse his later work with classical architectural elements. The vista was a symphony of columns and domes, statues and friezes, arches and angles.¹¹⁶ It was a city of dreams and epic poetry and greatness, “a place where Julius Caesar and Marc Antony . . . walked about in togas and thought high and noble thoughts.” It was a place where the emperor Augustus vowed to rebuild a fractured, pessimistic society by

¹¹⁶ For a description of the gardens, the view of Rome, the Villa Medici and its history please see Evelyn March Phillipps, *The Gardens of Italy* (London: Country Life, Ltd., 1919), 53-66. Some of the earliest pictures of Garnier were drawn or painted by fellow Prix de Rome laureates in 1849. Two good examples: Felix-Joseph Barrias, *Portrait de Charles Garnier à Rome*, 1849, painting, BMO; Léon Bénouville, *Portrait de Charles Garnier à Rome*, 1849, pencil drawing, BMO. For an explanation of classical architecture, please see: Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, *Classical Architecture: The Poetics of Order* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1986); George Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988).

rebuilding the town itself.¹¹⁷ Nothing was too good for the gods, as the saying went, and so the best architects and artists of the time flocked to Rome to create a city of gleaming white marble and gold ornament. But these men did not create art for art's sake. They created art that celebrated empire. The writer and architect Vitruvius wrote of this in his treatise *On Architecture*, which he dedicated to Augustus:

You cared not only about the common life of all men, and the constitution of the state, but also about the provision of suitable public buildings; so that . . . the majesty of the empire was expressed through the eminent dignity of its public buildings . . . Since, then, I was indebted to you for such benefits that to the end of life I had no fear of poverty, I set about the composition of this work for you. For I perceived that you have built, and are now building, on a large scale. Furthermore, with respect to the future, you have such regard to public and private buildings, that they will correspond to the grandeur of our history, and will be a memorial to future ages.¹¹⁸

Did Garnier feel the weight of history as he settled into his Italian existence? It is unclear, but later in the architect's life he would echo Vitruvius' sentiments when he likened architects to historians, who "must indicate in their works the characteristics of the time in which they produce."¹¹⁹

Because of the revolution, Garnier produced little during his first months in Rome. Within months, the villa was occupied by French army troops, and the fellows were forced to leave Rome for Florence that May. Garnier traveled north of his new environs, amassing a series of detailed watercolors that impressed his classmates. Sensing their respect for his work, Garnier

¹¹⁷ Augustus reigned 30 B.C. to 14 A.D., coming to political prominence after the murder of Julius Caesar and the civil strife it wrought throughout the city. He vowed to avenge his great uncle's death, but fell into a political triumvirate with Mark Antony and Marcus Lepidus that ruled the empire until Augustus became its sole ruler in 27 B.C. Although he was said to restore power to the Roman Senate, the measure was superficial. Augustus reigned as an autocrat, using his money and military to cement his hold on the empire. His effort to rebuild the city was hoped to cement its place in the world as the seat of a great empire, not a dangerous place that was susceptible to fire and flooding. For information on Augustus, see Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2007), 43-103; Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1996), 31-34; Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1990).

¹¹⁸ Vitruvius quoted in Zanker, *The Power of Images*, 135.

¹¹⁹ Charles Garnier, "La Reconstruction des monuments de Paris," *Le Temps*, September 5, 1871.

joked “Oh, that piece only took me about five minutes [to complete].”¹²⁰ All joking aside, the young Frenchman began to flourish because of the newfound freedom he had. Prix de Rome laureates were required to submit studies of ancient monuments during the first three years of their stay, a rendering of a proposed monument restoration in their fourth year, and project for an original building in their fifth year. The pieces were exhibited first at the Villa Medici, then shipped to Paris where members of the Académie des Beaux-Arts would study them to make sure each fellow was gleaning the appropriate lessons of style and structure from ancient ruins. Although each rendering was vigorously scrutinized and mercilessly criticized, Prix de Rome laureates came and went as they pleased, studied what they wanted when they wanted to do it and were encouraged to be as independent and as intellectually curious as possible.¹²¹ Garnier took full advantage of that freedom, as evidenced by the list of books he checked out from the Villa Medici library between 1849 and 1853. Most laureates averaged 15 books during their stay in Rome, but Garnier checked out 35, among them Vitruvius’ *On Architecture*, Pausanias’ *Description of Greece*, Abel Blouet’s *Restoration of the Baths of Caracalla*, various works on sculpture and ornamentation, and classics such as Homer’s *Iliad* and Virgil’s *Aeneid*.¹²²

Garnier was not a total bookworm. His fellow laureates came to know him as “Carlo,” an outspoken bon vivant who drank and smoked, wrote countless puns and songs and sometimes dressed in disguise.¹²³ “In the midst of all the work, Garnier relaxed with a spiritual gaiety that was served by his nimble pen,” the architect Constant Moyaux said. “His comedies and sketches

¹²⁰ Mme Vve Charles Garnier, née Louise Bary, “Charles Garnier, par Mme Garnier,” *L’Architecture*, 38 (1925): 378.

¹²¹ Pierre Pinon and Francois-Xavier Amprimoz, *Les Envois de Rome. Architecture et Archéologie* (Rome: 1988) “Les règlements de 1778 à 1948,” 15-70.

¹²² “Sortie des livres. A compter de 1849,” from French Academy library quoted in Mead, *Charles Garnier’s Paris Opera*, 22.

¹²³ *Recueil de caricatures de Charles Garnier* (EBA 41829) and exhibit catalog for *L’Oeil et la plume. Les caricatures de Charles Garnier*, cabinet des dessins Jean Bonna, Beaux-Arts de Paris les éditions, 2010.

enlivened the festivities of the Academie During carnival, for the director's ball, [Garnier's] fantasies led to costumes that cost more imagination than money. Each one was witty: Garnier, who had shimmering tastes, excelled in the oriental genre [of clothing] and his technique of making jewels out of gilded horse chesnuts and glass beads defied all competition."¹²⁴ Aristocrats on the Pincian Hill invited Garnier and his classmates to their parties, which were a source of wonder and inspiration. "In Rome, not only did [Charles] work, but he made time to go out, have fun and dance," Louise Garnier wrote after his death. "He was in awe of the grand parties that were thrown by aristocrats . . . as grandiose luxury was new for him, but would have been astonishing even for an artist more blasé than he. The size [of the rooms], the abundance of diamonds, everything was stunning."¹²⁵ It was stunning, but it was also an opportunity for Garnier to research how the upper-crust lived. "Brilliant uniforms, princely outfits, lustrous gold and diamonds that enhanced the noblest beauties and the prestige of the biggest names, all of it in sumptuous palaces that excited his admiration to the point of ecstasy," Moyaux said after Garnier's death. "He foresaw that in a society no less aristocratic, it was necessary to create surroundings that were no less grandiose."¹²⁶

Although Garnier was riveted by Rome's opulence, he had work to do, and he launched himself into a study of ancient ruins that would serve as the basis for his annual design project. Although Rome offered a good sampling of these classical monuments, Garnier was eager to travel beyond the city to immerse himself in the widest possible range of structures and relics. Traveling with students who were more familiar with the country than he was, Garnier soon learned that the theories and models he learned about in a Paris classroom did not always mesh

¹²⁴ Constant Moyaux, *Institut de France. Académie des Beaux-Arts. Notice sur la vie et les oeuvres de M. Charles Garnier*, Paris, 1899, p. 10.

¹²⁵ Mme. Charles Garnier, née Louise Bary "Charles Garnier par Mme. Garnier," *L'Architecture*, 38 (1925): 378-379.

¹²⁶ Moyaux, *Notice sur la vie et les oeuvres de M. Charles Garnier*, p. 10.

with a reality that was far more complex. He toured Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli with his classmate Jules Thomas in August, 1849. Built as a retreat for the Emperor Hadrian in the second century A.D., the villa complex at one time included several palaces, temples, libraries, state rooms and Roman baths. Because Hadrian was well-traveled, the architecture was a reflection of what he had seen. Among the ruins were Greek-influenced Corinthian columns, noted for their slender lines and the ornate scrolls and leaves that adorn the top. There were also caryatids, or deity statues used as support structures for a building; pumpkin-shaped domes; underground tunnels, and vibrant mosaics.¹²⁷ Garnier followed that trip with an excursion with Félix Thomas. Tramping across the Italian countryside in an outfit of worn brown corduroy, Garnier and Thomas sketched their way through Cerveteri, Tarquinia and Viterbo, three sites that had captivated archeologists and architects since the 1820s because of their Etruscan tomb decorations and wall paintings. Garnier reveled in the romance of being on his own and seeing how far he could stretch the money he had. But those youthful joys ended as soon as he and Thomas were robbed outside of Viterbo. The duo walked back to Rome, where they arrived at the Villa Medici after their 16-hour journey "starving and harassed . . . they made many envious with their tale of being attacked and robbed by brigands."¹²⁸ By autumn, Garnier began his first year study, a series of architectural and ornamental details from Trajan's Forum, possibly culled from fragments in the Villa Medici's architectural library. Garnier's sketch of ruins included a broad-winged imperial eagle resting atop a Doric column fragment, various types of molding and entablature that included winding florals and rounded cherubs. The final study he sent to Paris featured a cherub on an ornate floral backdrop framed on the top by five different types of

¹²⁷ Sculptures such as the Discobolus, the Furietti Centaurs and Artemis of the Chase had been discovered at the site and taken to museums for display. The Discobolus is on display at the British Museum in London, the Furietti Centaurs are on display at the Capitoline Museum in Rome and Artemis of the Chase is on display at the Louvre in Paris.

¹²⁸ Louise Garnier, "Charles Garnier, par Mme Garnier," 379.

molding that cast shade on the frieze. In Paris, his instructors approved his rendering, forgiving small mistakes “that were excusable in first study of antiquity.”¹²⁹ This stamp of approval emboldened him in his second year.

In January 1850, Garnier was issued a permit to study the Temple of Antoninus Pius and Faustina in the Roman Forum. Two months later, he studied the Temple of Vesta near the Tiber River. The March studies wound up being the subject of his second-year project, an effort that included three sheets of details as well as a plan for the temple’s restoration. Although his superiors were pleased with his consideration of a temple with Greek influences and noted the young student’s “good taste” and drawing ability, Garnier was widely criticized for attempting a restoration before his fourth year of study, for assorted stylistic errors and for including seemingly frivolous renderings of chairs and retaining walls. He was told that he should be “applying [himself] to more serious and interesting studies.”¹³⁰ Garnier applied himself to more travel instead, going to Assisi, Florence, Pisa, Genoa, Milan, Verona, Vicenza, Padua, Venice, Trieste, Ancona and Loretto over the course of three months. Garnier and the painter Eugène Lenepveu spent the bulk of their trip to Venice studying its ornate Renaissance and Baroque architecture and vibrant colors. Densely packed buildings and palazzos emerged from the spongy lagoon on which Venice rested, their pastel hues a watercolor backdrop for the bold mosaics and Byzantine architecture of Saint Mark’s Basilica and intricately sculptural buildings such as the Doge’s Palace or the Scuola Grande di San Marco.

¹²⁹ ENSBA houses the drawings from Garnier’s first year study, many of which show his eye for ornate details. Charles Garnier, *Le Forum Trajan à Rome details sur ruines*, 1849, pencil and white chalk on blue paper, ENSBA (EBA 7664); Charles Garnier, *Le Forum Trajan à Rome, detail d’un entablement au quart de l’exécution*, envoi de Rome de première année, 1849, ink and wash, ENSBA, (EBA 7365) For background on the first year study, see Mead, *Charles Garnier’s Paris Opera*, 23.

¹³⁰ Permits from the Ministero del Commercio in “Lettres diverses,” ENSBA, Carton 545, book one; “Rapport sur les travaux des pensionnaires de l’Académie de France à Rome, pendant l’année 1850,” Carton 545, book one.

In April 1851, Garnier left Rome to study wall frescoes in Pompeii, all of them noted for their primary colors and intricate details, the memories of which remained with Garnier throughout his later career.¹³¹ He went with another classmate into southern Italy, where Curzon remembers his colleague eager “to reconstruct the ruins of a temple We did not see him again after that. Garnier, always pressed and impatient, had already led his companion [somewhere else].”¹³² Excitement aside, Garnier returned to Rome to work on his third year study, careful to follow the Académie’s rules after being dressed down for his ambitious submission the previous year. He submitted four details from the Temple of Serapis, one of them an architectural plan, another one a section of the temple, a third that indicated future structures incorporated into the structure and a fourth that showed the water level at the time he performed his initial sketches. His teachers appreciated his obedience to their strictures:

Mr. Garnier has completed his work and fulfilled his third-year obligations in a satisfactory manner, as much for the object [chosen] as for the care he took [in completing it].¹³³

After following the Académie’s rules with his third year study, Garnier decided to push his superiors for a trip to Greece in 1852 so he could sketch the Temple of Aphaia, a shrine to a fertility goddess laden with marbles, painted fragments and Doric columns. Usually, Prix de Rome fellows could travel only within Italy, but Garnier argued for a trip that would immerse him in the source of classical architecture. His teachers were open to the request because of a relatively new rule that allowed pensioners to spend four months in Greece as informal guests of the newly created École Française d’Athènes. Still, the Académie was uncomfortable with the new rule because it would dilute a student’s Roman studies. Perhaps control was part of their

¹³¹ Charles Garnier, “Le Drame de Vésuve par M. Beulé,” *Le Moniteur Universel*, December 1, 1871.

