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Palazzetto Bru Zane – Centre de musique romantique française, Venice

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Keynote: Light, Music and the Arts of the Theatre

Scott Palmer (University of Leeds),

«There is a mysterious relationship between music and light [...] it is important to make light visible to the inattentive eye of the musician and to make music more accessible to the often recalcitrant ear of the visual artist. Only then can we begin our conquest of the *mise en scène*» [Appia 1908 in: Volbach, Walter Richard. *Adolphe Appia: Essays, Scenarios, and Designs*, edited and with notes and commentary by Richard C. Beacham, Ann Arbor (MI), UMI Research Press, 1989, pp. 177-178]. This presentation will consider the impact of the practice and theory of light on the late nineteenth century stage that initiated an aesthetic shift that was to have a profound affect on future audiences' experience of performance. The emergence of a radical new scenographic sensibility was realised through light but triggered through two key elements; an experience of Wagner's music and the advent of key developments in stage lighting technology. These elements were brought together through the vision of Adolphe Appia (1862-1928) who recognised the power and potential of light as both a unifying and expressive force that could be modulated like music and expressed as a 'score'. In establishing the fundamental principles of modern stage lighting, Appia drew attention to the materiality of light, the critical role of darkness and shadow and their direct effect upon the perception of stage space. The theoretical writings of Adolphe Appia are well-known to scholars of performance. What is not acknowledged however is the critical role that theatre practice played in the emergence of the new scenographic sensibility. This presentation will demonstrate how Appia's experience of Hugo Bähr's lighting innovations, from the auditorium at Bayreuth and at first hand, backstage at the Dresden Opera, represent a critical moment in the evolution of contemporary scenography.