Beat: Politics

FRENCH MINISTER RACHIDA DATI UNVEILS €450M RENOVATION PLAN OF NATIONAL OPERA

NEW ERA NEW AIR/ BASTILLE OPERA

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USPA NEWS - Paris, September 2, 2025, this afternoon at the Opéra Bastille, French Minister of Culture Rachida Dati unveiled “A New Era, a New Air”, a landmark transformation project for the Paris National Opera. In the panoramic foyer overlooking the Place de la Bastille, Dati was joined by Jean-Pierre Clamadieu, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Paris National Opera; Alexander Neef, Director General; and Jean-Laurent Bonnafe, President of the Association for the Outreach of the Paris National Opera (AROP). The event gathered cultural figures, patrons, and journalists to mark what the minister described as “a pivotal moment in French cultural history.” The renovation represents more than just a technical undertaking: it is also a cultural and civic mission. With expanded workshops, immersive experiences, participatory programs, and new social spaces, the Opera aims to demystify the lyric and choreographic arts and make them accessible to all, regardless of age or background. The Paris National Opera, founded in 1669 under King Louis XIV, has always been a reflection of France’s artistic ambitions.

A NEW ERA, NEW AIR Paris, September 2, 2025, this afternoon at the Opéra Bastille, French Minister of Culture Rachida Dati unveiled “A New Era, a New Air”, a landmark transformation project for the Paris National Opera. The project will cost €450 Million by 2030, In the panoramic foyer overlooking the Place de la Bastille, Dati was joined by Jean-Pierre Clamadieu, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Paris National Opera; Alexander Neef, Director General; and Jean-Laurent Bonnafe, President of the Association for the Outreach of the Paris National Opera (AROP). The event gathered cultural figures, patrons, and journalists to mark what the minister described as “a pivotal moment in French cultural history.” The renovation represents more than just a technical undertaking: it is also a cultural and civic mission. With expanded workshops, immersive experiences, participatory programs, and new social spaces, the Opera aims to demystify the lyric and choreographic arts and make them accessible to all, regardless of age or background.

The Paris National Opera, founded in 1669 under King Louis XIV, has always been a reflection of France’s artistic ambitions. Nearly 40 years after the Bastille Opera’s inauguration, this new phase seeks to inscribe the institution firmly into the 21st century as both a guardian of heritage and a laboratory of creation.

A HEARTFELT TRIBUTE TO BRIGITTE LEFEVRE FORMER FAMOUS DANCER

During her address, the Minister paid a moving tribute to Brigitte Lefevre, the former étoile dancer and one of the leading figures in French ballet, who at 80 remains the director of a prestigious dance school. Modestly seated among the audience, Lefevre was recognized for her lifelong work in democratizing classical dance and making it accessible to all.

Pointing to her presence, Rachida Dati declared: “You are a truly democratic woman, Madame Lefevre.” The minister’s words highlighted Lefevre’s enduring influence on French cultural life and her commitment to expanding access to the arts.

OPERA DE PARIS IS A HISTORIC INSTITUTION WITH GLOBAL INFLUENCE

The Paris National Opera is among the world’s greatest lyric and choreographic institutions, welcoming around 2 million visitors each year across its two main theaters the Palais Garnier and the Opera Bastille, with more than 375 curtain-raisers annually. With 2 million visitors annually and 375 performances, the Paris National Opera ranks among the world’s largest lyric and choreographic institutions and aims positioning the Paris National Opera in the 21st century.

The Opera Bastille, inaugurated on July 13, 1989 during the bicentennial of the French Revolution, has since become one of Europe’s largest opera houses with a capacity of 2,700 seats. Its first official performance took place on March 17, 1990, with Berlioz’s Les Troyens. The Palais Garnier, by contrast, opened in 1875 under Napoleon III and remains a symbol of 19th-century architectural grandeur. Together, these venues have established Paris as a global opera capital, attracting audiences from across the world and consolidating France’s cultural prestige.

THE AMBITIOUS “NEW ERA, NEW AIR” PROJECT

Commissioned by the President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron, the project reflects France’s ambition to modernize its cultural infrastructure while strengthening access to the arts. The culture Minister Rachida Dati highlighted the project’s goals:

- Modernizing technical equipment: Upgrades to stage machinery, sound, lighting, and video systems.
- Improving public spaces: Renovating foyers, rehearsal studios, and backstage facilities.
- Accessibility: Opening 4,600 m^2 of public space at the Bastille Opera to the public free of charge during the day starting in 2030.
- Ecological responsibility: Energy optimization, rooftop solar panels, and new green spaces.

While works will temporarily close stages at the Bastille Opera from 2030 to 2032, and at the Palais Garnier Opera, from summer 2027 to summer 2029 performances will continue thanks to alternating venues and off-site programming. The project has an environmentally responsible approach; Each renovation phase will adhere to rigorous environmental goals: energy performance, resource conservation, installation of solar panels, green landscaping, and optimized energy consumption.

PUBLIC SUPPORT & PRIVATE PATRONAGE: A STRATEGIC INVESTMENT FOR CULTURAL INFLUENCE

The State is fully committed, with funding driven by the Opera’s own resources and an unprecedented mobilization of French and international sponsors. The project will be financed by both public funds and unprecedented private patronage. Among the leading sponsors are CHANEL (Exceptional Patron of the Works), BNP Paribas and its Foundation, and philanthropist Thierry Deau. “This project is proof that France is capable of carrying out bold cultural investments,” Minister Rachida Dati declared. “The Paris National Opera is opening up, transforming, and projecting itself into the future, bringing art closer to citizens while continuing to shine on the international stage.”

AN OPERA TO VIBRATE IN TUNE WITH THE 21st CENTURY

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Throughout her address, the Minister repeatedly emphasized her deep attachment to both the technicians and the artists, insisting on the importance of social mobility within the entire pyramid of staff at the Opera and its ballet schools. She underlined the need for Category C employees to have genuine opportunities for promotion, improved career progression within the public service, and better working conditions. With visible emotion, she reminded them several times: “This Opera exists because of you! We owe it to you” Concluding her remarks, she made a solemn pledge: “I will always be here, and I promise never to abandon you, whatever my future role may be.” Reported by our correspondent Rahma RACHDI, handyjournalist on site.

SOME FIGURES OVER THE OPERA DE PARIS, BASTILLE

Inauguration of Opera Bastille:

Scheduled for 13 July 1989, coinciding with the bicentennial of the French Revolution. The inaugural performance was La Nuit d’avant le jour, directed by Robert Wilson and conducted by Georges Prêtre, attended by over 30 heads of state. (Source: Opera national de ParisWikipedia)

First opera performance: Took place on 17 March 1990, featuring Berlioz’s Les Troyens. (Source: WikipédiaFranceTVInfo)

Size of Opéra Bastille:

It is one of the largest opera houses in Europe, with an auditorium seating approximately 2,700 (visitparisregion.comparisladouce.com)

- Palais Garnier inauguration: Opened on 5 January 1875, commissioned under Napoléon III. (Source: RedditWikipedia)
- Recent attendance figures:

In the 2018–2019 season, the Paris National Opera (Bastille + Garnier) recorded approximately 810,942 spectators down slightly (~7%) compared to pre-pandemic numbers. (Source: Senat)

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UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes
UK, London N13NV 4BS
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