¹³² Curzon, *Alfred de Curzon*, vol 1, p. 97.

¹³³ ENSBA, “Rapport sur les travaux des pensionnaires de l’École de France à Rome, pendant l’année 1851,” Carton 545, book one.

concern too, as Garnier's advisor Lebas wrote from Paris to remind him that he should not abuse the special travel privilege that had been granted him.¹³⁴ If anything, Garnier was grateful for his advisor's approval, and he kept a diary of his trip that chronicles his initial excitement, the seasickness he felt as he traveled to the country by boat, and the joy he felt as he set foot on Greece for the very first time. When Garnier arrived in the city of Patras, he said it made him "dizzy, because I found myself in a new world and really a dream that I thought imaginary. Was I in Charenton [a reference to a Parisian insane asylum founded in 1645] or in paradise? I did not know, but panicked on one side and overjoyed on the other, I would never forget the impression caused by the first Greek city [I visited]."¹³⁵ The impressions continued in overwhelming fashion:

Athens March 8, 1852. I have forgotten everything, [my] fatigues, annoyances, illnesses, everything. I am in Athens, I have seen the Acropolis! As the saying goes, it is a beautiful lie that comes from afar. But I defy that lie because of what I saw. All the enchanted words, all the laudatory descriptions cannot describe the magnificence of this spectacle; the reunion of nature and beauty, art and beauty, these two sources so alive and of such pure joy. Everything is here. These impressions will always be great and indelible.¹³⁶

Traveling with the landscape painter Alfred de Curzon, they befriended the archeologist Charles-Ernest Beulé and the writer Edmond About during their stay. Shortly after his arrival in Greece, Garnier went to the Acropolis with them:

After lunch, a visit to the Acropolis. It is impossible for me to say everything that I felt during this beautiful and long visit. I felt nonetheless a sort of velleity, of pride in seeing all that: "and I too was an architect," I practiced the great art, that which touches and impresses so vitally, and I regarded with admiration the Propylea, and the Parthenon and

¹³⁴ The Greece aspect of Garnier's stay in Rome tends to be glossed over, in part because it was so brief. Even so, some writers and scholars have provided valuable glimpses of trips like the one Garnier took, and the Academie's willingness to allow students to escape to Athens, if only for a short time. Please see Edmond About, *La Grèce Contemporaine* (Paris: 1854), 90-95; Marie-Christine Hellman and Philippe Fraisse, "Architecture greque et envois de Rome: Historique et tendances," in ENSBA's *Paris, Rome, Athènes. La voyage en Grèce des architectes français aux XIXe et XXe siècles* (Paris, 1982), 25-38. Various ENSBA letters from a variety of Garnier's professors shed light on the fight involved in allowing Garnier to go to Athens.

¹³⁵ BMO, Fonds Garnier, Charles Garnier, "Voyage en Grèce," Pièce 92, p. 21.

¹³⁶ BMO, Fonds Garnier, Charles Garnier, "Voyage en Grèce," Pièce 92, p. 34.

the Temple of Minerva Poliaides and of the Nike Apteros and this, and that, then I began to look all over again...¹³⁷

After his initial excitement, Garnier seemingly lost enthusiasm for the Acropolis, its surveys and yet-to-be completed work. “I took him on site and explained to him my system of work, while he prodded the ground with the end of his cane,” Beulé recalled. “Although he had no personal experience in these matters, he had his architectural education, his keen intuition, his habit of seeing these excavations because they do them daily in Rome. He did not ask me to stop what I was doing; but he was so nervous that I read on his face an absence of interest, a discouragement that signaled he would not continue. He walked away very sad like a man who was promised something interesting and found nothing but a deception.”¹³⁸

Beulé guided Garnier through his visits over the next few days, explaining to him that there was nothing better than seeing, sketching and touching actual Greek ruins. Everything in Rome was a knockoff, he said, and now they were at classicism’s true source. Garnier did not remain out in the field for long, however, because of the poor weather in Greece that March. He stayed inside, sketched Greek peasants, and complained about the rain that kept him from his studies. Because of the weather, Garnier was not able to travel to Aegina until April 1 with About and a servant named Constantine. When the trio arrived in the town the next day, they stayed with a peasant family before heading out to draw. Garnier was spellbound by the experience:

I am enchanted with my work, it is of the greatest interest, but there is much to be done, and despite my desire not to loaf, I believe that I will have a full month of drawings to do. At five o’clock, burning to be alone, I sent About and Constantine back to the cabin to

¹³⁷ BMO, Fonds Garnier, Charles Garnier, “Voyage en Grèce,” Pièce 92, page 36.

¹³⁸ Ernest Beulé, *Grèce et Italie*, Paris, 1875, p. 28-29.

prepare dinner, and alone with my ruins for a half-hour, I interrogate its every face, I caress it with my eyes. It is mine. Mine alone.¹³⁹

Garnier was hungry for more to draw, but Curzon did not share his enthusiasm for Aegina and went back to Athens on April 8. Bad weather returned after the writer's departure, and Garnier struggled with isolation and ever-present pests. "I am flea-bitten, I am scratching everywhere," Garnier wrote. "My wrists and legs are covered with bites . . . I also have the company of spiders that every night make a ticking noise like a watch and the grain chest is full of cockroaches that walk with great speed. Add to that a myriad of insects whose names and habits are unknown to me and one has an idea of the menagerie that surrounds me. And I complain of being alone!"¹⁴⁰ Garnier was further frustrated by waiting for the Greek government to approve his request to excavate the temple site. He began excavating anyway with his hands, a borrowed pickaxe, the handle of his umbrella and Constantine's help "but this old idiot was in a bad mood and he found himself humiliated by the work and complained all the time of fatigue. The fact is that these excavations were not easy with the instruments that I had."¹⁴¹ Garnier unearthed "a gentle slope that gave access to the temple" and a circular walk that he assumed must be from an altar.¹⁴² At one point Garnier discovered fragments that indicated the temple was once vibrantly multicolored. "All these discoveries made over twelve days refocused me on my work," Garnier wrote. "I began to daydream of success, I began to feel ambitious, and I told myself that I liked this idea [of being an architect], I would give it my all to dream of grandeurs and laurels."¹⁴³

¹³⁹ BMO, Fonds Garnier, Charles Garnier, "Voyage en Grèce," Pièce 92, 78-79.

¹⁴⁰ BMO, Fonds Garnier, Charles Garnier, "Voyage en Grèce," Pièce 92, p. 92.

¹⁴¹ BMO, Fonds Garnier, Charles Garnier, "Voyage en Grèce," Pièce 92, p. 105.

¹⁴² BMO, Fonds Garnier, Charles Garnier, "Voyage en Grèce," Pièce 92, p. 108-109.

¹⁴³ BMO, Fonds Garnier, Charles Garnier, "Voyage en Grèce," Pièce 92, p. 110.

By April 23, Garnier finished his work and returned to Athens to sightsee. In May, he, Curzon and About rode horses through the Peloponnesus, guided only by the map in Abel Blouet's *Expédition scientifique de la Morée*. He returned to Athens to witness Beulé's discovery of the steps of the Propylea and spent his final days in the town sketching its monuments.¹⁴⁴ Before returning to Rome, Garnier and Curzon visited Constantinople for two weeks, finding it "too beautiful to describe."¹⁴⁵ They rode on the backs of donkeys, encountered camel caravans, and absorbed ancient homes "bathed in a fresh, silver light and an unheard of transparence."¹⁴⁶ They observed calls to prayer and immersed themselves in the colorful worlds of the bazaars:

Tired of running, our little group sat down at a café . . . where we saw a procession of Turks, Persians, Syrian and African Arabs, Armenians, Kurds, Tatars and Jews in costumes that were sometimes splendid, often ragged, but always picturesque. Never has a more varied kaleidoscope not turned a curious eye, and we saw there, in one hour . . . all the types of the Orient, except for India.¹⁴⁷

As artists, they enjoyed the sweeping views of the Marmara and Bosphorus, the piercing minarets, the sparkling domes. Their watercolors were full of the vibrant local clothing and the intricate, elegant architecture they saw. But Garnier had to return to Rome to finish his four-year restoration study, an effort that included an explanation of the project and fourteen renderings that show the Aegina temple in ruins, the proposed reconstruction and an assortment of details. Garnier turned to his notes from Greece to help him complete his assignment:

Today I made some great and good discoveries and my day is not lost. Thus I found:

1. Some phrases with which to respond to the gamekeeper;
2. The columns of the interior;
3. The top of a pediment at the bottom of the hill and serving as a boundary to divide a field;
4. A marble tile;

¹⁴⁴ Descriptions of these voyages are in Garnier's "Voyage en Grèce," BMO, Fonds Garnier, pièce 94.

¹⁴⁵ BMO, Fonds Garnier, Charles Garnier "Voyage en Grèce," pièce 94, June 20, 1852,

¹⁴⁶ Théophile Gautier, *Constantinople* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1875), 72-73.

¹⁴⁷ Gautier, *Constantinople*, 62.

5. The architrave of the small order and as a result the distance of the interior columns
6. An enclosure of the temple or of the sacred wood behind my temple;
7. A terra-cotta tile;
8. Some vermilion in the pronaos;
9. The traces of a step to enter the naos;
10. The fastenings of the temple portal.¹⁴⁸

His field drawings were full of careful measurements and painstaking detail, work that made him feel “ambitious and say to myself that perhaps my name will be attached to the history of art and archaeology.”¹⁴⁹ Still, he faced the problem of organizing all these different elements into something he could use for his fourth-year project. Using his imagination and knowledge of architecture, he crafted a design that was “more decorative than architectural,” with multicolored stucco, red and blue columns, and marble figures that emerge from the wash of color. He admitted that his use of color was rooted in his own preference:

I have no information for its restoration; only, having tried successively all the colors that might be put on this part of the capital to harmonize it with the rest of the temple, the color blue alone satisfied me.¹⁵⁰

His use of ornamentation was just as speculative. Garnier resorted to renderings of other similar temples to guide his drawings, arguing that the palmettes used at one site must have been painted because of the condition of the stone and that it would justify his use of color in the restoration.¹⁵¹ Garnier had reached his final year in Rome and he was expected to take all that he had learned in his various travels and readings and apply it to the creation of an original monument. And yet, in spite of all his travels, in spite of all his extracurricular studies of antiquity, Garnier, who was seemingly bored by then, submitted a half-completed assignment for a design school building. The Académie responded with fierce criticism:

¹⁴⁸ BMO, Fonds Garnier, Charles Garnier, “Voyage en Grèce,” pièce 94, 108-109.

¹⁴⁹ BMO, Fonds Garnier, Charles Garnier, “Voyage en Grèce,” pièce 94, page 110.

¹⁵⁰ Charles Garnier, “Mèmoire explicatif de la restauration du Temple de Jupiter Panhellénien à Egine,” ENSBA, *Paris, Rome, Athènes*, p 375-376.

¹⁵¹ Garnier, “Mèmoire,” 376.

The weak and incomplete project of Mr. Garnier . . . does not answer in any way what one would rightly expect from a *pensionnaire* who during the preceding four years sent very good studies.¹⁵²

By the time he was done sketching five years' worth of classical monuments in Italy and Greece, Garnier was ready to work for someone, not finish his final school project. He accepted a commission in April 1853 to sketch House of Anjou funeral monuments for a book that Honoré Théodoric d'Albert, duc de Luynes, hoped to publish. Extraordinarily wealthy, the duke had immersed himself in classical study during his youth, traveling to Italy where he became interested in ancient coins, medals and ceramics. The duke was also an influential arts patron. Although it is unknown how he and Garnier met, the two traveled through Naples on a sketching expedition for the duke's proposed book that became a source of tension with the director of the school, Jean Victor Schnetz, a painter who warned him about the difficulties of mixing work and study.¹⁵³ Garnier did not listen to his advisor, whom he found tiresome and overbearing, and in time he was sending his patron effusive apology letters for the delays in his work. "Before you accused me of negligence, I decided to write you a few words of explanation," Garnier wrote, promising that he was 15 sketches away from being done.¹⁵⁴ Although he did finish his work for the duke, the book was ultimately never published. The duke gave him his first architectural commission years later.¹⁵⁵

By 1854, it was time for Garnier to return to Paris. The city that awaited the architect was in the process of changing, but in a manner for which he should have been prepared. After his election to president of the Second French Republic, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte took military

¹⁵² Garnier's final project does not exist in the archives so it is difficult to know how that work compares to his submissions of the prior four years. ENSBA, "Rapport sur les ouvrages envoys de Rome par les pensionnaires de l'Académie Impériale de France, pour l'année 1853," carton 545, book one.

¹⁵³ Mme Charles Garnier, nee Louise Bary, "Charles Garnier, par Mme. Garnier," 378.

