ANCIENT TIMES

The spectacles offered to the public in Roman Imperial times were mainly duels between gladiators (munera) and hunts (venationes), during which men battled and killed ferocious and exotic animals from faraway places. The building may also have hosted athletic competitions, in particular boxing matches. The amphitheatre was decorated with sculptures, of which just a few, but important, exemplars remain (now on view in the Archaeological Museum at the Roman Theatre), and enlivened by fountains. The place bustled with intense activity.

It is not known with certainty when the degradation of the structure began, but already by the 3rd century it showed some signs of decay. It is probable, however, that the spectacles continued during the Late Antique period, but perhaps with fewer gladiator duels, which were looked upon with disapproval by Christianity.

THE MIDDLE AGE

During the course of the Middle Ages, the original function of the amphitheatre was lost, and it was perceived as a labyrinth whose construction was attributed by some to demonic powers. Later, the legend spread that it was the "house" of King Theodoric.

In contrast to many Roman theatrical buildings, new structures were not built upon the Arena, therefore the internal auditorium could continue to be used for various events, in particular those tied to the administration of justice, such as the resolutions of controversies using arms and death sentences (among these, burnings for those condemned for heresy).

In the Municipal Statutes of 1276, fines were established for those who damaged or disfigured the Arena, which continued, however, to be an ideal den for criminals. In the late 13th century, the city's prostitutes were ordered to live in the spaces of the Amphitheatre, where they could practice their profession until 1537.

THE MODERN AGE

In the Renaissance, the condition of the amphitheatre began to be safeguarded and various scholars and architects made interesting graphic surveys.

Numerous vaulted areas, open to the exterior, became shops for artisans and merchants.

Meanwhile, performances continued, in particular tournaments organised by Veronese nobility and many other kinds of events, often staged to celebrate the arrival in Verona of Italian or foreign personages.

In 1713 for the first time a small wooden theatre was set up in the auditorium, to stage the Meropè by Scipione Maffei. Since then, with increasing frequency, during summer the central ellipse hosted comedies.

The Arena was also the site where public services were carried out, such as the weighing machine for hay (an iron rod with the date 1733 is exhibited in the arco volo: this was probably the rod for a great scale). Other events included races (at times of animals, such as donkeys), ascents in hot-air balloons, circus performances, hunts (in particular of bulls), one of which was staged for Napoleon Bonaparte.

In 1822 the first performance in which music and dance prevailed, with a lyrical prelude, was directed by Gioacchino Rossini.

In 1890 the legendary Buffalo Bill presented his Wild West show in the Arena.

THE 20TH CENTURY

Since 1913 the Arena has been the site of celebrated summer seasons devoted to opera. The first performance was of Aida, on the 100th anniversary of the birth of its composer, Giuseppe Verdi.

But the Arena also provided the setting for Barabba, with Anthony Quinn, and for many concerts.

Since 1984, during the Christmas season a great metal comet is installed between Piazza Bra and the amphitheatre.
THE ARENA AMPHITHEATRE

Built around the middle of the 1st century A.D., outside the boundary wall of Roman Verona, the Arena is the eighth largest amphitheatre in the Roman Empire and the fourth in size amongst the Roman amphitheatres in Italy. It has an elliptical ground plan measuring 152.43 x 123.23 m, with an internal auditorium that is 75.68 x 44.43 m.

Of the external ring, almost 31 m high and built using limestone from the Valpolicella, only the so-called “Ala” (wing) remains, four arches with three orders, decorated with buttresses and cornices of the Tuscan order.

Above the arches are preserved the Roman numerals which favoured the orderly entry of spectators.

The interior features a large cavea (seating area) with elliptical seating, originally supported by a triple ring of galleries.

Originally, the Arena could hold about 30,000 spectators, who came not only from the city, but probably also from nearby regions. Today, it can seat roughly half that number, for both scenographic and safety reasons.

From the beginning, this monument has hosted performances and events; for this reason, the areas that may be visited vary according to the event in progress.

for information about the Arena:
www.museomaffeiano.it