

I TESORI DI VILLA ARCONATI-FAR

#7 – la Sala da Ballo

Waiting to open wide the doors of our little Versailles to welcome again the visitors who love it so much, we take this opportunity to let you know better the "treasures" that Villa Arconati-FAR guards and that few still know.

Today we open the doors of one of the most elegant and refined rooms of our Villa: **the Ballroom**. The room, built by Giuseppe Antonio Arconati by the mid-eighteenth century, is the largest of the 70 rooms in the building and measures 200 square meters.

The size of the room served not only to demonstrate the size of the landlord, but also had practical reasons: the room, in fact, was supposed to contain the **dances** of knights and ladies (whose clothes at the time needed ample space) and of course the **orchestra** that played live. For this reason, in villas that did not have large halls, the ballrooms are sometimes built on two levels - an example is the beautiful Sala della Musica of Villa Litta in Lainate - and the orchestra is positioned above a stage or balustrade.



The Arconati Ballroom is in the south-west wing of the Villa, a position that is certainly not accidental! The positioning towards the **south**, in fact, allows the room to enjoy the light until late evening in the summer **sunsets**.

The question of lighting may seem trivial today, but we must not forget that electric lighting only arrived in 1913 here! Until then, therefore, it was necessary to use some precautions to illuminate the room and make it welcoming to its guests.

In addition to the favorable positioning towards the south and a double exposure with windows and French doors on the two long walls, three large 12-drop **crystal chandeliers** and even 18 lights were positioned in the center of the large vaulted ceiling.



And then there are the **mirrors**, the true main element of the room.

The room is perhaps the highest expression of the refined **Lombard baroque** that we find throughout the Villa: its delicate stuccos seem to create a refined embroidery together with the elegant gilding that draw sinuous lines, seed beads and flowers, which shine in the sunlight.

Set within this bold yet elegant wall decoration, there are 10 mirrors. The mirror, which had its maximum expression in Versailles, was a very expensive decorative element in the eighteenth century; and perhaps from here comes the saying "break a mirror, seven years of trouble."

Having, therefore, ten mirrors inside your own ballroom meant showing your guests their greatness, even financially.

The **mirrors** of the Ballroom of our little Versailles are, however, placed in a position that certainly did not allow the ladies to powder their noses!

What could they serve, therefore, besides enriching the decoration of the room?

They had a very practical function! In front of each of them, in fact, there is a golden eyelet inside which a **candlestick** with two candles was placed. The mirror therefore reflected both the light from the candles of the candlestick placed in front of it, and the one from the chandeliers in the center of the ceiling: this allowed to illuminate the room with games of dancing light that joined the rays of the sun of the summer sunsets, guaranteeing without a shadow of a doubt a dream atmosphere for the Arconati dances!

Dancing was an unmissable social occasion, as it allowed for diplomatic and amorous encounters, and both could mean a lot to those who took part in it.

The **ladies** took hours to prepare themselves with bold hairstyles or wigs, a perfect make-up and dresses with the finest fabrics: in the eighteenth century the "robes à la française" were very fashionable, dresses with very tight bodices and with wide necklines that left plenty of glimpse of the otherwise; very wide skirts on the sides, thanks to the use of cushions or circles under the petticoat. On the back they had a long train, arranged in folds, which started from the shoulders to reach the ground. Heavy clothes to wear, which sometimes made movement even difficult. As well as wigs, sometimes so high, voluminous and heavy as to create wounds to the skin of the ladies who wore them ... in addition to an insured headache. Any sacrifice, however, was bearable to be the most watched and envied lady during a dance!

Taking part in a dance - even at the "Corte" Arconati - could mean making alliances, sometimes matrimonial, crucial for one's family.



Imagine being on a warm summer evening in the eighteenth century: the light breeze of the sunset, the music of the orchestra playing, the rustling clothes embellished with sparkling jewels, the sparkle of candles...

Perhaps it is for all these suggestions that the Ballroom still fascinates us so much: in addition to the refinement of its decorations, in addition to the elegance and majesty of its breadth, by entering it we can, in fact, still perceive the aristocratic life of a time that was.

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