¹⁵⁴ BMO, Charles Garnier to Duc de Luynes, August 6, no year cited, microfilm 4090.

¹⁵⁵ Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera*, 33; *Charles Garnier: un architecte pour un empire*, 75.

control of the country in late 1851 before he was proclaimed Emperor Napoleon III the following year, ushering in the beginning of the Second Empire. Like his uncle before him, Louis-Napoleon fancied himself a second Augustus and aimed to rebuild Paris into a beautiful city of marble.¹⁵⁶ Achieving that vision would require more than his parchment map that snaked with red, green, yellow and blue lines.¹⁵⁷ The emperor named a career civil servant Georges-Eugène Haussmann prefect of the Seine, a position that would entail overseeing the entire project during the course of almost twenty years.

Haussmann would set in motion a fresh urban design that gutted the seedier parts of the city, in turn creating wealth for a growing middle class and improving the health and morals of Paris: “You are combatting moral squalor indirectly but with certain effect, by raising the conditions and habits of life of the toiling classes,” the Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris, François-Nicolas-Madeleine Morlot, wrote to Haussmann. “In wide and straight streets flooded with light, people do not behave with the same slovenliness as in dark, narrow winding streets.”¹⁵⁸ It was an immense and complicated affair that included “architecture and engineering, slum clearance and sanitation, emigration and urban growth, legal problems of expropriation and human problems of high rents and evictions, public finance and high politics, dedicated men and profiteers. It involved planning on an unprecedented scale . . . and posed technical problems for which there were no ready solutions.”¹⁵⁹ There was no accurate map of the city in 1850. No one knew how to measure the underground water supply, or how to cut trenches that were big enough for sewers. And then there was the issue of cost. In 1869, Haussmann guessed that the city had spent

¹⁵⁶ Napoleon III quoted in David Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 3.

¹⁵⁷ The parchment was the same map that he brought to Paris when he was elected prince-president in 1848. The lines on the map were colored by their degree of urgency. Carmona, *Haussmann*, 9.

¹⁵⁸ The letter from Morlot is quoted without a date. Carmona, *Haussmann*, 147-153.

¹⁵⁹ Pinkney, *The Rebuilding of Paris*, 4-5.

2,500,000,000 francs on rebuilding since 1850, some 44 times what it spent on government in 1851. The city hoped to raise money from existing taxes, the resale of condemned property, government subsidies and public financing.¹⁶⁰ These sources were not enough, and Fialin de Persigny, minister of the interior, devised a funding strategy that involved using city revenue surpluses as security on large loans for the project. The strategy -- what Persigny termed “productive expenditure” -- was a gamble because it was based on his belief that surpluses could remain high every year. “Such works would certainly help the city’s finances by producing a huge movement of business and wealth into the capital; and that, in accomplishing these major works, Paris would have increased and not reduced its own resources.”¹⁶¹ Paying off these loans involved a tricky mix of selling land, increasing property and patent taxes, and charging toll revenue on all the goods that entered the city. Although Persigny’s plan was denounced in some quarters as mad, the emperor approved the idea and the work of reconstruction continued throughout the city.¹⁶² As slums were razed, streets were laid, parks were developed and light poured in, the cost of living increased and drove many of the urban poor out to the city’s fringes.

It is unknown what happened to Garnier’s parents at this time, but the skyrocketing property values within the city created a swarm of new millionaires. The author Émile Zola wrote that the empire was “on the point of turning Paris into the bawdy house of Europe.” Over-the-top opulence reigned among the growing bourgeoisie as seen through the life of the fictional property speculator Aristide Saccard in the novel *The Kill*, which chronicled the uncontrollable appetites unleashed among the middle class during the city’s rebuilding. “He had got wind of the vast project for the transformation of Paris,” Zola wrote about Saccard, “the plan for the

¹⁶⁰ Pinkney, *The Rebuilding of Paris*, 5.

¹⁶¹ Persigny quoted in Carmona, *Haussmann*, 157.

¹⁶² Carmona, *Haussmann*, 158.

demolitions, the new boulevards and neighborhoods, the huge piece of jobbery in the sale of land and property, which throughout the city was beginning to ignite the conflict of interests and the blaze of unrestrained luxury.”¹⁶³ Saccard “knew how you sell for a million what has cost you a hundred thousand francs; how you acquire the right to rifle the treasury of the State, which smiles and closes its eyes; how, when throwing a boulevard across the belly of an old neighborhood, you juggle with six-storied houses to the unanimous applause of your dupes . . . Sometimes, in the street, he would look curiously at certain houses, as if they were acquaintances whose destiny, known to him alone, deeply affected him.”¹⁶⁴

Reconstruction sliced through the city. “A cut there, cuts further on, cuts everywhere,” Saccard told his wife over dinner. Zola wrote that “Paris slashed with sabre cuts, its veins opened, providing a living for a hundred thousand navvies and bricklayers, traversed by splendid military roads which will bring the forts into the heart of old neighborhoods.”¹⁶⁵ The sabre cuts brought property speculators new wealth, enabling them to keep their wives in the latest fashions and, in Saccard’s case, allowing him to build a hot house that was modeled after the Louvre. It was “a remarkable edifice, still new and pallid, with the wan face, the purse-proud, foolish self-importance of a female parvenu.”¹⁶⁶ Paris was awash with fortune-seekers like Saccard, whose affluence “required a reign of adventures, shady transactions, sold consciences, bought women, and rampant drunkenness . . . There sprang up . . . timidly as yet, the mad desire for dissipation that was destined to drag the country down to the level of the most decadent and dishonored of

¹⁶³ Zola, *The Kill*, 49.

¹⁶⁴ Zola, *The Kill*, 67.

¹⁶⁵ Zola, *The Kill*, 69.

¹⁶⁶ Zola, *The Kill*, 16-17, 49.

nations.”¹⁶⁷ And it was full of well-off, but bored residents like Saccard’s wife Renée, who looked for any thrill, any diversion to pass the time and fill their empty hearts.

These changes did not come easy for everyone. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt said their city was beginning to feel like “some American Babylon of the future,” while novelist George Sand said it was nice to walk down the street without “being forced every moment to consult the policeman on the street corner or the affable grocer.” The journalist Victor Fournel walked across Paris one day to a house he used to visit, only to find a vacant lot. “Even the street had disappeared,” he lamented.¹⁶⁸ Writer and gastronome Charles Monselet wrote, “day by day, the streets are disappearing, the buildings known for their history and the memories associated with them are being demolished.”¹⁶⁹ Émile Zola gushed that he loved “the horizons of this big city with all my heart . . . depending on whether a ray of sunshine brightens Paris or a dull sky lets it dream, it resembles a joyful and melancholy poem. This is art, all around us. A living art, an art still unknown.”¹⁷⁰ Surely Balzac, who died in August 1850, would have been pleased with the openness and light.

Garnier returned to Paris in 1854, dazed by a city full of opportunity. Torn between working as a private architect and designing buildings for the state, Garnier was poor and needed his first professional break. It is possible that his final years in Rome had overwhelmed him and that returning to a Paris in flux was too much to bear. One account of Garnier’s life states that he suffered a year-and-a-half-long nervous breakdown in the mid-1850s that required

¹⁶⁷ Zola, *The Kill*, 49.

¹⁶⁸ Victor Fournel, *Paris Nouveau et Paris future* (Paris: J. Lecoffre, 1865), 70.

¹⁶⁹ Charles Monselet, *Les ruines de Paris*, 4 vols (Paris: L. de Potter, 1857), 2: 43.

¹⁷⁰ As Horne notes, one of the ironies of Napoleon III’s reign was that he wanted to help the urban poor, but his modernization plan pushed them outside of the city into neighborhoods that were even more crowded and dingy. Horne, *Seven Ages of Paris*, 232-240.

hospitalization.¹⁷¹ Looking back on that period, Garnier acknowledged that he “was in difficult straits.” At the time, Queen Victoria was visiting Paris, and the city prefect hoped to offer her a souvenir of the visit by getting a large album made that contained views of all the salons, galleries and halls in the Hôtel de Ville. “As I could then handle watercolors passably well, I was commissioned to make two of these views; think how delighted I was to get that piece of luck, which brought the first money I earned since my return from Rome,” Garnier said in a speech to the British Association of Architects. “I have never forgotten that circumstance, and, of course unknown to Her Majesty, I have always considered her my first client, or, at all events, the cause of the first client I ever had.”¹⁷² Whether she was his first client, she would certainly not be his last. Garnier’s persistence and dedication to his art were about to pay off in an empire that rewarded men just like him.

¹⁷¹ Bruno Girveau, “L’Homme,” *Charles Garnier: Un architecte pour un empire* (Paris: Beaux-arts de Paris les éditions, 2010), 145.

¹⁷² BMO, Fonds Garner, press clippings, microfilm 4249, undated speech to the British Association of Architects.

CHAPTER THREE THE BIG CHIEF

Charles Garnier was working his way up the state's architectural ranks when explosives changed the course of his life.¹⁷³ As Napoleon III's carriage approached the entrance of the Opéra le Peletier on the evening of January 14, 1858, an Italian named Felice Orsini threw three bombs at the imperial retinue. The emperor and empress were unharmed by the blasts, but eight people in their entourage were killed and 142 onlookers were injured. Orsini, a member of Young Italy who believed that Napoleon III was the chief obstacle to Italian independence, fled from the scene but was arrested at his home the next day. His sentence: Death by guillotine.

As the government cracked down on opposition elements within the country, Haussmann wove the Orsini attack into the new city fabric, selecting a site for a new opera in the ninth arrondissement that could have better-guarded approaches. Orsini aside, the old opera house was a shambles anyway; built in 1821 out of wood and plaster, the theater was a fire hazard that could not be adapted to hold modern stage equipment. Still, when several lawmakers heard that Haussmann had his heart set on a new performance hall, they railed against the extravagance of such a move. The government calmed legislators, telling them that it had neither decided on a new opera nor a site on which to build it. As they did, Haussmann, acting with the Municipal Council's approval, quietly purchased a tract of land on the Boulevard des Capucines. As proposals for rival sites poured in, Haussmann created a committee in April 1860 to review all of the pitches. The committee selected Haussmann's location for its accessibility but also because it could be cleared without harming existing monuments or park space. The government signed off

¹⁷³ Garnier worked first as an auditor, then as an inspector, sometimes juggling several jobs all at once. Mead, *Charles Garnier*, 34-35.

on the proposal in September 1860.¹⁷⁴ Curiously, the financiers Émile and Isaac Péreire invested heavily in the Opéra neighborhood at that same time, and Parisians gossiped about how neatly their decisions fit with the prefect's plans, which were typically announced to the public after the fact.

The Péreires, natives of Bordeaux, moved to Paris during the Bourbon Restoration to make their fortunes in banking, a field that liberal politicians deemed important to the future economic growth of France. Through their cousin, Olinde Rodrigues, they were introduced to the world of St-Simonian doctrine, and soon they began to write and lecture about how bankers and industrialists would lead France into a great new prosperous age. By September 1830, the brothers proposed a bank that would free up the flow of credit, which would, in turn, be used to spur the nation's stalled economy. Called the Mutual Insurance Company for Discounting Commercial Paper of All Maturities, the bank would be run by businessmen who provided short-term loans at low interest rates. The Bank of France, founded by Napoleon I in 1802, was the main financial organ that supported the state's credit and assisted it with its financial problems. Although funding new business enterprises was not among its functions, the bank viewed the Pereires' plan as a threat, and as a result the brothers were unable to bring their ideas to fruition until they founded the Crédit Mobilier with Napoleon III's support in 1852.¹⁷⁵

By the time Haussmann deemed the area surrounding Boulevard des Capucines ripe for development, the Péreires had established themselves as the French capital's ultimate insiders, savvy businessmen who knew how to unearth the next big deal. Haussmann needed investors in the ninth arrondissement. The Péreires needed opportunity. Whatever the gossip, the relationship

¹⁷⁴ Pinkney, *The Rebuilding of Paris*, 83-84.

¹⁷⁵ Rondo Cameron, *France and the Economic Development of Europe 1800-1914* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1961), 85-96.

made good business sense.¹⁷⁶ In 1853, the brothers bought the Hôtel Osmond, which is now Nos. 6 to 10 of the Boulevard des Capucines. In 1859, they borrowed 11 million francs from Crédit Foncier so they could purchase land in the southern part of the district. Within a few months of their purchase, building had begun. By 1861, the Pereires owned most of the land between Rue Scribe and Rue Caumartin, allowing them to build immense structures in the neighborhood. If anyone stood to benefit from an enormous Opéra in the ninth, it was the Péreires.¹⁷⁷

Garnier, who struggled to make ends meet when he first returned to Paris, had been working since spring as the *architecte ordinaire* of the fifth and sixth arrondissements, a job that was largely administrative but paid a handsome middle-class salary of 8,000 francs a year. He had been married for two years by then to Louise Bary, a fresh-faced 24-year-old beauty who had taught at a girls' school. The daughter of a university professor and a fervent Catholic, Louise was sweet, steady and calm by nature, and gave up her career to support her ambitious husband. Together, they lived in an apartment at 90 Boulevard St.-Germain, a fashionable address on the broad new thoroughfare that Haussmann carved through the Left Bank to replace several smaller streets.¹⁷⁸

The Garniers' apartment overlooked Cluny Square, which included a relatively new museum of the Middle Ages that was housed in a grand townhome once inhabited by monks. The museum sat on the ruins of a Roman bath complex, and on some days Garnier must have looked out on the ancient fragments and recalled his time as a Prix de Rome fellow. If the old

¹⁷⁶ After Haussmann's death in December 1891, the architect Adolphe Alphand defended him against allegations of corruption. "His lack of selfish interest did not prevent slanderers from attacking the honor of this public servant," he said. "It was possible to rebut those attacks, and no one today is unaware that Baron Haussmann left the Hôtel de Ville knowing that he had always done his duty and strictly observed the rules of the most scrupulous conduct. Such a man, haughty and proud as he was, could never have agreed to the humiliation of a dishonest deal that would have made him bow his head before an accomplice, whoever he might be." Carmona, *Haussmann*, 352.

¹⁷⁷ Carmona, *Haussmann*, 351.

¹⁷⁸ Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera*, 35-37.



Image 8: The Garniers' apartment at 90 Boulevard St.-Germain.
Photograph taken by the author.

relic did not remind him of his Roman days, then his circle of intimates must have called him “Carlo” at least once or twice. It was Edmond About, his friend from Greece, who introduced him to a literary Left Bank crowd that included the journalist Francisque Sarcey, critic Théophile Gautier and the academic Arthur Bary.¹⁷⁹

All around them, Paris sparkled with excitement and affluence. The bourgeoisie grew to include families like the Garniers, and the young cello virtuoso Prussian Jakob Offenbach -- now known as Jacques -- composed spritely tunes that became the era’s soundtrack. His operetta, *Orpheus in the Underworld*, originally opened to poor reviews, but began to draw curious crowds after one critic lambasted Offenbach for satirizing “holy and glorious Antiquity.” If Offenbach satirized anything, it was Second Empire society, cloaked in ancient garb. There, Jupiter seduced scores of pretty women as his wife Juno sat back and jealously watched. The court followed Jupiter’s example and Olympus was corrupted as a result. When Jupiter threatened to take the gods with him to the underworld, they forgot their anger and worshipped him, losing themselves in any number of amusements that they could afford. One of those amusements was the operetta’s signature song, “Galop infernal,” which came to be associated with the can-can, a scandalous dance noted for its raucous high kicks.¹⁸⁰ Some critics called Offenbach’s score “brothel music,” but the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche hailed it as “the supreme form of wit.” Perhaps Offenbach was so clever that Napoleon III did not know he was the target of his ridicule; after an April 1860 performance of *Orpheus*, the emperor wrote the composer, telling him he would never forget the wonderful evening he had at the theater.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ About was the matchmaker responsible for introducing Garnier to his wife Louise, Bary’s younger sister. Maud Dommenge, “Charles Garnier et ses réseaux,” *Charles Garnier: Un architecte pour un empire* (Paris: Beaux Arts de Paris les editions, 2010), 82.

¹⁸⁰ Kracauer, *Offenbach*, 207.

¹⁸¹ Kracauer, *Offenbach*, 212.

Second Empire France was a wide-open world, a place where a marquis could marry a horse dealer's daughter, a girl of noble birth could marry her father's coachman, and a Prussian-born composer could reinvent himself as an empire-skewering Frenchman. The country had a devil-may-care attitude, and high society went in for luxury on an unheard-of scale. "Everyone then who was somebody in society – man or woman – was *chic*, if not by nature or by grace, by example and habit," wrote Dr. Thomas Evans, the American dentist who tended to Napoleon III.¹⁸² Perhaps Americans and French had different definitions of *chic*. The financier Raphael Bischoffsheim invited journalists, playwrights and celebrities to his home for opulent suppers that were followed by all-night dancing. Offenbach threw balls where "improper dances" were the order of the day; he called these events a "mutual insurance society for the combatting of boredom."¹⁸³

The writers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt were disgusted by what they saw. "Our Paris, the Paris in which we were born, the Paris of 1830 to 1848 is disappearing and it is not only disappearing materially, but morally," they wrote on November 18, 1860. "Social life is beginning to undergo a great change. I can see women, children, husbands and wives, whole families in this café. The home is dying. Life is threatening to become public . . . I am a stranger to what is coming and to what is here, as for example these new boulevards which have nothing of Balzac's world about them but make one think of London or some Babylon of the future. It is silly to come into the world in a time of change; the soul feels as uncomfortable as a man who moves into a new house before the plaster is dry."¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Thomas Wiltberger Evans, *The Memoirs of Thomas Wiltberger Evans: Recollections of the Second French Empire* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906), 139.

¹⁸³ Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach*, 194-195.

¹⁸⁴ Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Goncourt Journals* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2007), 53.

Like Offenbach, Garnier threw himself into the vibrant life of the changing city, wet plaster and all. Bold, brash and expressive on his best days, Garnier was the center of attention and life of the party. A rangy 5 feet 9 inches tall, his almond-shaped grey eyes peered out from beneath a tangle of dark, unruly hair that many journalists said spoke to his tormented, artistic temperament. Often photographed in a charcoal vest and pants with an ill-fitting black overcoat and off-kilter tie, he was remembered by many as a man of simple tastes, but varied interests too. “He was a bit of a gamin,” Sarcey wrote of his pipe-smoking friend, who improvised songs and other bits of theatrical verse with great ease during the dinners he and Louise hosted for their friends each Friday night.¹⁸⁵ A fan of opera and theater, Garnier later wrote a few of his own operettas, some of which were performed. He was also an inveterate card player, an avid pianist, an incurable caricaturist and a chronic traveler whose countless voyages inspired his work. At 35 years old, Garnier had a beautiful wife, a promising career and an apartment in a tony part of town.¹⁸⁶ He was well-educated and well-traveled, and in a year’s time he would become well-known. Louise was often photographed on her husband’s arm, beaming at him in pride. When photographed alone, she tugged at the necklace around her throat, exuding an uncomfortable air. Together, they would face – and occasionally escape from – the public life they would soon lead.

¹⁸⁵ BMO, Fonds Garnier, press clippings, *Le Libre Parole*, Au Jour Le Jour, Charles Garnier, August 5, 1898, microfilm 4249, pièce 372, A2

¹⁸⁶ Mead, *Charles Garnier’s Paris Opera*, 35-37.

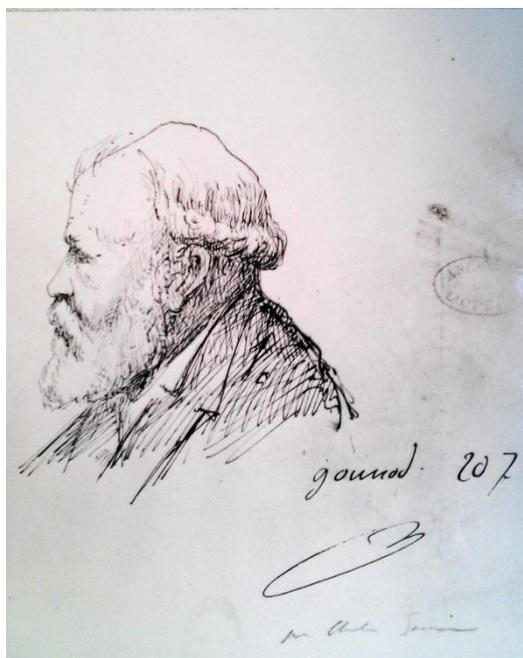


Image 9: Charles Gounod by Charles Garnier.
Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, Paris



Image 10: Jules Massenet by Charles Garnier
Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, Paris

Before Haussmann had purchased the site for a new Opéra, Achille Fould, minister of state, commissioned the architect Rohault de Fleury to design a new opera house and devise a plan for the facades of neighboring buildings. Work on the buildings began in the autumn of 1860, but then Count Alexandre Joseph Colonna-Walewski had replaced Fould as minister of state and scrapped Fleury's plans. The count announced an open competition to choose an architect for the new hall, giving prospective competitors a month to submit a design for the proposed building. "Considering that the composition of a theater project excites, with good reason, public attention . . . it is the duty of the administration to call upon architects and to solicit people of intelligence . . . in a public competition for . . . an Opéra project to be built in Paris," Walewski's announcement read.¹⁸⁷ Participants were to design an Opéra for a 33,000-square-foot building site. The building was to include carriage porticoes, ticket booths, staircases serving all floors, an auditorium seating up to 2,000 people, an imperial box and an entrance for season ticket holders. The building was also to include a stage that could hold 400 actors, a prop warehouse, a costume depot, dressing rooms and administration offices.¹⁸⁸ The journalist César Daly believed the contest was rigged: "The program is so brief that it could only serve those contestants already familiar with the needs of the Opéra . . . the delay of one month for the submission of projects could not suffice except for those architects who have already made a study," he wrote.¹⁸⁹

The first part of what would become a two-round competition resulted in chaos. It was held in the Palais d'Industrie in February 1861, where all shapes, sizes and styles of submissions covered the first floor walls, the "sheets of paper awkwardly affixed to a canvas . . . designs

¹⁸⁷ Comte de Walewski, "Arreté du 29 Decembre, Programme du Concours de l'Opera," *Le Moniteur Universel*, December 30, 1860.

¹⁸⁸ Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera*, 60.

¹⁸⁹ César Daly, "Concours pour le Grand Opéra de Paris," *Revue Générale de l'Architecture*, 19 (1861): 85.

thrown up quickly by excited hands . . . corrections made after the fact; everywhere signs of improvisation.”¹⁹⁰ The exhibition galleries were cold, one reporter remarked, making the task of judging annoying because one had to rush past each submission just to stay warm in the “uninhabitable” room. Of the 170 proposals seen by shivering judges, “the admissible ones were a small number.” Although each contestant was promised anonymity in the competition, the public had such an interest in the outcome that newspapers published lists of the architects involved. Garnier came in fifth out of five finalists because his submission was considered not grand enough. Then again, jurors did not believe the other four finalists were appropriately grand either, so they asked the five contenders to compete in a second round.¹⁹¹ In his revised project, Garnier added circular entrance pavilions, pushed the imperial box and suites off to the side, and added a grand staircase that would make entering and leaving the Opéra as much of a show as the performance itself. This design won, beating out his former mentor and Empress Eugénie’s favorite, Viollet-le-Duc, who became a powerful enemy. When Garnier presented his project to Napoleon III, Eugénie verbally attacked the young architect, asking “What kind of style is this? It is not a style. It’s not Greek, nor Louis XVI, not even Louis XV!” Angry and embarrassed, Garnier shot back “Those styles have had their time. This is the style of Napoleon III and yet you complain!”¹⁹²

Garnier’s new role as architect of the opera would place him firmly within the vast government administration devoted to the city’s reconstruction. Architects tasked with large public projects such as his were monitored closely to ensure that their work reflected the aims of

¹⁹⁰ Daly, “Concours pour le Grand Opéra de Paris,” 88-89.

¹⁹¹ “Echos de Paris,” *Le Figaro*, February 10, 1861, p. 5-6.

¹⁹² Some have suggested that Garnier plagiarized another contestant’s design because after he won, he asked Haussmann to appoint that architect to his previous job as architecte ordinaire of the fifth and sixth arrondissements. Others have written off that suggestion as jealousy; many architects borrowed from each other’s designs in this competition. Mead, *Charles Garnier’s Paris Opera*, 3, 76-78.

rebuilding and the vision of the empire. The administration was staffed with 20 Prix de Rome winners in its top jobs, another 100 architects who were in charge of specific buildings, and as many as 300 inspectors charged with making sure structures met building codes. At least 1,000 architects were employed by the state at the time Garnier won the opera commission, and most of those workers were educated at Beaux-Arts, just like him. The highest-profile jobs like building the opera went to the most talented professionals, like Garnier, and mandated that the architect could not assume any private work on the side. The administration also made room for so-called secondary professionals such as architecture critic César Daly, who was enlisted to work on cathedral renovations. Its demands were not as strict on the architects who were entrusted with building non-monumental works such as archives, prisons and hospitals. While those buildings had important social functions, they lacked the symbolic impact of a structure like the Hôtel de Ville, which required more embellishment and grandeur in its design to articulate its function within the state. The grand governmental monuments were also more expensive; the Bibliothèque Saint-Geneviève cost a mere 1 million francs in contrast to Garnier's 36-million-franc opera. Decoration was important, especially if the sculptures and paintings could be removed as a building's political meaning changed. Viollet-le-Duc, by then in charge of the department that restored historic buildings, said that an artist should "forget his tastes" and submit himself "to the art of an age now gone." In truth, many high-profile architects had to forget their tastes and submit themselves to the government, which strove to preserve or adjust its sense of history.¹⁹³

Garnier wanted to make history. After a series of design revisions and the state's initial approval of a 1-million-franc credit, Garnier set up an office and began working on the site in

¹⁹³ David Van Zanten, "Nineteenth Century French Government Architectural Services and the Design of the Monuments of Paris," *Art Journal*, 48 (Spring 1989): 16-22.

early 1862. The building site faced the Boulevard des Capucines, one of the city's grand boulevards. The grand boulevards were popular places for the bourgeoisie to stroll, people watch, and enjoy leisurely afternoons. Wherever this fashionable set went, developers were sure to follow, building any number of hotels, theaters, department stores and cafés to amuse them. As Garnier broke ground on the opera, across the street on Rue Auber, other developers were putting the finishing touches on an opulent new hôtel called "Le Grand Hôtel," which was said to be the largest in the world. "Grand" hôtels like it were popping up all over the city, as Napoleon III wanted the world to see his new city of light and marble. The emperor had enlisted Alfred Armand to design the building and Emile and Isaac Pereire to fund its construction. When the hôtel debuted on May 5, 1862, the Empress Eugénie declared the interiors so lavish that she felt "at home . . . like I am at Compiègne or Fontainebleau [the imperial chateaux]." Offenbach conducted the orchestra as the acclaimed Spanish soprano Adelina Patti sang for patrons in awe of a luxurious retreat that would someday overlook an opera house.¹⁹⁴ The hôtel had eight hundred rooms, some of them with private bathrooms, a rarity for the time. It also had a smoking room, a ladies room, mail service, a telegraph office, a theater booking office and a reading room where one could find most of the newspapers from Europe and the Americas. Within a year, the hôtel would open its elegant Café de la Paix, and banks and offices would move into the district.

Garnier had plenty of groundwork to do. He hired assistants to draft working drawings for the opera and to oversee how they were executed at the work site. Those assistants – Louis-Victor Louvet, Jean Jourdain, and Edmond Le Deschault – were former classmates who managed at least 40 different inspectors, designers and the like who, in turn, orchestrated a complicated project that included masons, ironworkers, carpenters, roofers, plumbers, glazers,

¹⁹⁴ Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera*, 57; Pinkney, *The Rebuilding of Paris*, 60.

marbleworkers, painters, sculptors, mosaic makers, and theatrical machinery engineers. Enlisting these professionals was no easy matter; as a state architect, Garnier had to get approval for every employee he hired. He also had to submit annual building reports, request continued funding and coordinate his efforts with Haussmann to ensure that they fit within the ongoing rebuilding plans.

The building site was also complicated; two new streets sliced to the northwest (Rue Auber) and northeast (Rue Halévy) of the main thoroughfare. Rue Auber provided a straight shot from the end of the Western Railway on the Rue Saint-Lazare to the grand boulevards, while Rue Halévy provided another broad, safe approach to the new opera hall. On the opposite side of the plot, Rues Scribe and Gluck intersected with Auber and Halévy to create a diamond shaped network of streets surrounding the site.¹⁹⁵ It was a frustrating space for Garnier not only because it was cramped, but because it was purchased without his design in mind. In later years, he said he felt like the opera was submerged in a rock quarry of buildings, or that it looked like a crate that was about to slide off a tipping raft. When he walked by his masterpiece, the architect said he felt the need to lean in the opposite direction to make the raft level again.¹⁹⁶ And then there was the river; when Garnier broke ground on the building, he unleashed a torrent of Seine water that bubbled beneath the turf. He used six steam pumps to drain the site, but the effort knocked out water and sewer services to the surrounding neighborhood, infuriating its residents.¹⁹⁷

For the young craftsmen who worked for him, Garnier, whom they called The Big Chief, could be one of “the best, warmest, and most indulgent masters . . . [it was an office] where the

¹⁹⁵ The streets are named for the composers Daniel Auber, Fromental Halévy, Eugène Scribe and Christoph Gluck. Gluck was a native Bavarian who worked in Vienna before he was brought to Paris by Queen Marie-Antoinette, a former student. Pinkney, *The Rebuilding of Paris*, 60.

¹⁹⁶ Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*, 87.

¹⁹⁷ Eventually, Garnier devised a concrete tank that would enclose the water and become part of the building’s overall structure. This creation would become fictionalized as the underground lake in Leroux’s *Phantom of the Opera*. “Les Coulisses,” *Le Figaro*, May 22, 1862.

only thing required of us was friendship and devotion. [Garnier] would stop his work to review ours and give us advice and encouragement and it was a valuable experience.”¹⁹⁸ As walls rose, *Le Figaro* covered “the already famous young architect’s” exploits, dreaming of the immense, elegant building that would stand on that site in 12 years. “Blocks are piled up ready to support the immense monument,” the newspaper wrote. “One can imagine the architectural elegance of the public foyer, an immense gallery that ends with an elegant salon on each side . . . it will be an impressive scene and the performance hall will have the effect of a Roman circus.”¹⁹⁹

One year later, *Le Figaro* featured a two-page spread that described the opera project in detail, expressing every confidence that Garnier “could make something as grand as Versailles.” The paper imagined Parisians ascending the grand staircase toward their seats, their climb every bit a spectacle for the ticketholders watching each entry. Patrons who saw an elegant woman who caught their eye could throw her a rose or a carnation from the surrounding balconies. The performance hall would be large and well lit, encircled by comfortable boxes. The effort to build the opera had by then become so massive that it employed 550 workers. As the dream emerged from a marshy diamond in the ninth, Garnier’s mind thought of “Greece and Rome and the immortal Acropolis,” according to the article.²⁰⁰ If Napoleon III was creating a city of marble, just like Augustus, then Garnier would create an opera of multicolored marble and stone, laden with proud Corinthian columns, copious statuary and mosaics so rich they would rival everything he had seen at Hadrian’s Villa.²⁰¹ Although Garnier could not change the fact that the state had already selected the opera’s site before he won the design competition, he could make the

¹⁹⁸ Julien Guadet, “Charles Garnier,” *Societe des Architectes Diplomes par le Gouvernement, Bulletin Mensuel*, second série, 1899, p. 63.

¹⁹⁹ “Les Coulisses,” *Le Figaro*, May 22, 1862.

²⁰⁰ “Les Coulisses,” *Le Figaro*, May 22, 1862; “Le Nouvel Opéra,” *Le Figaro*, May 7, 1863, p. 3-5.

²⁰¹ Aside from various sources that confirm Garnier was one of the first people – if not the first – to use ancient-style Mosaics in a public building in Western Europe, he celebrated his accomplishment in a clumsily-written manuscript he attempted to write in Greek. Charles Garnier, Greek manuscript, undated, Fonds Garnier, 191 C, number 35.

awkwardly-placed building dazzle passers-by. He covered the building facades with scaffolding in late 1866 as he finished work on the exterior décor. Although the scaffolding was a practical part of the construction process, it also created a lot of interest, according to the journalist

Théophile Gautier:

Nothing occupies the imagination more than mystery. Thus, all who pass by the Opéra . . . do not fail to raise their eyes, even though they know they cannot see anything, and remain several minutes in contemplation of the immense curtain of planks that conceals from curiosity the monument's façade.²⁰²

When the scaffolding on the principal façade came down in August 1867 just in time to impress travelers in town for the Universal Exposition, the response was enthusiastic:

One is literally dazzled by the magnificence and ornamentation of this most remarkable part of the edifice . . . it is the unity of style that reigns in this so-varied work and the feeling of harmony that bursts forth in the whole of this composition. Bravo, Garnier. Well done.²⁰³



Image 11: Demolitions for the Avenue de l'Opéra. Garnier's Opéra sits in the background.
Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris.

²⁰² Théophile Gautier, "Le Nouvel Opéra," *Le Moniteur Universel*, August 5, 1867.

²⁰³ J. Ruel, "Chronique Parisienne," *Journal d'Annonay*, August 25, 1867.

Public opinion would change when Garnier unveiled a nude sculpture by Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux called “La Danse” on the opera’s south façade in July 1869, Parisians swore to destroy the piece and one man even threw a bottle of ink at it in disgust. Another local held Garnier responsible for the so-called “filth . . . I have a wife, sir, I have daughters who love music and who go frequently to the Opéra! That will now be impossible for them, because I will never consent to send them to monument whose sign is that of a place of ill repute.”²⁰⁴ Garnier responded to the criticism by explaining he was building a theater, not a morgue, but “if I ever build a penitentiary, I assure you I will produce a façade so mournful that it will be less sad to be behind it than in front of it.”²⁰⁵

This quip did not change the fact that the opulence was costing a lot of money. Initially, Garnier estimated that it would cost him 36 million francs to build the Opéra – a plan that the state attempted to curtail, arguing that it should cost only 10 million francs to acquire the site and 15 million francs for construction.²⁰⁶ This set the stage for a series of annual fights, with Garnier asking for more money to speed the building’s completion and the state responding by cutting his budget in some manner. When the Bâtiments Civils cut his 1863 budget from 3.2 million francs to 2.5 million francs, Garnier argued that more money would allow him to finish the building for the 1867 Universal Exposition, to be held in Paris. “This hope would become a certainty if the means for aiding that result are put at my disposition,” Garnier pleaded. “These means are first of all the allocation of sufficient credit, then the submissions of the still-undesignated contractors, as well as the pending nomination of the painters and sculptors who must contribute to the ornamentation of the Opéra, and finally, for me, a rather great freedom of

²⁰⁴ Quoted in Charles Garnier, *Le Nouvel Opéra* (Paris: Librairie Hachette: 1878-1881), I: 445.

²⁰⁵ Garnier, *Le Nouvel Opera de Paris*, vol I, 9, 28, 102-104, 106-107.

²⁰⁶ “Note sur les depenses de construction de l’Opera” (May 1861), AN serie F/21 830; “Premier devis de 1861. Nouvel Opera: Devis de 15, 000,000” AN serie F/21 832; Two more letters from Haussmann to Count Walewski said the dispute over the cost of construction continued into 1863

action to limit delays and to augment my influence with those people who work under my direction.”²⁰⁷ Garnier received the 3.5 million francs he requested in 1864, but when he was asked to submit a new general building estimate, he hurt his case by asking for more money. Citing the unforeseen expenses of the special foundation he created to contain the Seine water and the new façade attic requested by Napoleon III, he implied that the state had unreasonable expectations for a building of this type. Garnier wanted stronger, more durable materials and those cost money. Although this budget was ultimately approved, Garnier was warned to “resist the temptation to embrace the exaggerated luxury that is exploding all over the new Paris.”²⁰⁸ The emperor had entered the Opéra fray by then because he hoped to help the city’s poor by building a hospital for them. Frustrated because it looked like the Opéra’s costs would be covered at the expense of his project, the emperor wrote the Bâtiments Civils and asked it to hurry Garnier along. “The reproach must be avoided of having spent millions for a theater, when the first stone of the most public hospital in Paris has still not been laid,” the emperor wrote. “I ask you therefore to get the prefect of the Seine to begin work very soon on the Hôtel Dieu and please direct that of the Opéra in such a way as to finish them at the same time . . . From a moral point of view, I attach great value to the fact that a monument consecrated to pleasure not be erected before the asylum of suffering.”²⁰⁹

Garnier was concerned with artistic principle. By October 1866, he was embroiled in a spat with the painter Paul Baudry, a longtime friend and Prix de Rome laureate whom he employed to paint the Opéra’s foyers. Baudry, in Garnier’s opinion, had the audacity to ask his boss to change the construction of the building’s foyers to feature his paintings in the best

²⁰⁷ Charles Garnier, “Nouvel Opera: Avancement des travaux,” October 24, 1863, AN serie F/21 830, p 1.

²⁰⁸ Garnier, *Le Nouvel Opera*, vol II, pp 78-79; Felix Duban and Lambert, “Rapport fait au Conseil. Séance du 25 novembre 1864,” AN serie F/21 831, p 6.

²⁰⁹ The Opera would be completed in 1874 and the Hôtel Dieu would be finished in 1878. *Le Moniteur Universel*, August 2, 1864.

light.²¹⁰ Garnier flatly refused. On October 2, 1866, Baudry's brother Ambroise visited the Garniers one night after dinner while Charles was playing piano in the salon. Music floated through the apartment as Ambroise told Louise about the fight between his brother and her husband. Within a week, the rupture between the two men had gotten so severe that Louise decided to intervene, bringing up the painter's concerns with Charles. Over breakfast, she broached the subject with her husband, pleading with him to do for Paul as Paul "would do for you if he were in your shoes." After the foyer for your friend, she pleaded. Charles replied that doing so would be impossible and that Paul was being childish about the whole affair. "Paul could do as [the Italian Renaissance painter] Raphael did," Charles said, a reference to the painter's ability to find creative ways to make his work harmonious with a given structure. Louise realized she was getting nowhere with her stubborn husband and enlisted the help of another painter and Opéra employee – Jules-Emile Saintin, who was nicknamed "The Colonel" – to smooth things over between the two men. Louise's brother, Arthur, drove her to Saintin's house after lunch, where she found him smoking a pipe and painting a 14-year-old model in a blue peignoir. Saintin promised he would smooth over the spat between the two men and swore to Louise that he would never tell Charles about her visit. Days later, the Colonel had engineered a truce between the two men, although the foyers remained the same. The Baudry brothers thanked Louise effusively with kisses. "Paul took me by the arm and called me his little protector and cherished sister," she wrote.²¹¹

²¹⁰ The state cut the budget in 1865 from 3.6 million to 3 million and asked Garnier for another report that detailed his use of funds and explained when he expected to be finished. Garnier responded that the exterior would be done by August 1867 and the interior ornamentation would be completed by the beginning of 1869. The emperor's interest in a hospital for the poor diverted budget and forced Garnier to accept that his building might not be completed until early 1869. Garnier, "Rapport a S.E. Monsieur le Marechal de France etc sur la repartition par nature d'ouvrage des credits votes pour cette annee, et l'epoque de l'achevement probable des travaux," June 19, 1866, AN serie F/21 831, pp 66-67; *Le Moniteur Universel*, 2 August 1864.

²¹¹ ENSBA, Louise Garnier journal entries from October 2, 1866 to October 10, 1866, ms. 742.

Tensions may have eased with Baudry, but they worsened with the impatient French state, especially when Garnier overspent his budget to complete the Opéra's lavish ornamentation. On January 29, 1868, he informed the state that he might be 800,000 francs in debt by the end of the year. When Garnier exhausted his funds, his wife wrote that he would grow depressed and write operettas and poetry to distract himself.²¹² He needed the distractions. In the midst of the budget battles, the Garniers struggled to start a family. Their first son, Daniel, died before he reached the age of two, and in August 1865, Louise suffered a miscarriage.²¹³ These tragedies served to aggravate Garnier's already fragile emotions. In several letters he complained about his health, feeling "demolished" and "truly ill" enough to reach out to doctors at least once a week about everything from pertussis to colic to fevers and back aches, among other things. "Please respond to this by coming [to my apartment] tomorrow," Garnier pleaded.²¹⁴ He understood that he was "a nervous, unhealthy man who was plagued by his thoughts, self-esteem, imagination and discouragement."²¹⁵ Other times, he admitted he was "a basket case with all-over fatigue . . . I cry as I laugh, with excess and without much reason."²¹⁶

The state's money trickled too slowly for his tastes. "We had taken measures to pay you during the course of next week," read a letter from prefect of the Seine's office, dated August 23, 1867. "But after the letter you have done me the honor of writing . . . that payment will not come until the 15 of September." It is unclear what Garnier may have written to the prefect's office, but given his testy relationship with his superiors and the press, his bosses may have wanted to

²¹² ENSBA, Louise Garnier journal entry dated April 22, 1868, ms 742.

²¹³ Later that year, Paul would write Louise a letter, calling her his "little angel" and telling her he couldn't wait to see her at the Opera so he could give her a big kiss and hug. Letter from Charles Garnier to Paul Baudry, August 1865, ENSBA, ms 742.

²¹⁴ The BMO has several letters written by Garnier to a Doctor Firmin, who cared for him for much of his adulthood. Those letters also complain of bronchitis, laryngitis, and rheumatism. Letter from Charles Garnier to Dr. Firmin, undated, BMO, LAS Garnier Ch., piece 124.

²¹⁵ Charles Garnier, *Le Nouvel Opera*, 1878, (Paris: re-edition Phenix: 2003), 493.

²¹⁶ Letter de Charles Garnier à un journaliste, September 1876, BMO, LAS Garnier Ch., piece 60.

tell the architect that should treat them and the state's money with more respect.²¹⁷ The budget cuts continued as Garnier watched the Opéra spiral toward 1 million francs in debt. Garnier submitted another report in 1869, informing the state that the Opera was nearing his original estimated cost of 36 million francs.²¹⁸

Sensing that he was viewed unfavorably, a tormented Garnier mocked himself in a self-deprecating toast at a dinner for 50 on February 8, 1869: "Who am I? I am the little misery that happens unexpectedly, the hair in the soup and the corn in the shoe."²¹⁹ The newspaper reporter who covered the evening for *Paris Journal* poked fun at Garnier's theatrics, wondering if "the great architect would regale his company with the same kind of song" once the Opéra was inaugurated.²²⁰ The responsibility of building a grand imperial monument weighed on Garnier. "You're too nervous," his boss, Jacques Etienne de Cardaillac, wrote him in 1869 before presenting him to the imperial couple. "Calm down. . . You're no longer a dirty child. You're a man with a big responsibility."²²¹

On June 6, 1869, *Le Figaro* ran a front-page story about the new Viennese Opera Hall, which broke ground at the same time as Garnier's building. Written by Émile Perrin, director of the Imperial Academy of Music, the article noted that the Viennese hall was bigger than the one in Paris and cost half as much to finish. He added, however, that the Viennese Opera was nowhere near as opulent as the Parisian one would be and lamented that its opening was still

²¹⁷ Letter from the Prefect of the Seine's office to Charles Garnier, August 23, 1867, BMO, Fonds Garnier, piece 191 C, letter 47.

²¹⁸ Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera*, 139-146.

²¹⁹ Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera*, 39.

²²⁰ BMO, Fonds Garnier, articles divers de M. Charles Garnier, Duranty, "Une Petite Trouvaille," *Paris Journal*, February 8, 1869, microfilm 4249

²²¹ BMO, Fonds Garnier, Cardaillac to Garnier, November 5, 1869, pièce 229, letter 10.

some time in the future.²²² Perhaps this comment was Perrin's graceful way of letting Garnier know that his free-spending ways were wearing thin. Two months later, *Le Figaro* offered Garnier the opportunity to discuss the artistic value of his building once again on the front page of the newspaper. The architect declined to write 20 lines about the opera "because you know it does not take but three to hang a man, and I would rather . . . remove from the gallows a head that many of your colleagues associate with that of a Turk."²²³ Garnier suspected that he was regarded as a gilt-loving plunderer and would not incriminate himself until he had a building that could speak for itself.

Construction continued throughout 1869. Garnier entrusted his younger brother, Gustave, to oversee the building while he was out of town. Gustave noted that when the workers were busy, "things were rather calm" and that they were finishing the building's façade, the lanterns and raising the statue of Apollo on the exterior. Gustave said the only worker giving him trouble was Pépin, who was jealous of another colleague who was on vacation.²²⁴ It appears that Gustave was quietly giving his brother trouble too. An alcoholic, he wrote effusive apology letters when he returned to Paris from vacation two days later than he should have. As his brother fought the state for more money to build his masterpiece, Gustave had been stealing funds from the Opéra's coffers for the better part of a decade. Charles sent his brother away to Cairo with a small amount of money to cover his needs. It is unknown how Garnier felt about Gustave's betrayal of trust, but as a dutiful older brother, he asked Ambroise Baudry, who was working in Egypt by then, to check on him from time to time.²²⁵

²²² Émile Perrin, "L'Ouverture du Nouvel Opéra de Vienne," *Le Figaro*, June 4, 1869.

²²³ Charles Garnier, *Le Figaro*, September 17, 1869, p. 1.

²²⁴ BMO, LAS Garnier Ch, Gustave Garnier to Charles Garnier, August 23, 1869, piece 203, letter 6.

²²⁵ Charles wrote Paul Baudry about his brother having an alcoholic seizure right as they were leaving for Sweden on a family trip. Gustave died in a hospital in Alexandria on August 17, 1889. He is not buried in the Garnier family

Things were fine on the outside, both literally and figuratively. All of the Opéra's facades were completed and the statues were in place. On the inside, an English visitor noted in February 1870 that there were only iron columns to mark the box seating, lobbies and staircases. The building was nothing more than a shell.²²⁶ At the same time, the emperor's health was declining along with his popularity. In 1869, Napoleon III tried to resuscitate popular support for his government with parliamentary reforms. Eighty percent of voters approved the measure, softening against the government until Prince Pierre Bonaparte shot journalist Victor Noir in January 1870. Six months later, the public reaction to the Hohenzollern claim to the Spanish throne was a diversion from the hullabaloo, as Frenchmen felt it was an attempt by the Prussians to surround France on all sides. On July 19, 1870, the emperor declared war on Prussia. Although it was clear by August that France was vulnerable to a Prussian invasion, there was still a sense of detachment among the well-to-do about any threat from the outside. The emperor's cousin, Princess Mathilde, hosted a dinner party in September 1870 where her guests were preoccupied about the war. Upon hearing that a cathedral in Strasbourg collapsed during battle, Mathilde responded that it could not have been built all that well, a sign that she had no idea what was about to unfold in her country during the coming months.²²⁷ Her cousin would surrender at Sedan on September 2 and abdicate the throne two days later, prompting angry crowds to scream "Down with the Empire!"²²⁸ On September 4, 1870 France was declared a Republic once more. "A man tore the blue and white stripes from the tricolor, leaving only the red waving in the air," Edmond de Goncourt wrote. "There was shouting and cheering and hats

crypt in Montparnasse Cemetery. ENSBA, Charles Garnier to Paul Baudry, June 1870, ms 741. Acte de deces de Gustave Garnier, archives departementales de Paris, register 1890, ref no 3305; BMO, LAS Garnier Ch, Gustave Garnier to Louvet, undated, piece 203, letter 9; ENSBA, Letter from Louise Garnier to Paul Baudry, February 28, 1871, ms 741.

²²⁶ Pinkney, *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris*, 86.

²²⁷ Goncourt, *Goncourt Journals*, 168.

²²⁸ Goncourt, *Goncourt Journals*, 170.

thrown in the air. Infantrymen stripped shrubs and handed branches to women. At the Tuileries, Parisians covered the gold fountains with newspaper.”²²⁹

As the Prussians advanced on Paris, the capital ran out of fresh vegetables and meat as the weather turned chilly. In the final months of 1870, construction on the Opéra ground to a halt, and workers such as Paul Baudry worried about how they could get their hands on food as rationing became more prevalent.²³⁰ Horse meat crept into the average diet, and people began stocking up on water. By late October, the streets were dark, the shops were closed and fear grew. “There’ll be a ’93 before long,” one Parisian mused. “With everybody hanging everybody else.”²³¹ Edmond de Goncourt called on Victor Hugo in early November, finding him at a table still littered with the remains of lunch. “In that old fashioned room, in the half-light of autumn . . . in that setting of another age in which everything was a little vague and uncertain . . . Hugo’s head, seen in the full light, looked right and imposing.” Hugo did not like the Paris of the Second Empire. He said it appealed to him more as a ruin. The novelist told Goncourt that the Empire did nothing to the city to defend it from foreigners, only from its own.²³² By the end of the year, death spread through Paris, and butchers sold “nameless meats and unusual horns.” By the end of the year, Louise’s brother Arthur and Charles’s colleague Gustave Boulanger were called away to fight in the same National Guard regiment.

“We were living in a fifth-floor apartment at 90 Boulevard St.-Germain,” Louise recalled. “The Prussians had begun their bombing [in January 1871] and large splinters of shells fell on

²²⁹ Goncourt, *Goncourt Journals*, 169-170.

²³⁰ In September, Paul wrote the Garniers that he needed two portions of smoked meat and two portions of conserved beef and to please send the opera’s errand boy to pick them up for him. As Louise remarked in an accompanying note, “[Getting food] was the preoccupation of each and every one of us during the siege of Paris.” ENSBA, Letter from Paul Baudry to Charles and Louise Garnier, September 12, 1870, ms. 741.

²³¹ Goncourt, *Goncourt Journals*, 173-177.

²³² Goncourt, *Goncourt Journals*, 178.

our balcony. Arthur begged his brother-in-law and me to leave our apartment, saying that it was enough for him to risk his life, and that we should not be risking ours too. So we settled at the Opéra, which was still under construction, in parts that were enclosed and covered.”²³³ The Garniers lived in the Opéra, according to Louise, throughout January at the very least, but possibly until the beginning of March, 1871, when the Prussians entered the capital. The Garniers then left for the Italian Riviera. By the time they reached safety on the coast, Charles had lost his voice, and Louise’s brother Gustave died of tuberculosis at age 30, sending her into a depression. Together, the Garniers would pledge to forge a fresh start as they purchased a plot of land in Bordighera on which they would build a home that would later become their refuge.²³⁴ While the republic sought firm footing in Paris, Louise discovered she was pregnant again, this time with a frail son named Christian, who would be born in 1872.

One month after the armistice was signed with Prussia, a National Assembly was elected to govern the country and write a constitution for a new French regime. A special commission was formed to investigate the Opéra’s budget, but once the Opéra Le Pelletier burned to the ground in 1873, Garnier got the upper hand with an infuriated state that realized it had to work with him to see the project to completion. One minister fumed that the Opéra was taking three times longer to build and costing three times more than projected. The accusation was hyperbolic, designed to pressure Garnier into reducing his decorative ambitions and finishing his work.²³⁵ The National Assembly issued Garnier what it hoped would be his last check in 1874, all the while praying that he would complete his “bronze insult” as quickly as possible.²³⁶ At the

²³³ ENSBA, Journal from Louise Garnier, January 5, 1871, ms. 741.

²³⁴ ENSBA, Journal entries from Louise Garnier, January 5, February 20, February 28, and March 11, 1871, ms. 741.

²³⁵ Mead, *Charles Garnier’s Paris Opera*, 145.

²³⁶ “Amusements Abroad: The New Paris Opera House,” *The New York Times* via www.nytimes.com, May 17, 1874.

end of the year, Garnier handed over the building's 1,942 keys and eagerly awaited what he assumed would be complementary seats to opening night. He would be in for a surprise.

On January 3, 1875, Charles Garnier received an impersonal letter from the minister of fine arts, Arthur de Cumont. A viscount and Legitimist, Cumont informed Garnier that a second-tier box would be available to him on the opera's opening night for the fee of 120 francs, a substantial sum that, for Garnier, was also an insult.²³⁷ Never mind that countless Parisians were similarly offended; Cumont set aside 250 of the performance hall's 1,900 seats for government deputies, sparking outrage among other local worthies who felt they should have been given a ticket free of charge. Isabella II, deposed from the Spanish throne in 1868, was not entitled to a free seat. Cumont notified the former ruler that he would be happy to give her six box seats for the sum of 180 francs. Whether Garnier knew – or cared – about the ticketing shenanigans is unknown. He scribbled a reply to Cumont, however, reminding him that his work on the Opéra was “in sum, the reason for the ceremony,” and that the second-tier seating would make audience members believe he had been demoted, “or that the Minister was forced to abandon his patronage of the arts to submit it to political pacts, or at least to support certain pressures outside of his prerogatives.” Garnier closed his letter in a huff by refusing the tickets, adding that he would remain “in my office until Your Excellency might be freer to follow his sentiments of justice and benevolence.”²³⁸

²³⁷ Cumont, some Parisian gossipmongers whispered, had questionable credentials as a viscount and academic. “Minister de Cumont's Troubles,” *The New York Times* via www.nytimes.com, December 19, 1874. By comparison, the sum Cumont charged Garnier was 1/10th of the annual teacher's salary in France. F. Buisson, “Traitement,” *Dictionnaire de pédagogie*, 2 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1887) 2: 2886; Marguerite Bodin, *L'Institutrice* (Paris: Librairie Octave Doin, 1922), 266.

²³⁸ The *New York Times* correspondent covering the ticket imbroglio remarked in a January 4, 1875 dispatch that Cumont's actions were characteristic of an “incapacity of some sort,” hinting at mental instability. “Parisian Gossip. A Memorable New Year's Night. The New Opera,” *The New York Times* via www.nytimes.com, January 23, 1875. Christopher Curtis Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera: Architectural Empathy and the Renaissance of French Classicism* (New York: The Architectural History Foundation, 1991), 194.

Then, Garnier thought better of his missive and paid for the seats he was offered in box 28, located at the back right corner of the performance hall. Unless one sat in the box's front row, there was not a good view of the stage, in part because of a large stone column that cut through the seating area. But Garnier resolved to suffer this perceived slight to see how his life's work was received by fashionable Parisians. He would be on hand to accept a great honor, the officer's cross of the Legion of Honor from Patrice de MacMahon, the former defeated general, now president of the Republic.²³⁹

There was a time when he viewed this title as his destiny. "I understood when I was 30 years old that I would be named a grand officer in the Legion of Honor," he said later in life. "I knew this because I had a good head full of ideas -- some of them good, some of them bad -- but they were ideas all the same. I was also full of passion, so it made sense to me that this would happen. So when I was 40, they named me commander. When I was 50, they made me an officer. When I was 60, they made me a knight, and now that I am an old man who has nothing to do but sit on my rear end, they could give me the Mérite Agricole."²⁴⁰

At the debut, Garnier was overwhelmed with emotions. "Imagine the night of the Opéra inauguration, the elegant staircase overgrown with the tumult of a select audience in a beautiful room," Georges Montorgueil wrote about the evening, as he imagined Garnier recalling his roots. "[Garnier] must have thought about his modest home birth and his first neighborhood, with the smoking axles, the coucous, the iron sparks singing with a hammer's cadence."²⁴¹

²³⁹ Though the letter from Garnier to Cumont exists in Garnier's archival papers, there is no evidence that it was actually sent. Whatever the case, it is strongly-worded proof of his frustration two days before the Opéra opened. Mead, *Charles Garnier's Paris Opera*, 194.

²⁴⁰ Leniaud, *Charles Garnier*, 43.

²⁴¹ BMO, Fonds Garnier, press accounts, microfilm 4250, Georges Montorgueil, "Fils de Forgeron," publication unknown and undated.

He must have thought of these things as he sat in his box with his wife Louise. Together they heard selections from Daniel Auber's *La Muette de Portici*, Fromental Halévy's *La Juive*, Gioacchino Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* and Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*. Garnier sat in his red velvet seat, more anxious than usual that night.²⁴² And at the end of the performance, Garnier and Louise linked arms and left the box he had cursed just two days before to descend one of the great glories he designed -- the Opéra's grand marble staircase.



Image 12 : Charles Garnier descends the marble staircase with his wife Louise.
Le Monde Illustré, January 16, 1875

The staircase was lined with a sea of patrons in their evening finery: The men raised their top hats in the air or waved their handkerchiefs in salute; the well-coiffed women, some of them swathed in winter wraps, craned their necks to see the man who had created this glittering marvel.²⁴³ “Bravo, Garnier!” they shouted. “Bravo Garnier! Bravo, bravo Garnier!” they cried as they clapped frenetically. Reflecting on this moment 50 years later, Louise Garnier wrote: “Do I need to say how moved my Charles was? But he suffered in his modesty, lowered his head,

²⁴² Katherine Knorr, “Starchitect of the Second Empire,” *The New York Times* via www.nytimes.com, November 17, 2010.

²⁴³ Lix with G. Durand, “Ovation à M. Garnier à sa sortie de l’Opéra,” *Le Monde Illustré*, January 16, 1875.

wanted to cry, and walked as fast as possible to escape this ovation that was so unforeseen, so flattering!”²⁴⁴

Newspapers covering the Opéra’s debut had mixed emotions about the building. Some reporters believed the Opéra was “the most perfect specimen of its kind” and that Garnier was “a man of genius.” Garnier’s design was “of antique simplicity” and the clear result of a man who had traveled throughout Europe in search of the best theater building practices. It was clear from the construction, some wrote, that the real theater was the public spaces, not the stage itself. The chandelier impeded the view of the stage from the galleries. The lighting was inadequate. Garnier’s former mentor Viollet-le-Duc loathed the marble staircase and widespread use of gold overlay.²⁴⁵ Others criticized the building for its poor acoustics and “fiasco” of an interior.²⁴⁶ Claude Debussy said it resembled a Turkish bathhouse.²⁴⁷ Edmond de Goncourt went so far as to attack the man himself, describing him as an ape-like dinner guest with a “rheumy voice” who looks like a “fish gulping a hook” when he swallows, making him “a table companion who is disagreeable to hear speak, disagreeable to see eat.”²⁴⁸

At the end of the day, some journalists opined “that the new theater will not differ in any startling degree from other houses of similar pretensions.”²⁴⁹ One reporter wrote that “the new theater has unquestionably a somewhat gaudy, meretricious air, in keeping with the other imperial constructions.” Another reporter chastised Garnier for the building’s front steps. They were the “most objectionable and stupidest thing that ever could have been devised for the

²⁴⁴ Louise Garnier, “Charles Garnier,” *L’Architecture*, 38 (1925): 385.

²⁴⁵ Knorr, “Starchitect,” *The New York Times*.

²⁴⁶ “Parisian Gossip,” *The New York Times* via www.nytimes.com, January 23, 1875.

²⁴⁷ Alan Riding, “Arts Abroad; Opera House is Cleansed, and 1875 Paris Comes to Life,” *The New York Times* via www.nytimes.com, June 21, 2000.

²⁴⁸ Goncourt, *Memoires de la vie litteraire*, I: 975.

²⁴⁹ BMO, Fonds Garnier, press clippings, microfilm 4249, “The New Paris Opera House,” unnamed publication, November 28, 1874.

entrance of a theater. Ladies and gentlemen arriving . . . in evening dress have to leave their carriage in front, cross a wide pavement, which is also a public footpath, and ascend some 20 to 25 steep stone steps, where there is no covering of any kind. The performance is exceedingly trying, especially for ladies, and as the greater number are not expert climbers or are embarrassed by their dresses, the scene from a little distance just before the opening of an opera performance is rather curious and laughable. If it is raining, the spectacle can be imagined.”²⁵⁰

Garnier had devoted 14 years of his life to this spectacle in the ninth arrondissement. He needed a break from the scrutiny. Dazed with fatigue and emotions, he packed up his wife Louise and 2-year-old son Christian and left Paris the day after the opera’s debut for the family’s brand new villa in Bordighera, Italy.²⁵¹ The medieval hill town on the Ligurian Coast was known for supplying Rome with palm fronds during Holy Week, but in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, it had become a fashionable winter refuge for Europeans in search of mild weather and virtually non-existent crowds.²⁵² It was a small town of closely packed houses and simple charms; late summer wildflowers mingled with early spring blooms, streams trickled down hillsides, the faint scent of eucalyptus hung in the air.²⁵³ Just south of town there was open sea,

²⁵⁰ BMO. Fonds Garnier, press clippings, references incomplets, non dates, microform 4250, untitled article in *Catholic Herald*, August 13, 1898.

²⁵¹ ENSBA, Letter from Charles Garnier to Paul and Ambroise Baudry, January 7, 1875, Ms. 742-47.

²⁵² Fighting had made it difficult to get to the French Riviera, unless one took a circuitous route. Resorts were also cut off from direct communications with Paris and Lyon. As a result, many Europeans turned eastward to the towns just over the border in Italy, where it was safer and less crowded. “War and Winter Stations for Invalids,” *British Medical Journal*, 2 (November 5, 1870): 482.

²⁵³ “Winter in the Riviera,” *British Medical Journal*, 2, (December, 25, 1880); “Notice Biographie sur Christian Garnier 1872-1898,” Bibliotheque Musée de l’Opéra, Fonds Garnier, piece 103, item 8; “The Riviera; Sketches of the Health Resorts of the North Mediterranean Coast of France and Italy from Hyeres to Spezia, with Chapters on the General Meteorology of the District, its Medical Aspect, etc,” *British Medical Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1031, October 2, 1880, p. 550.

acres of palm and olive trees and rocky coastline, where on a clear day one could make out the faint contour of the beach at Cannes, some fifty miles to the west.²⁵⁴

Until families like the Garniers built grand villas that peeked through the canopy of palms skirting Bordighera's shoreline, the town's most prominent landmarks were a church and a square that featured a battered marble fountain. But in 1872 when Garnier purchased a plot of land nestled high above the Mediterranean Sea where he would build a white, three-story home, things were changing. The railroad began snaking along the coast, bringing with it financiers such as Raphael Bischoffsheim, who invested in roads, new hotels and eventually a villa of his own.²⁵⁵ Slowly, the population inched upward from 1,688 to roughly 1,800.²⁵⁶ The Garniers' seaside getaway was surrounded by a lush, colorful garden in which one could pass the time painting landscapes, playing croquet, or in Charles' case, brooding about life.²⁵⁷

"I don't feel like doing anything," Garnier wrote one month after leaving the French capital. "I am stupefied from morning to night and don't care about art or nature . . . I have a profound disgust for my profession."²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ "Italian Health Resorts," *The Medical Times and Gazette*, 2 (August 25, 1877): 1.

²⁵⁵ Bischoffsheim retired in Bordighera. His villa was built by Garnier, who also built the Bischoffsheim-funded Observatory of Nice. *Charles Garnier: Un architecte pour un empire* (Paris: Beaux Arts de Paris, 2010), 83-85.

²⁵⁶ Frederick Fitzroy Hamilton, *Bordighera and the Western Riviera* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessenger Publishing, 2010), 19.

²⁵⁷ Hamilton, *Bordighera*, 350; Photo of Garnier playing croquet with guests at the Villa Garnier, undated, BMO, Fonds Garnier, photograph 2.

²⁵⁸ ENSBA, Letter from Charles Garnier to Paul Baudry, February 17, 1875, Ms. 742-51.



Image 13: The Garniers' villa in Bordighera.
Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, Paris.



Image 14: Croquet with a guest in Bordighera.
Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, Paris.

EPILOGUE

“A TRIUMPH FOR OUR DEAR CITY OF PARIS”

Albert de Lasalle of *Le Monde Illustré* called Garnier’s Opéra “a triumph for our dear city of Paris. Such a festival for a people dying of famine four years ago [a reference to the Prussian siege] is more than a consolation for its pride – it is the start of a Renaissance.”²⁵⁹ Grippled by depression, Garnier would not see the truth in Lasalle’s words for months. When his emotional gloom lifted, the architect began to write about the politically charged process of building a grand performance hall for an emperor who would not remain in power long enough to see its opening night. For Garnier, the experience would be something of a catharsis, a reminder of far he had come from Rue Mouffetard, that miraculous street where consumptives were cured, the blind were granted vision and a poor frail boy could become a great and famous architect.

Although he had been branded an architect of the Second Empire, Garnier said he did not have time for politics. Architecture kept him busy enough.²⁶⁰ “No matter what regime we live under – republic, empire, monarchy, consulate or dictatorship – this regime will always be represented by some leader – president, king, consul or dictator.” It was an architect’s job, he wrote, to produce a building with “the indisputable signs of the period of construction.”²⁶¹ Perhaps these words were Garnier’s attempt to ingratiate himself with the Third Republic. Perhaps they reflected his insecurities that the Opéra had not been recognized as the masterpiece that it was. Perhaps they were a sign that he had not really learned the lessons of Rome, where art and politics were inextricably linked. He attacked his Prix de Rome, the award that set him up

²⁵⁹ Albert de Lasalle, “Le Nouvel Opéra. Inauguration,” *Le Monde Illustré*, January 5, 1875.

²⁶⁰ Paul Roche, “Les Aigles de l’Opéra,” *Le Gaulois*, October 23, 1874.

²⁶¹ Charles Garnier, “Le Reconstruction des monuments de Paris,” *Le Temps*, September 5, 1871.

for life, calling it an obstacle that forced people to abandon him like a mangy dog “for a so-called builder.”²⁶² Garnier wrote that artists must not get drawn into politics because they will “run the great risk in these debates of being injured by some fact that struck home, and which, causing him to lose confidence in himself, would weaken his convictions.” Artists without confidence and faith were lost, Garnier wrote, adding that while they might not do bad work, they “will certainly do mediocre work.”²⁶³

In 1880, Garnier wrote a song “Souvenir et Regret” which illustrates how the youthful, exuberant “Carlo” had given way to a wise and wounded old soul:

*I had an eye full of fire
Piercing, intense, passionate, mischievous
I had an eye full of fire
Which made the eagle envious
But everything goes wrong
In the climate of Paris.
Alas, I don't have an eagle eye.
Or even the eye of a partridge.*²⁶⁴

Perhaps Garnier worried that at the height of his profession, he stood on a foundation that was nowhere near as strong as the one that kept the Seine from swallowing up his masterpiece.²⁶⁵ He wanted people to look at his building someday with a sense of pride. “Thirty six million!” he wrote in reference to the Opéra’s final cost. “That’s a big sum isn’t it?” That big sum was his

²⁶² Charles Garnier, *Le Nouvel Opera de Paris*, vol. 1 (Paris: Ducher et Cie, 1878), 506-507.

²⁶³ Garnier, *Le Nouvel Opera*, vol.1, p. 3.

²⁶⁴ Garnier, “Curiosities de la Chanson,” Publication unknown, May 22, 1880.

²⁶⁵ The BMO archive holds an impressive collection of international honors and honorary memberships conferred on Garnier, among them his Legion of Honor commendations, a commander’s cross from Franz Joseph I of Austria, an honorary membership in the American Institute of Architects and various other awards from places that include Russia, Belgium, Brazil, Chile and Holland. BMO, Assorted international honors and decorations, pièce 98.

initial estimate, Garnier noted, one the government should have accepted from the outset. “I even think that in the future one will augment further the figure of its cost, not this time as a sign of reproach, but on the contrary out of pride,” he wrote.²⁶⁶

On August 3, 1898, Garnier died of a heart attack in his apartment on Boulevard Saint-Germain. The architect, 73, had been ill for a week and had suggested a healing trip to Vittel. The night before the family planned to leave town, Garnier had a choking fit and passed out. After his doctor revived him, he recognized his wife and son, but soon grew weaker and it was clear that he could not be saved.²⁶⁷ Distraught, Christian, who was suffering from tuberculosis, threw himself into his mother’s arms and cried “At least he will never see me die. But you, poor mother, will have to be alone soon.”²⁶⁸

Garnier rested on a bed of flowers at his funeral, which was attended by government ministers, academicians from the École des Beaux-Arts and representatives from architectural societies, and featured a military procession due an officer of the Legion of Honor. He was buried in a simple grave with his parents in Montparnasse Cemetery. Although he came to symbolize over-the-top opulence in his lifetime, Garnier’s name, profession and date of birth and death were etched on a plain white headstone with a cross.²⁶⁹ One month later, Christian, who had been breathing with the help of a balloon, died too and was buried in the family crypt.

²⁶⁶ Garnier, *Le Nouvel Opera de Paris*, vol. 2, 59-71.

²⁶⁷ Various reports from this time include mention of Garnier having an unnamed painful operation that weakened him. BMO, Fonds Garnier, articles concernant Garnier, references incomplets, non datés, microform 4250, “Charles Garnier,” *La Liberté*, August 4, 1898; untitled article, *The Daily Telegraph*, August 5, 1898; Francisque Sarcey, “Grains de Bons Sens,” *Le Figaro*, August 8, 1898.

²⁶⁸ Ludovic Drapeyron, *Notice Biographie sur Christian Garnier 1872-1898*, Institut Geographique de Paris, 1899, BMO, Fonds Garnier, letters, diplomas and biographies concernant Louise and Christian Garnier, piece 103, item 8.

²⁶⁹ Mead, *Charles Garnier’s Paris Opera*, 43.



Image 15: Garnier family tombstone in Montparnasse Cemetery.
Photograph taken by the author.

“We lost Charles Garnier . . . whose . . . fame is universal and will last as long as the monuments of Paris,” M. Fremiet, a sculptor, said. “His death has left the French and European art world in a state of painful mourning. A month after that, his son, the embodiment of his hopes, died too, leaving behind not only a widow, but a devastated mother. It is a poignant drama, worthy of all sympathy.” In her grief, Louise would remember her son as a “generous and delicate heart, who lived, staring death in the face. He was heroic to the end.”²⁷⁰

The city struggled to memorialize Garnier. The municipal council decided in 1898 to erect a bust of him outside of the Opéra, enabling him to “realize the dream, dear to big hearts, of

²⁷⁰ Drapeyron, *Notice Biographie sur Christian Garnier 1872-1898*, BMO, Fonds Garnier, letters, diplomas and biographies concernant Louise and Christian Garnier, pièce 103, item 8.

being buried in his work like a general in victory.”²⁷¹ Louise asked that the statue include the phrase “son of a blacksmith,” to honor her husband’s humble roots. Her request was ridiculed by the painter Léon Gérôme. “Believe me, do not leave ‘son of a blacksmith’ because in truth it is a little ridiculous,” he wrote the widow in a June 10, 1903 letter. “It is a kind of reverse vanity in so far as we are all sons of blacksmiths, or of peasants, or of merchants . . . Garnier is the son of his works, and that is the title of his glory.” Less than a week later, Gérôme wrote the widow again, reprising the argument, but concluded his letter with “as the son of his works, Garnier honors the country.”²⁷² Louise was persuaded by this logic and abandoned her request. Two years later, Parisians were horrified to learn that the municipal council might honor the architect by naming a street after him in front of la Roquette Prison, an act “against good sense and taste.” Instead, it named the intersection of Rue Scribe and Rue Auber – which sits in front of the Opéra -- the Place Charles Garnier.²⁷³

When Garnier’s statue was unveiled on June 20, 1903, minister of public instruction Gustave Larroumet called Garnier a misunderstood “man of genius” who “expressed the soul of his time.” That soul was determined to soar, like the bronze imperial eagles flanking Garnier’s statue, which did not honor the son of a blacksmith but an architect.²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ Vignole, “Au Jour le Jour: Le Monument de Charles Garnier a l’Opera,” *Le Figaro*, December 2, 1898.

²⁷² Letters from Leon Gerome to Mme Louise Garnier, June 10 and 17, 1903, BMO, Fonds Garnier, piece 269.

²⁷³ “A Travers Paris,” *Le Figaro*, December 8, 1900.

²⁷⁴ The statue includes his winning design for the opera house, his date of birth in 1825, then lists that he won the Prix de Rome in 1848, the Opera competition in 1861, was made a member of the Institute in 1874, was the Inspector General of Civil Buildings, a Grand officer of the Legion of Honor and died in Paris in 1898. Among the works of his listed: Hotel and Maison Hachette, Cercle de la Librairie, Nouveau Cirque of the Marigny Theater, Magasins de Decors de l’Opera de Paris, Villas and a Church in Bordighera, Italy, History of Habitation in 1889, Nice Observatory, Concert Hall of Monte Carlo, Baths, Casino and Chapel in Vittel, Tombs of Offenbach, Bizet, and Victor Hugo. At the bottom of the plaque it concludes with his “Literary Works.”



Image 16: Statue of Charles Garnier outside the Palais Garnier.
Photograph taken by the author.

Almost four decades later, Adolf Hitler declared Garnier's Opera the most beautiful building in Europe. It was replaced with a newer and no less controversial opera house in the Bastille neighborhood in 1990 under President François Mitterrand. Although ballet and opera performances continue to be staged at the performance hall that bears Garnier's name, its history has been eclipsed by a moneymaking Andrew Lloyd Webber production. In 2010, Paris finally honored Garnier with a first-of-its-kind retrospective at the École des Beaux-Arts, reacquainting the city with a man who rose out of poverty to create the building that inspired Gaston Leroux. Garnier was a man of his time, shaped by turbulent political and social forces that drew France into modernity and its people into prosperity. In the end, he never forgot that it took him 50 years to climb out of a Parisian slum to the top of a sleek marble staircase that was his creation.



Image 17: Cartoon about Garnier's statue. -- "Say papa, who is that?" – "My son, that is an extraordinary man who made an opera without knowing a note of music."
Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, Paris.

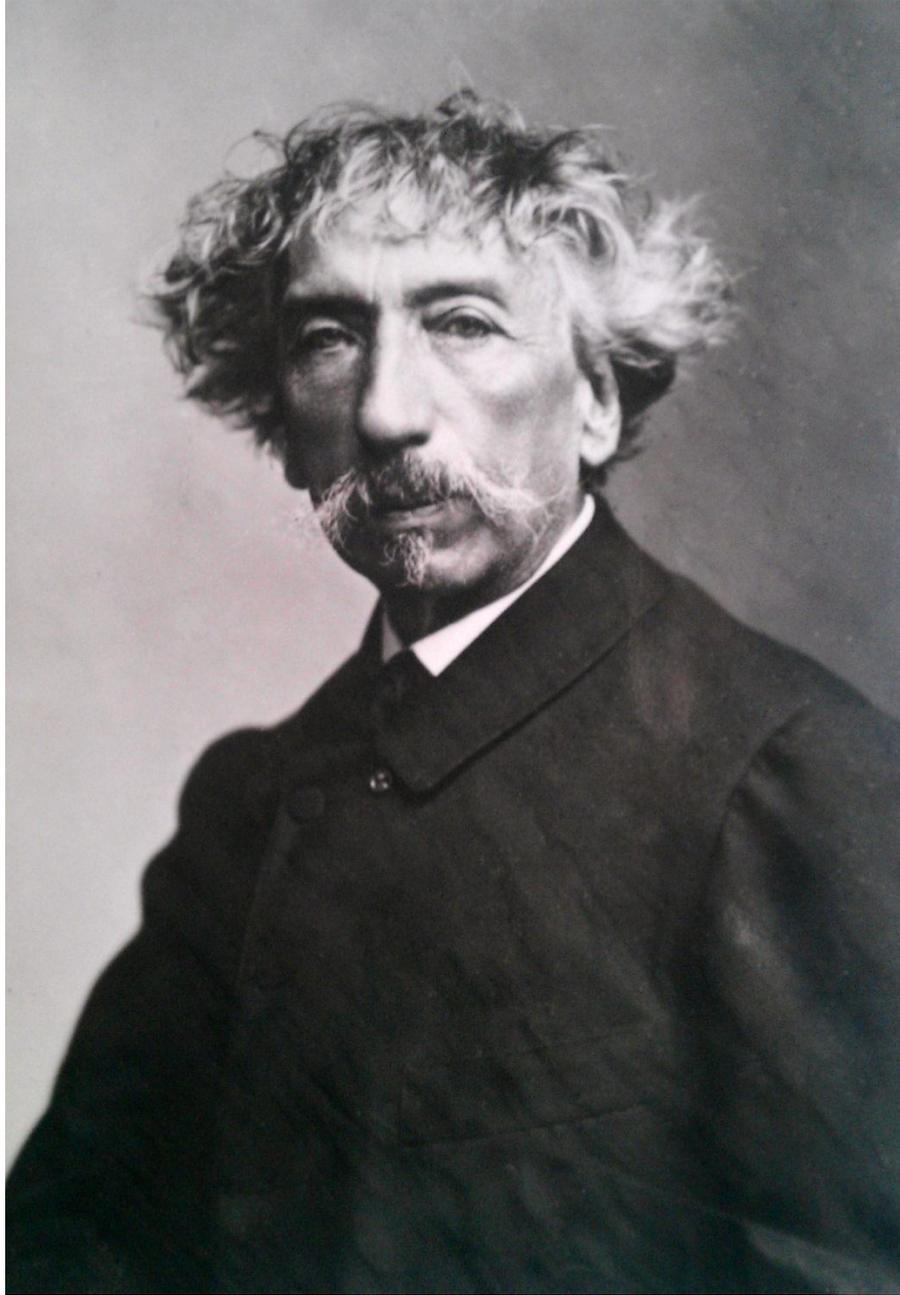


Image 18: Charles Garnier, son of a blacksmith.
Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, Paris.

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